Masculinities in Working Parent Discourses: A Dystopian Fiction inspired Subversive Fictocriticism of Patriarchal Organisations

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Masculinities in Working Parent Discourses: A Dystopian Fiction inspired Subversive Fictocriticism of Patriarchal Organisations

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Abstract

What is the problem?

Despite UK government legislation to promote equality in the workplace e.g., Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and flexible work, the gender pay and care gaps continue to favour men over women (ONS, 2020; UK Government, 2020b). Uptake of UK SPL in 2020 was 2% of eligible couples (Howlett), which signals cultural and structural barriers. The existence of 'masculine organisations' (Acker, 1990) may explain this problem. Masculine organisations are microcosms of patriarchy, which maintain hegemonic masculinity (HM) as the 'most honoured way of being a man' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This patriarchal 'gender norm' (Butler, 2011) perpetuates the 'motherhood penalty' (Brearley, 2021) and 'patriarchal deficit' (Bailey, 2015), which negatively impacts all working parents, and their employers by association.

Method

This thesis uses dystopian fiction (DF) to 'blur the lines' between fictional and empirical data (Phillips, Pullen, & Rhodes, 2014). DF is used as a critical and creative instrument for social-justice-oriented qualitative research. Three DF tropes inform a conceptual framework: Masculinity, Subversion and Parenthood. Aligned with these tropes, Masculinities theory (Connell, 2005) is used to explore the spectrum of working parenthood experiences within 'masculine organisations' (J. Acker, 1990). Empirical data is generated from interviews with 19 working parents connected to one organisation. Althusser's (2014) interpretation of ideology and 'interpellation' informs a critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2013). Finally, the 'dystopian "fictocriticism"' (Rhodes, 2015) chapter is the subversive climax of this counternarrative of masculine organisations.

Findings

Culture and policy play a significant role in constraining or enabling working parents' sense of justice. Participants cited limited parental leave and flexible working, work intensification, and patriarchal norms as negative influences. There were many examples of 'interpellation' to traditional social roles (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000) between working parents, suggesting individuals and employers are relationally interconnected in reproducing patriarchy. One important finding was the collegiality between working parents that signified existing informal networks.

Contribution

Primary implications for practice include: increasing paid parental leave; greater flexibility; & more explicit HR guidance for line manager. Cultural recommendations include a staff-led 'Parents and Carers network' to foster more inclusive culture for working parents. This thesis extends masculinities theory by explicitly including working parenthood to compare negative influences of patriarchy and 'HM', with egalitarian 'caring masculinities' as a subversive 'rejection of domination' (Elliott, 2016) in 'masculine organisations'. Finally, using DF is a subversive methodological contribution both within CDA, and as a contemporary feminist approach to 'writing differently' (Gilmore et al., 2019).

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Key

- AL = Annual Leave
- BAME = Black, Asian, and Minoritised Ethnicities
- CDA = Critical Discourse Analysis
- CM = Caring Masculinities
- DFCDA = Dystopian Fiction inspired Critical Discourse Analysis
- EDI = Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
- FT = Full Time
- HM = Hegemonic Masculinity
- HyM = Hybrid Masculinity
- PT = Part Time

Acknowledgements

I first want to thank my wife and best friend, Holly for all her love, support, and encouragement throughout this PhD journey. Without her by my side, I know this would not have been possible. She has given me the confidence to believe I can be an academic and pushed me to achieve something I never thought I could do. More important, during my PhD, we became parents and have learned the reality of how to be working parents together, while I have been reading, learning, and writing about it in theory. Holly is the love of my life and I look forward to continuing our wonderful journey together in the years ahead.

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My third acknowledgment is for my Second Supervisor, Dr Rosemary White. I first met Rosie while studying for my undergraduate degree and she was my dissertation supervisor for a topic comparing Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World.* It has been a privilege to reconnect and I am extremely grateful for the detailed and constructive feedback that she has offered throughout this journey. I know I still have more to learn, but I know my writing has improved significantly compared to the first piece of work I submitted!

I want to thank my research participants for joining me on this journey. It was an honour to learn about their experiences of working parenthood and I am grateful for their honesty, candor, and trust. I wish them all prosperity and happiness in the years ahead and hope to remain in contact with them as fellow working parents as we all navigate the joys and challenges of working parenthood.

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others. Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this commentary has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted through the Researcher's submission to Northumbria University's Ethics Online System (Reference: 10263) on 10th August 2018.

I declare that the word count of this thesis is 86,678 words

Name: Mark

Signature: 

Date: 29 Jun

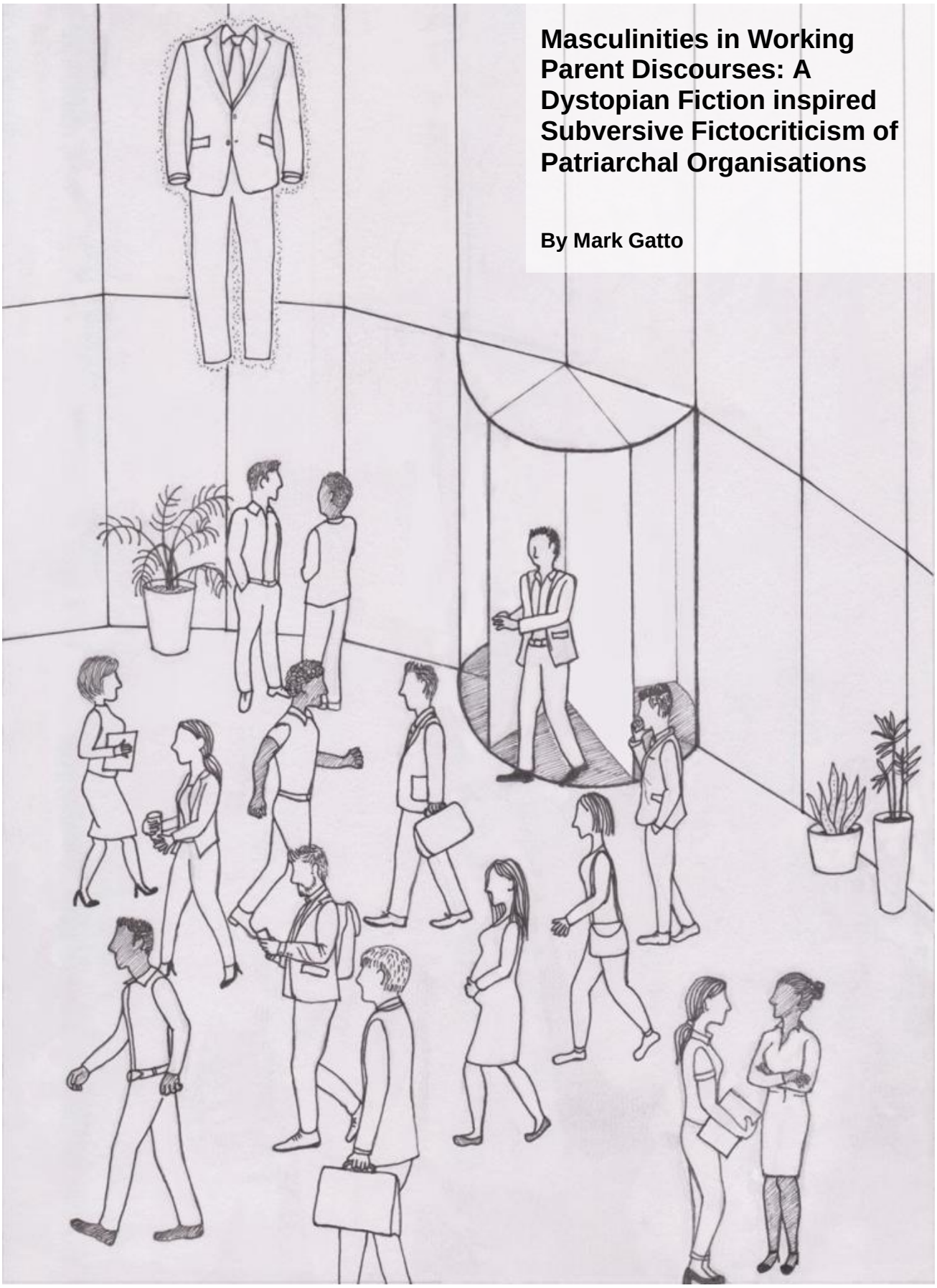

Image 1 - 'The Ghost of Masculinity' by Rachel Hunter (2021)

Prologue

Mark Gatto blog entry on 29th February 2056 – 'Reflections on Working Parenthood on a historic day'

This year marks a series of historic milestones for the planet; it is 30 years after the end of the 2020s pandemics, five years after the Great Cloud Crash, and we have, today, officially achieved net zero global carbon emissions. It feels like a momentous day, and yet I am left contemplating the state of affairs for working parents. As I approach the end of my academic career, it is strange to reflect on the events of the last thirty years. The early 21st century was a period where working families experienced polarising realities of astronomical wealth and poverty, exploitation, and oppression, yet it was also a time of love and solidarity. It was the latter forces of reciprocal care that saw working parents achieve a new balance in their working and family lives, although it was not an easy process.

In the early 21st century, most working parents were subjects of patriarchy trying to break free of traditional social roles. In their transitional experiences, they represented a connection with the traditions of past generations and the emerging egalitarian parenting of the future. Through the last thirty years, they navigated the tensions between their needs for financial security and personal career fulfilment, and their need to spend quality time with their families. In the UK, as with many other nations, this tension expressed itself as a zero-sum game and someone, inevitably, had to make a sacrifice. The sacrifice was either made by parents in their careers or imposed on the children through reduced contact with their parents. This was an unbalanced equation based on systemic and cultural biases founded in patriarchal workplace. The equation was typically resolved

through the unfair effects of the ‘motherhood penalty’. The fiction of ‘having it all’ in working parenthood was a narrative we told ourselves every day and, with each new generation, we recrafted this narrative to reproduce its effect. There was, however, a tide of change at the start of the 21st Century, building on the feminist activism in the 20th Century and the work of masculinities theorists. This work began creating a counternarrative to reimagine and remake norms for working parenthood, but it was the chaotic global events of early 21st century that was the catalyst in this story.

During the 2020s pandemics there was a major societal debate on the value of care; it formed the central battleground of the 2024 UK general election and marked the start of a new story for working parents. It was the subversive political organising of working parents and their allies that laid the groundwork for this new vision, but the real work began after that landslide result. In the years that followed, we saw communities transformed by reciprocal, cooperative caring, together with a definitive prioritisation of family life in organisations. Because of the growth of community connectivity, the great cloud crash of 2051 was not the catastrophic apocalypse it might have been when I began working in this area. The cloud crash marked a new ‘end of history’ and an opportunity to relearn our history and rewrite our story together. It is a story that we write every day, and it is founded in the love and mutual care we share for each other and our families.

Chapter 1: Introduction

'the ultimate, hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently' (Graeber, 2015, p. 100)

This thesis is a subversive story that is inspired by dystopian fiction (DF) narratives that closely mirror the gender inequities experienced by working parents [1]in masculine organisations. The subversion I offer in completing this thesis is to contest the patriarchal norms that honour the myth of hegemonic masculinity, a major influence on both working parenthood and academic writing conventions. I subvert these conventions through my approach to writing differently (Gilmore, Harding, Helin, & Pullen, 2019; Weatherall, 2018) and disrupting the boundaries between fiction and reality. DF underpins my empirical and theoretical story, spanning my literature review, methodology, analysis, and discussion. My research is continuously influenced by the tropes of DF (see appendix 1) and I seek new insights from DFs such as *The Testaments, Vox* and *Red Clocks* (Atwood, 2019; Dalcher, 2018; Zumas, 2018) as an ongoing process of engagement with DF. In writing this thesis I follow the principles described by Margaret Atwood (a modern leader of dystopian fiction writing (Claeys, 2018)), which she applies to her own DF stories:

> *One of my rules was that I would not put any events into the book that had not already happened in what James Joyce called the "nightmare" of history... (Atwood, 2017)*

Atwood's principle inspires my own process of creating a fictocriticism (Gibbs, 1997; Jiwa, 2013; Rhodes, 2015; Smith, 2009) thesis that honours my empirical data while maintaining synergy with pre-existing theory in the field of working parenthood research (see prominant examples in Gatrell, 2005; Hanlon, 2012; Hochschild & Machung, 2012). I adopt an abductive process to contribute to the foundational body of masculinities theory (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Hearn & Morgan, 1990; Pleck & Sawyer, 1975). To achieve this, I explore contemporary working parents' subjective experiences of organisational masculinity (J. Acker, 1990; Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2012; Cahusac & Kanji, 2014), hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018), hybrid masculinity (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Demetriou, 2001) and caring masculinity (A. Doucet, 2006; Elliott, 2016; Jordan, 2020). I also contribute to academic knowledge through my methodological choice to use dystopian fiction throughout my thesis as an

[1] I use the term 'working parents' throughout this thesis to refer to parents in paid work in organisations. All parents undertake unpaid work that is insufficiently credited, this thesis is concerned with the interaction between parenthood and paid work in organisations.

overall fictocriticism, which extends the extant range of unconventional methodologies (Bryman & Buchanan, 2018; Plakoyiannaki & Budhwar, 2021). Though I present a thesis that is directly influenced by DF, it is empirically informed by the existing knowledge and new insights from my primary data. This thesis therefore achieves one of the goals I had at the start of this process, to blur the lines between empirical 'truth' and 'creative' fiction in research (Phillips & Knowles, 2012; Phillips et al., 2014). This blurring is where my subversion starts and is crucial in my aspiration to contribute to subversive counternarratives for working parents.

What is the problem?

Despite government legislation to promote shared parental leave and equality in the workplace (e.g. The UK Equality Act 2010 (UK Government, 2010), and UK Shared Parental Leave entitlements (UK Government, 2018b)), recent statistical evidence continues to highlight a clear gender pay gap in favour of men's over women's careers (UK Government, 2020a) and unbalanced gendered caring for working families (ONS, 2020). The slow progress of an unresolved Government consultation to review parental leave provision (UK Government, 2019) illustrates how this problem is not viewed as a high priority. There is a massively unbalanced uptake of shared parental leave in the UK, only 2% of eligible couples take up the offer (Howlett, 2020). Initiatives including the 'Think, Act, Report' (Equalities Office, 2015) and the gender pay gap reporting service (UK Government, 2018a) highlight the baseline of unfairness that describes an organisational reality, where 'organizational values, beliefs, and goals … are inherently masculine' (Kissack, 2010, p. 540). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the problem of working parent inequity has been exacerbated by structural and cultural assumptions concerning who does the childcare. ONS data showed a troubling over-burden of working mothers during UK based lockdowns (ONS, 2020). There are some green shoots of hope in the Fatherhood Institute data (2020) which shows that fathers were doing 58% more childcare during the first UK lockdown compared with pre-COVID-19 times. This hands-on experience may shift some cultural assumptions about who is responsible for care but is a drop in the ocean of overall working parent inequity.

The extreme contemporary narratives surrounding this problem for working parents, especially mothers, are shockingly exposed by Joeli Brearley (2021) in her book *Pregnant then Screwed,* which offers story after story of women paying the motherhood penalty (Aisenbrey, Evertsson, & Grunow, 2009; Budig & England, 2001; Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007). Brearley also highlights the vital role of fathers stating 'it's pretty bloody obvious

that if dads were given the opportunity to be around more in the early days of parenthood, this would also enormously benefit the mother' (Brearley, 2021, p. 192). Brearley founded *Pregnant then Screwed* as a charitable organisation to provide free legal services to women who experience pregnancy-related discrimination. This followed her own experience as a victim of an overt breach of the UK Equality Act 2010 when she was released from her employment contract the day after disclosing she was pregnant. Such patriarchal practices, that disregard protective legislation, perpetuate the masculine organisational paradigm, which also affects men by creating a hostile environment for fathers who want to be more involved in family life (Burnett et al., 2012; Kangas, Lämsä, & Jyrkinen, 2019). I contend that the problem of organisational masculinity is complicit with ideological cultural norms and policy entitlements that reproduce gender injustice for working parents.

Research Questions

1. How do experiences and perceptions of hegemonic masculinity affect the discourses & decisions about and of working parents in organisations
2. How can multiple masculinities theory contribute to social-justice-oriented research into working parent experiences and discourses in organisations?

Conceptual & Theoretical Framework

My conceptual framework is derived from three tropes (see figure 1) of dystopian fiction that intersect with my research questions.

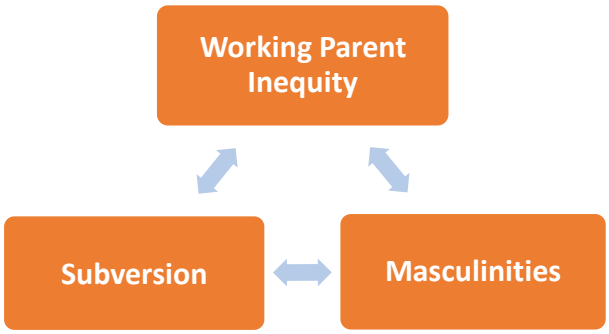

Figure 1 - Conceptual Framework

In navigating these three tropes, I draw on two key conceptual debates: Masculinities and Ideology, which I briefly describe in relation to working parenthood in this section. In order to flesh out the three tropes, I primarily draw on literature that addresses western working parenthood from 1989 to present. I chose this period because of the foundational work by

Hochschild and Machung (2012 [1989]), which provides a fixed point in time where the promise of working mothers 'having it all' was comprehensively dispelled as a myth. That starting point is significant for socio-political and historic reasons due to its close alignment with a notional 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 1989) following the fall of the Berlin wall.

The future I create in this fictocritical exercise refers to our recent history (1989-2021) as the pre-pandemic epoch (PPE) because it is reasonable to suggest that the COVID-19 global pandemic is an event that will shape the coming decades. I used this timeframe in concert with my fictocritical ethos, deploying the trope of 'future as past' in dystopian fiction (A. Stock, 2016).This often draws on asynchronous speculative and archival narratives to explain how a dystopian society came to be and where it is now in the fictional future. This thesis is thus partly constructed with a speculative relationship with 'time' in that I draw on extant research and dystopian fictions alongside creating my own speculative future for working parents. This approach demonstrates how a fictocritical dystopian narrative can offer a way of imagining a future that subverts some of the inequities of the present.

My subversive intent is also aligned to the methods of 'prefigurative politics' (Reinecke, 2018; Yates, 2015), which proposes the utility of creating change in the 'here and now'. I have taken action, inspired by my empirical findings, to organise a network that offers solidarity in the 'here and now' (Reinecke, 2018) for working parents in my organisation,. My prefigurative approach to subversion also draws on action research methods (Lewin, 1946) for inspiration as, through my empirical research with working parents, I identified a gap for an organised staff network in the organisation and took action to create one.

Focusing on working parents, I explore the concept of 'an unspoken male or masculine norm' which they experience in organisations 'where their success or failure can be explained by their degree of conformity to that norm' (Phillips & Knowles, 2012, p. 418). These 'obligatory norms' (Butler, 2009, p. 1) apply to the overwhelming majority of working parents whose parental decisions and experiences are essentially constrained by social and economic contexts. Within organisations this often translates to coercive expectations to opt for some form of maternity leave arrangement instead of shared leave. This is a major contributory factor in women being subject to the 'motherhood penalty' (Brearley, 2021; Budig & England, 2001; Correll et al., 2007), which covers a range of experiences, from career stagnation (Clark Blickenstaff, 2005) to in-work mistreatment (Berdahl & Moon, 2013) to being pushed out of their jobs (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Kanji &

Cahusac, 2015). One of the main drivers of this inequity in organisations for working parents is the socially constructed fantasy of hegemonic masculinity (HM).

I interpret HM, within its western social context, as a dominant discourse affecting individuals, cultures, and structures within organisations, which thus has a material effect on working parents. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe HM as 'the currently most honoured way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men' (p. 832). The most dystopian aspect of this statement is the 'requirement' for all non-hegemonic identities to be subjugated to this ideological gender order. Ideological hierarchies, as described in Althusser's theorising of class-based ideology, are reproduced via the subjugation by hegemonic groups (e.g., wealthy business owners), of subordinated groups (e.g., the working class). In this thesis, an Althusserian interpretation of ideology is used as a framework to consider the subjugation of subordinated genders to HM within patriarchy.

I draw on Althusser's account of how ideology has material effects (Althusser, 2014), particularly how 'interpellation' creates 'working parents' as ideological subjects within organisations. This organisational process operates within a wider context which privileges HM in other 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISA) such as the media, education, and the family (p. 75). These ISAs are underscored by 'Repressive State Apparatuses' which employ physical force and confinement, such as the penal system, the police and the military. Althusser argues that such institutional apparatuses are constantly acting upon individual subjects, repeating, and enforcing societal norms. Alongside this top-down process, working parents are 'hailed as a subject' of patriarchy through the ideological process of 'interpellation'. In effect, the working parent 'becomes' the working 'mother' or 'father', thus inhabiting the societal role that was 'always already' assigned to them. This Interpellation process associates fathers with 'breadwinning' in the traditional mode of HM, and mothers as subordinate primary caregivers. Butler and Dolar have critiqued Althusser's theory of 'interpellation' using the lens of psychoanalysis which suggests there is always a 'remainder' of the human identity that is not accounted for through ideological subjectification (Butler, 1997; Dolar, 1993). This remainder is encapsulated in the ethereal force of 'love', which Butler describes as 'beyond interpellation precisely because it is understood to be compelled by an immaterial law' (Butler, 1997, pp. 127-128). I draw on this critical perspective to promote parental love, amplified through direct experience of 'hands-on' care, as a unifying 'affect' (Spinoza, 1994) that can motivate collective acts of subversion.

I intend to subvert the patriarchal working parent model of breadwinner fathers and carer mothers as described in social role theory (Eagly et al., 2000). I use subversion as a concept that describes organised resistance to an existing system or structure with the intention of overthrowing that order and replacing it with another (Bloom & White, 2016). The concept of subversion follows the principles of collective organising and praxis established by Paulo Freire and Myles Horton (Freire, 2017; Horton, Kohl, & Kohl, 1990). Their process focused primarily on class-based struggles; this research employs that model to examine gender-based inequity and the plight of working parents.

My subversion is grounded in masculinities theory, which addresses multiple modes of masculinities (Connell, 2005; Hearn & Morgan, 1990; Kimmel, Hearn, & Connell, 2005); particularly caring masculinities (Elliott, 2016) and the growing literature of caregiving fathers (A. Doucet, 2006; Hanlon, 2012; Hobson, 2002). This research deconstructs the idealised breadwinner assumptions of HM as a normative mode of work-life balance which privileges men's careers.

The evidence of an emerging 'caring masculinities' amongst working fathers illustrates the importance of 'love' in the patriarchal workplace. I propose that organisations are playing catch-up in the wake of a subversive force of love that is not measurable or controllable in organisational contexts. Organisations need to do much better in response to an emerging cultural reality of involved fatherhood in the West (Dermott & Miller, 2015; Gottzen, 2011; Kangas et al., 2019; Wall & Arnold, 2007).Organisations who fail to respond are likely to be left behind. Masculinities theorists such as Connell (2005), Messerschmidt (2018), and Elliott (2016) have developed subversive arguments to promote re-embodied, positive and egalitarian caring masculinities. Developing these arguments can shift organisational cultures and policies towards the 'rejection of domination' (Elliott, 2016).

How I got here and why that matters

This thesis research is deeply personal to who I am as a researcher, and more importantly, as someone with a family. There have been three important influences upon the progression of my PhD research and thesis. The primary driver has been starting a family with my wife, Holly. I began my journey from hopeful to expectant parent at the start of my first year as a post graduate researcher (PGR) and this transition in my personal life coincided with 'becoming' a PGR. The second crucial influence was the moment I was given permission to integrate dystopian fiction (my lifelong passion) into my research. The third, critical conceptual moment was during a conversation with Holly when I realised the

synergy between my personal life and the trope of fertility and parenthood in dystopian fiction. These three influences have been integral in the development of my doctoral research, and crucial in shaping my identity as a researcher. My research has equally influenced my personal development as a working parent and my engagement with and understanding of dystopian fiction.

My first influence is the primary source of my commitment to researching and writing about working parenthood. I can honestly say that my experiences of becoming and being a working parent have, to a great extent, shaped the nature and direction of my research. At the beginning this process, when I tentatively stepped into the intimidating world of academia, I clung precariously to my critical perspective of gender injustices in organisations. I knew that I was searching for my research story and a way to articulate my desire to resist and subvert gender hegemony. It was when my wife and I decided to start our family that the events of my personal life became beautifully entwined with my research. Through this complex interaction and blurring of lines between personal and professional, I found immense motivation in focusing on the injustices experienced by working parents as a microcosm of gender injustices in organisations. I am so grateful that this process has provided me with the opportunity to learn in this way, it has been a privilege.

The second influence of having the permission to explore the possibilities of dystopian fiction in my research was something that lit a flame of excitement in me that has burned consistently throughout my PhD. I can distinctly recall the moment when I first tentatively broached the possibility of integrating dystopian fiction. My supervisor and I had met on a few previous occasions to explore the possibility of me working with her and trying to find a mutually motivating topic for my PhD. We had covered quite a lot of ground in these conversations, and I had tangentially burrowed down many rabbit holes. I look back on that time now in sheer amazement at how ignorant and naïve I must have sounded in the context of what I have learned about academic research over the following years. So much has happened since I had those conversations, not least the birth of my first child, however, I still think back to this moment as the literal ‘inciting incident’ that sustained my creative drive throughout my time as a doctoral student. The conversation went a little bit like this:

Jamie: Have you had any other thoughts?

> *Mark: [Shifts in chair, pauses]* ***[Internal monologue: Should I say it? Is it ridiculous to suggest this? Just say it!]*** *Well, what I would really love to do is find some way to incorporate dystopian fiction.*
>
> *Jamie: [Pauses for a second and smiles] Tell me more.*

In an instant my research journey changed and I began to construct, with my supervisor, how I could bring this small possibility to life.

The third milestone that ignited the focus of my research was the conversation I had with my wife, Holly, who was pregnant at the time, as we looked at my early draft of the tropes of dystopian fiction (appendix 1). As I stared at the chaotic web of interconnected tropes, I had been searching for the much fabled 'golden thread' that could connect all my research together. As has often been the case when trying to unpick and process the overwhelming magnitude of my research topic, it was a conversation with Holly that helped me to see things clearly. It went a little bit like this:

> *Mark: [gesturing to the screen with the spider diagram of dystopian fiction tropes*] *What do you think?*
>
> *Holly: Wow! What does it all mean?*
>
> *Mark: [Long pause] It is a map of all the tropes, or themes, that I have identified from dystopian fiction novels that I know of. I'm trying to find something to connect it all together.*
>
> *Holly: OK, talk me through it.*
>
> *Mark: Well dystopian fictions are often based on a speculative future with an oppressive, controlling hierarchical structure and, typically, powerful totalitarian rulers (such as* ***1984*** *(Orwell, 2004 [1949]) and* ***The Handmaid's Tale*** *(Atwood, 1996 [1985])). The main characters in these dystopian fictions are usually resistant protagonists who want to subvert the oppressive system. I am using that dynamic between oppression and resistance as a framework for how working parents experience organisational rules and cultures as oppressive systems that constrain their career and family time. What I am trying to find is a trope in dystopian fiction that connects these concepts in a concrete way.*
>
> *Holly: What is this one about? Fertility/Infertility?*
>
> *Mark: The Fertility/Infertility trope relates to a few DFs that focus on the speculative scenario of mass infertility (such as* ***The Children of Men*** *(James, 2018), or ideological fertility-based control (such as* ***Red Clocks*** *(Zumas, 2018)). Women's fertility is exploited as a currency in these DFs and used as a catalyst for social oppression. These DFs, and others like them, also show how people can work together to resist and subvert these*

> *oppressive systems. Margaret Atwood's* ***The Handmaid's Tale*** *is a really great example of this as it has provided inspiration for real life subversive resistance and the blurring of lines between fiction and reality (Beaumont & Holpuch, 2018).*
>
> *Holly: That's it! That's what you should use for your PhD! It's a perfect fit.*

Using Dystopian Fiction

In my research, I use dystopian fiction as a lens to interpret organisational policy, process, and practice in light of alarming parallels with some of the DFs I have already mentioned. Using fiction can '[accomplish] the feat which organisation theory often misses: it combines the subjective with the objective…'(Czarniawska-Joerges & De Monthoux, 1994, p. 9). This research suggests that dystopian fictions can help us to reflect upon organisational realities. I use DF to amplify examples of masculinised, patriarchal norms and subversive action within organisational narratives.

Below is a select list of the dystopian fiction I draw upon as analytical bases for source material.

- *Brave New World* (Huxley, 2004 [1932])
- *Swastika Night* (Burdekin, 1985 [1937])
- *1984* (Orwell, 2004 [1949])
- *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, (Atwood, 1996 [1985])
- *Never Let Me Go* (Ishiguro, 2005)
- *The Power* (Alderman, 2016)
- *Red Clocks* (Zumas, 2018)
- *The Testaments* (Atwood, 2019)

I want to draw attention to a few examples of female authored DFs that have explored the themes of HM, parenthood, and subversion. Most people recognise one of the most famous dystopian fictions of the last 100 years - George Orwell's *1984* (1949) - yet few people have heard of one of its predecessors, *Swastika Night* by Katherine Burdekin (1985 [1937]), which was originally published under a male pseudonym (see notable exceptions Lothian, 2016; Patai, 1984).The practice of female authors adopting male pseudonyms is symbolic of the patriarchal barriers that women face in the world of work. Such choices are reminiscent of the sacrifice many mothers make in relinquishing their work identity to become primary carers for their children. Burdekin's sacrifice is wonderfully subverted in recent DF, *The Power* by Naomi Alderman (2016) where [spoiler] the narrator is advised by their fictional publisher to choose a female pseudonym to overcome gender bias in the matriarchal world.

Burdekin's foundational novel speculates on an a the consequences of a Nazi 'Thousand year Reich' defined by 'knightly', patriarchal values and 'the cult of masculinity' (Patai, 1984, p. 87). Burdekin's novel foreshadows later feminist dystopian literature through its shocking demotion of women to a sub-human status as 'breeders', stated in a liturgy early in the novel:

> *As a woman is above a worm,*
> *So is a man above a woman,*

Patriarchal discourse repeats itself as a trope that involves the subjugation of women in *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1996) where fundamentalist Christianity is used in a similar manner to Burdekin's Nazi Germany. That fundamentalist trope is repeated in *Red Clocks* (Zumas, 2018); these DFs address and critique the traditional social roles of men and women within patriarchal dogma. In these DFs, domination is established through control and servitude via the threat of violence, underscored by HM. These cultural expressions of masculinity allude to contemporary constructions of HM and its power to influence and affect men and women's behaviours and experiences as working parents in masculine organisational contexts.

Dystopian fiction often speculates on post-apocalyptic scenarios, characterised by authoritarian constructs which subjugate a population or group (Claeys, 2018). It can also be described as 'a utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society' (Gordin, Tilley, & Prakash, 2010, p. 1). In the context of the COVID-19 where the UK government has granted lucrative contracts to private conservative party donors (Bright, Matharu, & Tarrant, 2021), the real life disparity between the super-rich who profiteer from the death and suffering of the UK population illustrates the harsh reality of the dystopia/utopia duality. This duality aligns with the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 2005) for working parents that describes utopian privilege for compliant white, cis-gender men, and a dystopian 'motherhood penalty' (Brearley, 2021) for women.

Utilising dystopian fiction to examine organizations 'allows the discussion of culturally relevant issues' such as working parenthood and the policies surrounding shared parenting 'in terms of [extending] knowledge through cross disciplinary research' (Burgos-Mascarell, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Martínez-López, 2016, p. 1845). In my research the culturally relevant issue is the impact of patriarchal discourse on gendered organisations where becoming a parent marks a critical stage of career progression or stagnation for men and women. Dystopian fiction introduces readers to the possibilities of another place

or time and ‘offers readers an opportunity to reflect on their current existence to compare the similarities and differences between the real and the fictional’ (Mallan, 2013, p. 16). My unconventional use of DF is intentionally critical and subversive; it is designed to undermine accepted ‘reality’ for working parents by drawing comparisons with oppressive and shocking dystopian fiction tropes that could easily be dismissed as fantasy.

There is sometimes a degree of guesswork required to unpick the origins of the fictional world and the reasons for its existence ‘which draws the reader into creative reconstruction of the future-as-past’ (A. Stock, 2016, p. 417). Utilising collaborative story reconstruction with the reader can potentially demystify the narrative fog of the ghostly masculine organisational paradigm (Burnett et al., 2012; Giazitzoglu & Muzio, 2020). The intention of this approach is to expose hegemonic masculinity as a constraining influence on working parenthood, and highlight subversive counternarratives that disrupt masculine organisational norms. In doing this, I identify subversive themes and characters hidden beneath the surface of organisational reality.

In the following sub-sections I briefly outline my thesis structure, providing a summary of each chapter.

Literature Review

My literature review is presented in two sections: a more conventional approach to masculinities and working parenthood, and an unconventional, conceptual review integrating dystopian fiction. The first part offers a brief history of masculinity and patriarchy with regard to working parenthood, my theoretical framework, and an overview of four masculinities: ‘organisational’, ‘traditional’, ‘transitional’ and ‘egalitarian’. This is adapted from Hochschild and Machung’s (2012) framework of involved fathers in their foundational ethnographic research on working parents. The second part of my literature review is a revised version of my article in *Human Resource Development International* (Gatto, 2020). This conceptual review offers a manifesto of five demands to outline more equitable conditions for working parents.

Methodology

My research aligns with the radical humanist paradigm of sociological research (Burrell, 2011). I interpret working parenthood and masculinities through a subjective ontology and follow a radical change epistemology motivated by social justice. I am motivated by research that critically examines social injustices, especially affecting oppressed subjects

such as women via the motherhood penalty, and men via the patriarchal deficit. I apply subversive, radical humanist principles of 'overthrowing or transcending the limitations of existing social arrangements' (Burrell, 2011, p. 32). Given my research focus involves the lived experience for working parents, I reject the functionalist paradigm (Burrell, 2011) of objective data and positivist analysis. I instead search for meaning in the variability and the messiness of subjective reality. I also take a critical view of organisations as incubators for patriarchal culture, which I perceive as a pervasive phenomenon in western society that damages working parents' lives.

I believe most organisational research creates and recreates knowledge inside a patriarchal framework of the 'masculine organisation' (J. Acker, 1990; Burnett et al., 2012; Giazitzoglu & Muzio, 2020). This context perpetuates patriarchal discourses that oppresses subjugated people akin to totalitarian organisations in dystopian fictions. Foucault proposes that human knowledge, like reality, is subjective and subject to the forces of power (Foucault, 1980), and therefore subject to hegemonic influence and biases. This pattern of knowledge is therefore a reproductive loop of ideology (Althusser, 2014), which privileges masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2001) as a conventional basis for knowledge creation. In order to subvert this masculine paradigm, I employ unconventional methodology because 'adhering to convention limits our thinking' (Bryman & Buchanan, 2018, p. 2). This thesis is designed to challenge dominant paradigms.

Unconventional Empirical Research

I used a dialectical-relational approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2013) for my primary data analysis. I interviewed 19 expectant and newly experienced working parents (men and women) from ten families, all of whom all have a common link to one organisation (see table 1). The link organisation is a higher education institution (HEI) that is a fairly representative example of the UK University sector. This is important as public perception (as indicated in my interview conversations) would suggest that working parents in HEIs should benefit from enhanced entitlements and support. I specifically wanted to speak to parents connected to one organisation in order to build a more detailed picture of how organisations operate through their cultural and policy environments. I spoke to couples and used visual elicitation techniques (Harper, 2002) to gain more open and interconnected insights into their ideas of working parenthood. I also adopted a life-histories (Connell, 2005) approach of semi structured and 'grand tour' style questions (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) concerning their ideas and influences on being

working parents. I explored working parent's roles, responsibilities and relationships as well as discussing policies and organisational structures from gendered lenses.

Demographics & parental information	Men	Women
Total	10	9
Ethnicity	9 white 1 BAME	8 white 1 BAME
Working pattern	9 FT / 1 PT	4 FT/ 5 PT (1 used AL to achieve 80% working for 12 months on return to work.)
Parental Leave (for the purposes of this table, I use the policy title to describe the leave taken e.g., maternity & paternity)	• 7 – 2 weeks Paternity • 1 – 2 weeks paternity + 1 week AL • 1 – 2 weeks paternity + 2 weeks AL • 1 negotiated circa 8 working days absence from work due to less than 6 months service	• 5 – 12 months maternity + 2 months AL • 5 – 12 months maternity • 1 – 11 months maternity • 1 – 10 months maternity • 1 – 6 months maternity + 1 month AL
Childcare (note added when based on expectations)	• 1 FT Nursery (expectations) • 1 mother full time with some family help • 1 Nursery 4 days per week (expectations) • 4 Nursery 3 days per week, 2 days with mother (1 based on expectations) • 1 Nursery 3 days per week, 2 days shared between grandparents & parents (expectations) • 1 Nursery 2 days per week, 2 days shared between parents, 1 day with grandparent	

	• 1 Nursery 2 days per week, 3 days shared between grandparents & parents (expectations)

Table 1 - Participant Demographics

Analysis

My analysis chapter employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Van Dijk, 1993) and integrates DF within the dialectical-relational approach (Fairclough, 2013) to make a methodological contribution to CDA. Fairclough (2013) described CDA as addressing a 'social wrong' of the day, which makes it an appropriate method for this research topic. CDA is an abductive approach to research and data analysis, which in this case, is guided by theoretical work exploring patriarchal discourse in an organisation. CDA offers a process to identify examples of interpellation that relate to individual and collective experiences of working parenthood in organisations. I suggest that social justice research cannot achieve meaningful change within the boundaries of the current masculine organisational paradigm; it must seek new approaches to gain new insights from the dialectical relational analysis that can contribute to collective subversion.

I integrate dystopian fiction into my analysis by making thematic links with DF tropes and using material from dystopian fiction as an exemplar' to blur the lines between fictional and empirical data. My CDA is driven by (a) the 'social wrong' of working parent inequality, (b) the mission to expose this 'wrong' and (c) a search for alternative subversive counter-discourses in my data. I explore this by engaging with the shared experiences of the participants who drew on a range of relational discourses linked with HM, familial bonds, structural constraints, and collegiality with peers. I sought examples of the 'known' qualities of western HM (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018) such as assertiveness, aggression, competitiveness and strength (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010), which form a discourse that affecting working parent experiences and decisions. I use DF to connect the tropes of DF with the golden thematic threads in of micro discourse such as participants' identity and language choices, meso discourse such

as relationships in organisational culture, and macro discourse such as statutory rights and patriarchal traditions. I draw on the DF tropes of masculinity, subversion, and parenthood as fictional counternarratives, with a focus on themes of individual affect, organisational domination, and collective subversion. This unconventional use of dystopian fiction leads, naturally, to a fictocritical chapter as a means of expressing my findings, which is the second strand of my methodological contribution.

Dystopian Fictocriticism

My discussion chapter is written as a DF-inspired critical organisational research 'dystopian "fictocriticism"' (Rhodes, 2015). As written, this chapter blurs the lines between my empirical data and the affective impact of counternarrative fiction in research (Czarniawska-Joerges & De Monthoux, 1994; Czarniawska, 2016). This approach is predicated on the assumption that novels can be factual and can 'be studied in order to arrive at richer theories'.(Czarniawska-Joerges & De Monthoux, 1994, p. 61). I draw on existing examples in management and organisation studies research, such as 'ethnographic fiction science' (Watson, 2000), short story (Rhodes, 2001b), autoethnography (Grenier, 2015), and murder mystery (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2019), to embolden my own approach to dystopian fiction/fictocriticism. As already discussed, I chose dystopian fiction due to its uniquely speculative and critical perspective on societal phenomena, particularly the tropes of parenthood, gender-based oppression, and subversion.

The fictocriticism chapter attempts to articulate the richness of a dystopian novel through its archival structure, character development, and subversive message. By offering a subversive counternarrative, I hope to contribute a constructive and disruptive narrative which can extend existing work in the fields of masculinities and working parent research. I use this explicitly disruptive mode of 'writing differently' in alignment with recent feminist research praxis (Gilmore et al., 2019; Özkazanç-Pan & Pullen, 2020), and hope my thesis will also challenge established masculine paradigms of conventional academic research (Bryman & Buchanan, 2018; Plakoyiannaki & Budhwar, 2021). I hope this chapter will be enjoyable to read and therefore potentially reach a wider audience. I also hope to achieve a degree of emotive impact beyond a traditional discussion chapter by making an emotional connection with the reader. In doing so, I hope to persuade the reader of the social justice message embedded in this subversive dystopian fiction.

Implications & Conclusion

My research findings have important implications for organisations, especially for managerial and human resources management practice. I categorise these implications according to cultural and policy-based factors that I recommend organisations implement as soon as possible in order to effect change for existing and future working parents. By implementing these changes, I believe any organisation could distinguish themselves as a market leader within the UK and global employment marketplace (Bear, Rahman, & Post, 2010; Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015). Additionally, and more important in my view, these recommended actions could dramatically improve the lives of the working parents, their families and the overall culture and wellbeing of organisations (Brearley, 2021; Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Tronto, 2015).

This thesis offers a contribution to masculinities and ideology theories within working parenthood research. Firstly, it extends masculinities theory to explicitly include working parenthood by promoting egalitarian, caring masculinities as a subversive opportunity to reject hegemony (Elliott, 2016). Secondly, it considers hegemonic masculinity as an ideological framework against which dominant discourses of working parenthood are reproduced in masculine organisations. My discussion offers a contemporary account of the difficulties of working parenthood in higher education contexts where you might reasonably expect a more progressive approach. Finally, my use of fictocriticism and dystopian fiction is a major methodological contribution to knowledge, both as an innovative analytical method and ‘writing differently’.

To conclude, I offer an epilogue, in the form of a dystopian flash-fiction which signals the future possibilities outlined in this subversive fictocritical thesis. However, as with many DFs, this story begins with the ‘once upon a time’ of a literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Part 1 – The Story of Hegemonic Masculinity and Patriarchy as a constraint on working parent equality in the UK

Introduction

The story of western masculinities could easily have been written as a dystopian fiction, particularly for working parents. Carrigan et al. (1985) first coined the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' (HM) and described it as a hierarchically dominant and 'most honoured form of being a man'. HM has been refined in contemporary theorising to integrate global and local variation as well as historical processes that continue to form and reform its etymology (Connell, 2000, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Demetriou, 2001; Hearn, 1996, 2004; Kimmel et al., 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018). HM is predicated on an idealised form of masculinity (assertive, aggressive, ambitious, strong, dominant, charismatic etc.) (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010), which is an unobtainable, mythical social gender performance (Butler, 2011), and acts as a dominant discourse within patriarchal societies.

Regardless of its fictional characterisation, hegemonic masculinity pervades the lives of working parents, both in the workplace (J. Acker, 1990; Alvesson & Due Billing, 2009; Burnett et al., 2012; Özkazanç-Pan & Pullen, 2020) and domestic contexts (Andrea Doucet, 2006; Hobson, 2002; Hochschild, 1997; Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Murgia & Poggio, 2013). It is the reproduction of patriarchy in organisational culture and policy that ensures the 'motherhood penalty' (Brearley, 2021; Budig & England, 2001; Correll et al., 2007) and 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 2005; Hodges & Budig, 2010) endure as unequal social outcomes for working parents, shaping family and working lives..

In this chapter, I will review patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity in working parenthood contexts, starting with a brief history of a foundational 18th Century essay, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* which establishes a UK-based manifesto style polemic that both subverted, and conformed to, persistent patriarchal discourse in the UK. I will then discuss my theoretical framework using Althusserian ideology theory and masculinities theory to describe the tension between traditional patriarchy and progressive egalitarian modes of masculinities. I adapt Althusser's theorisation of societal (class based) ideology and, specifically, 'interpellation' (Althusser, 2014) to show how the dominant forms of gender inequity, typified by HM, is reproduced in the UK's patriarchal order. This has particular

implications in terms of how the patriarchy is maintained to the detriment of all working parents. Then, I outline my use of masculinities theory (Connell, 2005; Hearn & Morgan, 1990; Kimmel et al., 2005) based on three modes of fatherhood as outlined by Hochschild and Machung (2012) in their foundational book *The Second Shift*: Traditional, Transitional and Egalitarian. These three themes will be discussed as follows: Traditional will encompass HM (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018) in relation to working parents and breadwinner masculinity (Hanlon, 2012; Sarah Thébaud, 2010); Transitional will describe hybrid masculinities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Demetriou, 2001) that aspire to progressive shared parenting, but also sustain some traditional aspects of masculinity; and Egalitarian will offer an overview of caring masculinities (Elliott, 2016; Jordan, 2020; Lee & Lee, 2018) as a potential pathway to the rejection of hegemony.

I use Hochschild's framework to establish the boundaries of this literature review in relation to working parents and masculinities. There is a huge range of research on these two areas that includes (but is not limited to) important work on men's violence (Hearn, 2012), gay masculinities (Connell, 2000), female masculinities (Halberstam, 2019), and other alternative forms of masculinity (Kendall, 2000; Salter, 2018; Seeley, 2018). I refine my review to traditional, transitional and egalitarian masculinities to make a direct link to Hochschild's foundational work from 1989; this date forms a historical link to the symbolic 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 1989), which heralded the beginning of what I term the 'Pre-Pandemic Epoch' in my fictocriticism (Gibbs, 1997, 2005; Jiwa, 2013; Rhodes, 2015) chapter. This period (1989-2021) registers an integral link between ideological patriarchy, neo-liberal, free market ideology, and the experiences of working parents in the UK.

Finally, part two of this literature review is entitled 'Parenthood demands: resisting a dystopia in the workplace' (Gatto, 2020) and is a manifesto of demands, inspired by the dystopian novel *The Children of* Men (James, 2018). I introduce that section in more detail later in this chapter but mention it here to signal the progression from a traditional literature review to a more unconventional, conceptual review that employs the fictocriticism methodology I adopt later in this thesis. For now, I reflect on the past and a feminist manifesto that foreshadowed the emancipatory energy of the first and second waves of feminism. I propose an ahistorical connection between the problems facing working parents over 200 years ago and contemporary parents today and the future. The persistence of this problem justifies the use of speculative DFs which often construct intemporal plots to explicate the process of cyclical history (Gordin et al., 2010; A. Stock, 2016). I use historical evidence in this review to problematise any assumptions of progress for working parents as interconnected with the patriarchal past. Considering the

roots of patriarchy and the feminist activism to resist it, is instructional for present day subversive action.

A brief history of feminist resistance to UK patriarchy in working parent contexts

The history of UK patriarchy for working parenthood has its origins in cultural and legal formalisation of labour dating back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (McKeon, 1995). This social shift provoked a feminist response asserting the rights of women in the form of collective manifestos (Weiss & Brueske, 2018) as well as individual polemics (e.g. Wollstonecraft, 2008). This was a time period when domestic and capitalist labour transitioned from 'patriarchalism to modern patriarchy [that] entailed a separation out of elements that had formerly been tacitly understood and experienced' (McKeon, 1995, p. 301). In effect, the previous assumptions of patriarchal familial authority were made concrete, in legal terms, in response to religious puritanical concerns, rooted in the biblical dogma of men's domestic authority, serving to formalise the subservience of women in the UK gender order.

Feminist manifestos dating back to the C17th articulate the resistance of feminist activists to patriarchy (Weiss & Brueske, 2018). This oppositional discourse supports the assertion that 'male domination and the subordination of women are constants in this long-term process. What changes is the form patriarchy takes under different historical circumstances.' (McKeon, 1995, p. 301). The mutation of patriarchy as a form of masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2001) relates to the concept of hybrid masculinity (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Demetriou, 2001), or hybrid hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018), which I will explore later in the chapter. I mention this strand of masculinities theory to illustrate how HM, as a signifier of patriarchy, can be adapted to maintain its mythical powerful status over subordinated groups. Aligned to this adaptability, the 'manosphere' is a community of men who violently oppose women's freedom from patriarchy (Bates, 2020) and see themselves acting as the vanguard to maintaining traditionally hegemonic ideas of sexual domination. In effect, the oppositional landscape of feminist activism against patriarchy is complicated by the parallel resistance of patriarchy to gender egalitarianism.

The end of the C18th saw the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft (2008 [1792]), *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* which rebutted gendered assumptions that legalised aspects of the patriarchal myth and called for the education of women as a form of liberation from subjugation. Wollstonecraft suggested this new system would liberate

women to live more fulfilling lives while also serving the societal purpose of better preparing them for their duty as primary carers and educators of their children, as well as making better wives for their husbands, too. This assertion was a bold challenge to the oppressive patriarchy of the time that subjugated most women through structurally reproduced educational constraints. Wollstonecraft's resistance to the lack of education for women resonates with contemporary dystopian fictions (e.g. *Red Clocks* (Zumas, 2018) and *Vox* (Dalcher, 2018)). However, considering the use of fundamentalist Christianity in *Red Clocks* (and *The Handmaid's Tale)* as a framework for hegemony, it is important to consider, as Carpenter (2017, p. 254) notes, that Wollstonecraft also asserted we should 'endeavour to… cooperate' in alignment with gendered hierarchy outlined in 'Adam's Law' and 'with the supreme being' (Wollstonecraft, 2008, p. 86). Wollstonecraft's statement provides a historic example of 'interpellation' (Althusser, 2014) to patriarchal discourse, which highlights its embeddedness, even at the core of foundational feminist activism. Unpicking such ideological influences is an ongoing task in feminist theory (hooks, 2014). However, setting aside such retrospective critiques, Wollstonecraft's foundational radicalism still inspires contemporary feminist manifestos to imagine another future for all working parents (Gatto, 2020).

Wollstonecraft pre-empted her famous essay with *A Vindication for the Rights of Men (2008 [1790]),* which is a relevant foundational touchstone for the gender equity arguments in this thesis. In this precursor, she responds to the speculative writings of Edmund Burke and his conservative patriarchal perspectives on the subject of the French Revolution. She criticises the class system in the UK stating, '[t]he few have sacrificed the many to their vices; and, to be able to pamper their appetites, and supinely exist without exercising mind or body, they have ceased to be men.'(p. 8) Wollstonecraft's work demonstrates the enduring injustice at the heart of patriarchal masculinity as an anathema that damages men as well as women; a criticism that applies, to this day, to the gendered injustices experienced by working parenthood.

Returning to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft (2008 [1792]) addresses the endemic gender-based inequity that continues to blight UK society. One of Wollstonecraft's most impactful statements is that 'it cannot be demonstrated that woman is essentially inferior to man, because she has always been subjugated' (Wollstonecraft, 2008, p. 76). This profound assertion of timeless subjugation marks a clear recognition of the project that lay ahead for feminism. Wollstonecraft's statement also resonates with Althusser's concept of 'interpellation' (Althusser, 2014) as she suggests that women are 'always already' subjects of patriarchy. In effect, Wollstonecraft suggests that it is

impossible to prove women's 'inferiority' witihin a patriarchal system that interpellates women as subservient to men from birth. Wollstonecraft is therefore also alluding to her own subjugation and interpellation to the patriarchal ideology.

Despite her own precarious societal position as a subjugated woman, Wollstonecraft spoke from a position of class-based privilege, particularly in relation to motherhood (Berges, 2013), which partly explains the relatively warm critical reception for the essay (Janes, 1978). Her demands for educational opportunities were, realistically, only accessible to those women fortunate enough to enjoy economic freedom i.e., not economically bound to low-paid, intensive jobs. Despite this limitation (retrospectively applied) to her arguments, she recognised that equity, particularly through education, should be extended to all people as an interconnected social concern that could benefit all men and women. The critical reception from Wollstonecraft's contemporaries was relatively supportive of her rationale to educate women for the betterment of society, though they disengaged with her more radical ideas of gender equality(Janes, 1978), such as her critique of 'the very constitution of civil governments' (Wollstonecraft, 2008, p. 124). Through her willingness to speak for women's rights via education, she laid the foundations for future feminist work that extended radical ideas, particularly for mothers.

Wollstonecraft also contributed to feminist critique of women's domestic servitude and subjugation as mothers based on their structurally imposed lower status. Though she was an advocate for advancing women's status in society, critics have alluded to her complicity with some elements of gendered essentialism. She associated social prestige; such as scholarly acumen (Berges, 2013), and physicality (Badowska, 1998) with men, and emphasised the 'virtue' of women's motherly behaviours (Berges, 2013). Though Wollstonecraft does relate family life to men's role as fathers, too (an important early forerunner for 'involved fatherhood), she emphasises that women, 'no matter how educated, are still first and foremost mothers and wives, and suggest[s] that the main reason for granting them rights is to enable them to fulfil their domestic duties better' (Berges, 2013, p. 169). It is difficult to know whether Wollstonecraft's approach was an example of 'tempered radicalism' (Meyerson & Scully, 1995) in an attempt to smuggle other progressive ideas into an acceptable narrative for her audience, but it is arguable that this possibility is borne out by the continued relevance of her essay.

Wollstonecraft's problematic description of parenthood is shown when she states that 'an unhappy marriage is often very advantageous to a family, and that the neglected wife is, in general, the best mother' (p. 64). Here, she rationalises the positive consequences of

women's marital unhappiness through their presumed additional commitment to motherhood. The sentiment of this statement builds on her association between women's social 'virtue' (Berges, 2013, p. 150), which is achieved through their role as mothers, not as wage earning members of society. Wollstonecraft's proposal bears striking comparison to present day contexts and the zero-sum game of the motherhood penalty where women are often made to feel guilty for not embodying the 'primary carer' role (Brearley, 2021).

The 'motherhood penalty' (Correll et al., 2007) describes the marginalisation and stagnation of women's careers, which can also affect personal relationships due to the inequity of primary caring roles many women assume. Wollstonecraft's description of the 'advantageous' effect of a woman's neglectful partner on their role as a mother serves to reinforce the historic roots of the motherhood penalty. Just as Wollstonecraft described the potential maternal benefits of women's marginalisation by their partner in C17th, men today benefit from the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 2005) through the effects of the motherhood penalty that enables their career progression.

The motherhood penalty has received recent attention in the UK through the legal charity Pregnant then Screwed (2021), which was established when its founder, Joeli Brearley was sacked 'two days after she informed her employer that she was pregnant with her first child' (Pregnant then Screwed, 2021). A recent court case claiming sex discrimination against self-employed women (BBC, 2021), cited unfair COVID-19 relief payments that were calculated to include periods of maternity leave, which reduced their mean salary over a three year period. The fact that this case was rejected, demonstrates the continuing neglect of working mothers' experience, not just in the home, but in wider patriarchal society, and the will of activists to resist it.

Feminist activist discourse opposing patriarchal injustice for 20th Century working families were amplified by the second wave feminist movement and the foundational text, *The Second Sex by* Simone de Beauvoir (2011 [1949]). In her thesis, de Beauvoir suggests that for women's maternal oppression 'only society can decide; woman's enslavement to the species is tighter or looser depending on how many births the society demands and the hygienic conditions in which pregnancy and birth occur.' (de Beauvoir, 2011 [1949], p. 69). De Beauvoir highlights the socially constructed phenomenon of patriarchy in relation to motherhood for women. She also draws on Freudian psychoanalysis and the value placed on analysing a subject's history without equal value being placed on their speculative futures. These speculative futures, proposed by feminist manifestos, are

creative possibilities where women could escape domestic subjugation and the motherhood penalty.

De Beauvoir highlights the hegemonic presence of patriarchy suggesting, '[t]here is one female function that is still almost impossible to undertake in complete freedom, and that is motherhood' (p. 828). In chapter one, I introduced the idea of the 'ghostly masculinity' which extends the idea of this hegemonic presence and draws on fictional inspiration, this will be explored later in this chapter, and fleshed out in chapters 4 and 5. Hochschild and Machung (2012) expose some of the material impacts of 'ghostly masculinity' in *The Second Shift* where the postfeminist promise of 'having it all' was revealed to be yet another myth in the absence of an egalitarian parental agreement. In reality, Hochschild and Machung highlighted how 'having it all' was just another mechanism to reproduce patriarchal privilege and the continuation of traditional male breadwinner role.

Men and masculinities research, which emerged through the mid-1970s (Pleck & Sawyer, 1975) and 1980s (Carrigan et al., 1985), offered critical perspectives on traditional patriarchy following the second wave of feminism. Foundational texts like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (2021 [1963]) and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (2012 [1970]) influenced masculinities research and offered critical arguments against the socially assumed 'essential' domesticity of women. Typically cited as one of the first major contributions to man and masculinities studies, *Men and Masculinity* by Pleck and Sawyer (1975) established a basis for a critical perspectives on men's roles in society. The field grew during the 1990s (Hearn & Morgan, 1990; Kimmel et al., 2005) as a corollary to gender studies (J. Acker, 1990; Butler, 1988; Connell, 2003; hooks, 1990) .As the field expanded, it problematised traditional patriarchal expectations of breadwinning and ideal worker trajectories, and laid the foundations for future critical work that could present a new vision for men and masculinities, particularly as involved fathers..

My thesis explores the influence of patriarchal discourse and hegemonic masculinity on working parents and predominantly focuses on the literature that has emerged since Hochschild and Machung (2012) first published *The Second Shift* in 1989. I define this epoch as a time when the neo-liberal capitalism became increasingly normalised (Jones, 2015) through the suppression of trade unions, and an unprecedented explosion of technology-enhanced individualism and consumerism. The timeframe I am reviewing concludes with the COVID-19 pandemic as a point of speculative uncertainty for working parents and western nations. Beyond this epoch, there will undoubtedly emerge a 'new normal' for all working parents that arises from the pandemic's unique societal impact.

The time after the publication of *The second shift* is distinct in three ways: firstly, the 1990s were my formative years growing up with two working parents; secondly, I became a working parent, myself, in 2019; and thirdly, this epoch includes a period of radical societal change that has significantly impacted previously accepted norms of working parenthood. The rise of precarious employment and work intensification, associated with increasing dependency on new technology, and the increasing normalisation of neoliberalism has squeezed the time working parents spend with their families (Hochschild, 1997). Considering the rise of neoliberalism since the 1970s, Connell and Dados (2014) discuss the proliferation of competitive ideologies and individualised societal structures, They highlight how '[m]arket thinking penetrates communities and even families, changing the way people relate to each other and think about their everyday lives' (Connell & Dados, 2014, p. 118). In the first two decades of the 21st century this has meant most working parents do not have the luxury to choose who works and who cares for their children, both must work (Devine, Foley, & Ward, 2021), often intensively, to live and avoid rising UK poverty (Inman, 2021).

The precarious employment of many UK workers (Jones, 2015), coupled with limited parental employment rights, contrasts with the post second world war period when 'social mobility' was 'romantically' linked to meritocracy (Themelis, 2008). Popular media depictions of the male breadwinner (e.g., *The Wonder Years)* depicted an expanding middle class that enabled single-earner households to live comfortable suburban lives. Aside from the wider implications of this westernised privilege, which was at the expense of oppressed nations and peoples (Chomsky, 2016; Connell & Dados, 2014), the myth of meritocratic education-based rewards actually served to reproduce existing wealth based advantages (Themelis, 2008) and gender-based privilege aligned with historic patriarchy. It is this fraught context of mythical, merit-based prosperity, and the harsh reality of neo-liberal organisational practices for working parents, that sets the scene for my speculative dystopian fictocriticism chapter.

Theoretical Framework

DF inspires the two theories that inform my research: *Multiple Masculinities* theory (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 2005; Hearn & Morgan, 1990), and Althusser's theory of *Ideology*, specifically his theory of 'interpellation' (Althusser, 2014). As discussed in my introduction chapter, DF has informed every stage of my thesis, which I justify in the context of noble examples of 'failure' in academic research (Callahan & Elliott, 2020; Halberstam, 2011) to tell sufficiently compelling stories with the potential to correct overt

injustices affecting working parents. My use of dystopian fiction is a methodological contribution to unconventional research (Bryman & Buchanan, 2018; Plakoyiannaki & Budhwar, 2021) which I discuss in greater depth in my methodology chapter, but for now it is important to state that DF directly influenced my theoretical framework, and by extension, my literature review. I arrived at *Masculinities* and *Ideology* through critical engagement with dystopian fiction, which typically speculates on the role of ideological masculinised control (read patriarchy) alongside prominent examples of fertility and parenthood as plot themes that speak directly to the contemporary problem I address. I first provide an overview of ideology, which represents the most convincing dystopian story of our time and, in particular, the compelling narrative that ensures social conformity through interpellation.

Patriarchy Discourse and Hegemonic Masculinity

Patriarchy privileges Hegemonic Masculinity as signifying 'the most honoured model of being a man' (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This is a model of masculinity against which working parent discourse is framed to marginalise women and non-conformist men. Althusser (2014) articulated a theory of *ideology* that attempted to explain how power is reproduced and operates in society through structural 'State Apparatuses'; 'Repressive Apparatuses' (operating through the threat of violence), and 'Ideological Apparatuses' (operating through the permeation of ideologically underpinned ideas).). Althusser proposed that state power is reproduced through the dual process of hierarchical state control and action, and individualised 'interpellation' as people are hailed as subjects of state power. Althusser famously used a material example of the police officer on a street hailing, 'Hey, you there!' (Althusser, 2014, pp. 190-191) to materially illustrate this concept. The individual becomes a subject of dominant ideology when they turn to accept the hail. Interpellation, however, goes beyond this transactional interaction of the ideological state 'hailing' the individual. Althusser proposed that individuals are, in fact, 'always, already' subjects of the very system that oppresses them. To relate this back to working parents, when workers are hailed as a 'mother' or 'father', their acceptance of this 'hail' renders them subjects of pre-existing parental ideology that expects and demands each subject's conformity to the ideological blueprint of working parenthood.

In the UK workplace, the interpellation of working parents (expectant or experienced) is reinforced through ingrained workplace policies that establish a clear delineation of gender-based roles and responsibilities that align with traditional 'social roles' (Eagly et

al., 2000). It is pregnant women who are 'interpellated' when the 'dominant group disempowers [them] by endorsing their social exit as a natural, almost inevitable consequence, of the incompatibility of the roles of mother and professional worker' (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014, p. 58). In contrast, expectant and new fathers are muted by organisational masculinity (Burnett et al., 2012; Kangas et al., 2019; von Alemann, Beaufays, & Oechsle, 2017). Such muting can excuse expectant fathers from any active role in the preparation for parenthood or marginalise their embodied experiences as secondary to the ideal worker model.

Althusser's theory of ideology and interpellation has been criticised regarding its theoretical oversight in theorising the 'clean cut' (Dolar, 1993) from the pre-ideological to ideological subjectification of individuals into ideological subjects (e.g. mother/father). Althusser's 'always already' paradox is also depicted as a Freudian 'from birth' phenomenon whereby the gender role of a new-born child (their assigned sex at birth) is immediately socially determined and enforced via the process of interpellation into the 'familial Ideological State Apparatus'. This 'clean cut' process initiates the 'becoming' of an ideological subject (the gender of a child) before their individual identity is formed (particularly considering gender identification in pre-birth scans). Dolar uses psychoanalytic theory and a Lacanian conceptual framework to suggest that this 'clean cut' is 'always unclean' (1993, p. 77) because there is an inaccessible kernel of the individual self (i.e. their gender identity) that 'comes to haunt subjectivity once it is constituted as such' (p. 77). Lacan suggested 'the subject emerges only at the point of a non-recognition' (p. 81) i.e., an individualised separation from the dominant narrative of the Ideological State Apparatus. This alternate view of subjectification provides a useful framework for the subversion that I pursue through this thesis. I suggest that the oppressive process of interpellation, which makes subjects of working parents within patriarchal ideology, is not a totalising process, rather, a kernel of the subjective self remains intact to haunt the totalising intent of patriarchal State Apparatus, which is capable of subverting its hegemonic effects.

Dolar suggests that 'transference love' between the subject and the 'analyst' provides a clue to the 'haunted' self that fails to become an interpellated subject. Dolar reports how Freud observed the unexpected, yet repeated emergence (in multiple cases of psychoanalysis) of the 'love of the patient for the analyst' (p. 85). Freud described this an example of 'true love', which Dolar describes as not initiated by either patient, or analyst, and therefore indicative of an uncontrollable subjective self. This 'haunting' remainder from 'interpellation' offers a hope for the potential subversive basis of collective love that

can be fostered in the shared experiences of working parents to resist patriarchal inequity. Dolar further elaborates on this point by suggesting that it is ‘love’ that remains the outlier in the interpellation equation and, I suggest, collective love between working parents can form a foundation to subvert the masculine organisation. Butler suggests that ‘Interpellation is "barred" from success not by a structurally permanent form of prohibition (or foreclosure), but by its inability to determine the constitutive field of the human’ (Butler, 1997, p. 129). It is pertinent to this review that Butler offers a critique of Althusser’s proposed rule-bound logic of interpellation by highlighting the subject’s ‘passionate’ conscious attachment to the rules that allows interpellation to work.

Butler suggests that subjects’ oppositional conscious passion to achieve a sense of identity within the rule-based ideology undermines the sense of total exterior control that is articulated by Athusser’s process of interpellation. Dolar’s suggestion of a ‘remainder’ in the interpellation equation may, therefore, be the explained in the unpredictable expression of love as an intrinsic part of ‘being’ human. Butler suggests ‘we might reread "being" as precisely the potentiality that remains unexhausted by any particular interpellation’(p. 131). In the context of contemporary organisations, Butler’s critique of interpellation offers opportunities to reread the rule-based patriarchal organisations affecting working parents and consider how they can ‘consciously’ organise collective acts of subversion.

Working Parents in the Masculine Organisation

In order to build a connection between Althusser’s theory of ideology as a framework for the influence of masculinity on working parents in organisations, I draw on theorising of the ‘masculine organisations’ (J. Acker, 1990) and societal level ‘masculine domination’ (Bourdieu, 2001). Masculinity in these contexts is an insidious influence that subjugates people as subjects of the patriarchal social order. Working families are subject to the multi-pronged influence of the Ideological State Apparatuses such as Politics, Families, Education, Media, Religion, which all contribute to workplace cultures; Collinson and Hearn (1994, p. 6) described organisations as ‘mini-patriarchies’ that are structured to reproduce social relations.

These ‘mini-patriarchies’ persist today in the form of masculine organisational norms, which perpetuate the ‘ideal worker’ myth that J. Acker (1990) defined within a gender hierarchy in organisations. Masculine organisations are sometimes described in terms ‘ghosts’ and ‘hidden rules’ (Burnett et al., 2012; von Alemann et al., 2017) that working

parents attempt to navigate, but find barriers in normative expectations of social roles (Eagly et al., 2000). Giazitzoglu and Muzio (2020) suggest that masculine organisations have continued to exist as 'mini-patriarchies' where young working-class men in professional industries (such as Information Technology) still feel the need to conform to hegemonic ideals of professional masculinity. Alarmingly, the pressure to conform also applies during the COVID-19 pandemic as evidenced by 'the masculine ideal of the warrior that does not fear the virus' persists in police organisational culture in Brazil (Alcadipani, 2020). Here, we see the direct link between patriarchal discourses of fearlessness, strength, and stoicism, even with an invisible enemy, such as the power of cultural organisational masculinity.

Masculine organisations are bound to competitive, target-driven league tables and operate in a competitive global marketplace. Marketised masculine organisations should be amenable to enhancing the baseline employee rights offer for working parents (e.g., parental leave and flexible working) to attract the best employees. However, in spite of the potential for organisations to lead the way with progressive, egalitarian policies (e.g. Aviva in BBC, 2019), it is also true that masculine organisations can repress employee's access to their rights by the ideological process of cultural suppression. Two major studies in Italy exposed the cultural resistance of public sector masculine organisations to men taking up their full statutory entitlement to family friendly policies (Murgia & Poggio, 2009, 2013). Such prohibitive organisational cultures are indicative of a normalised gender order where women are assumed as primary caregivers and men are the de-facto ideal worker/breadwinner.

The discourse of HM 'perpetuate[s] mothers' inferior status and uphold[s] men's dominance' (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014, p. 68). These hidden rules, which underpin material behaviours, reinforce the primacy of the male breadwinner model, typified by workers who 'display loyalty and commitment precisely by working long working hours and displaying near constant availability.' (Collier, 2019, p. 78) When such rules exist, they are often tied to highly masculinised, vocational occupations such as Law, and Academia. These rules exacerbate exploitative occupational precarity for employees, which negatively impacts upon their careers. Glick, Wilkerson, and Cuffe (2015) describe 'men's tendency to value and defend their masculinity' which is associated with masculine organisational cultures that can 'promote destructive behaviours' (p. 210) to the detriment of progressive parental policies. Vandello, Hettinger, Bosson, and Siddiqi (2013) found that men perceived greater risk to their career status and stigmatization if they pursued family-oriented policy entitlements. Sadly, as Burnett et al. (2012) discuss, fatherhood experiences can be

relegated as ‘a Ghost in the Organizational Machine’ that delegitimises any progressive family policies. Overall, the picture is fairly grim when considering the adaptive ways that organisations continue to impose ideal worker expectations on workers, especially on working fathers.

Of course, the greatest impact of the masculine organisation is felt by women. Cahusac and Kanji (2014) interviewed women who had been pushed out of organisations by the hegemonic masculine cultures. They described the consequences of this culture upon women as normalising the ‘male pattern’ of intensive work presenteeism, which pressurised women to reduce their hours when they became mothers. In a pertinent example of the ‘interpellation’ process, studies found that women in universities plan or curtail their parental leave to align with the organisation’s priorities such as academic year cycles or the end of major projects (S. Acker & Armenti, 2004; S. Acker & Dillabough, 2007). Alongside this imposed normative culture, Masser, Grass, and Nesic (2007) researched the impact of pregnancy on women’s job applications and found this to be a significant negative influence on hiring decisions. They described the phenomenon of gender based organisational bias in explicit familial and fertility-based terms suggesting that ‘pregnant women are liked, but not wanted in the workplace’ (2007, p. 711). The motherhood penalty reality for many women is curtly summarised by legal aid organisation, *Pregnant Then Screwed*. Brealey, as the founder, regularly shares evidence to highlight the patriarchal culture in UK organisations whereby working parents are not welcome, and the ideal worker is the only accepted model of employee performance (Brearley, 2021). In the next section of this chapter, I present an overview of masculinities theory in the context of working parents using the framework of ‘traditional, transitional and egalitarian’ (Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

Masculinities Theory and Working Parents

I am primarily using Connell’s theory of masculinities (Connell, 2005), which incorporates theorising men’s subordination to, and complicity with, the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity using a feminist analytical lens (Wedgwood, 2009). Connell considers the historical roots of patriarchy and adopts psychoanalytic, life-history case studies of men to explore individual examples of subordinated, non-hegemonic forms of masculinities. It is therefore important to refine what forms of masculinities I am considering in relation to working parents

Masculinities in Working Parent Discourses

In this section, I focus on three modes of masculinities drawing on Hochschild and Machung's typology of Traditional, Transitional and Egalitarian fatherhood (2012). As their foundational text evidenced, it is not only fathers who perpetuate patriarchy, women play an important role, too; men and women therefore form the empirical basis of this thesis. The reason I am using this framework is that it neatly describes a narrative arc from Hegemonic Masculinity, through transitional masculinities, to Caring Masculinities that can subvert the 'masculine organisation', and patriarchy through the rejection of domination (Elliot, 2016). This framework can represent a three-act narrative which may be applied to organisational culture and policy to the benefit of all working parents. As a working parent myself, I use this framework in direct relation to my own experiences as a father and caregiver. Finally, I present this framework in alignment with dystopian fiction tropes in examples such as *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1996) and *Red Clocks* (Zumas, 2018) where patriarchy is subverted by non-conformist individuals and collective acts of resistance.

Traditional 'Breadwinner' (Hegemonic) Masculinity

Traditional breadwinner (hegemonic) masculinity has been castigated in second wave feminist research (e.g. Friedan, 2021 [1963]). In twenty-first century, feminist academic discourse, Hegemonic Masculinity (HM) is critiqued as domineering and damaging to men and women, especially parents, within societal and work cultures (Callahan & Elliott, 2020; Hearn, 2004; Hearn et al., 2012; Messerschmidt, 2018; Murgia & Poggio, 2009; Seeley, 2018). Yet, crucially, and in a horribly dystopian way, as Gramsci originally theorised (Gramsci, 2000), HM always adapts and mutates to survive and remain dominant. HM is a fantasy of the 'most honoured model of being a man' (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018), commonly associated with being a breadwinner in the UK and wider global societies (Gatrell, 2005; Hobson, 2002; Hochschild & Machung, 2012). This hegemonic social construction continuously influences what it means to be a working parent by fortifying a binary of men as breadwinners and women as primary caregivers.

The reproduction of a traditional parental roles, centred on this presumptive social role binary, is reinforced through structural apparatus such as laws and policies for parental leave, as well as cultural factors such as the media. In 2021, the breadwinner assumption was exposed in a government approved poster that, though sadly representative of an uncomfortable truth about UK family roles, depicted women performing all the domestic family duties while the man enjoyed relaxing in front of the television (Ellen, 2021). For men and women, media depictions like this highlight the enduring data-driven reality

(ONS, 2020) that the traditional man as breadwinner dynamic is still the dominant in UK working parent life. However, it is also true that such depictions reinforce these inequities by offering state endorsements of the gender based social roles of men breadwinners and women as caregivers.

The dominant presumption that men are breadwinners has a constraining effect on working parents; it subjugates women through pay penalties (Budig & England, 2001; Fuller & Hirsh, 2019), stymies progress (Aisenbrey et al., 2009; Correll et al., 2007), forces women out of careers (Brearley, 2021; Cahusac & Kanji, 2014), and subjects women to general mistreatment (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Gloor, Li, Lim, & Feierabend, 2018). Alongside these abhorrent inequities experienced by women in the workplace, fathers also experience barriers being more involvement in family life. Involved fatherhood and the 'doing' of caregiving is still culturally perceived as a subjugated form of masculinity (Bach, 2019; Connell, 2005; Kangas et al., 2019; Knights, 2015). What is important here is the role that the idealised position of HM plays in suppressing the familial involvement of working fathers. This has been neatly expressed as a 'patriarchal deficit' (Bailey, 2015) in that such hegemonies constrain the opportunities for fathers to be involved in family life.

Transitional 'Hybrid' Masculinities

If working parents and organisations are to move beyond traditional, breadwinner HM, one hurdle to overcome is the resilience of HM within the gender regime (J. Acker, 2006). Hybrid Masculinities (HyM) (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Demetriou, 2001) describes how the 'masculine bloc', or the dominant mode of being a man, may integrate, mutate, and adapt to the increasingly expected rhetoric of 'involved fatherhood'. From a critical perspective, Demetriou (2001) theorised the 'constant appropriation of diverse elements from various masculinities' (p. 248) in response to theorising of Hegemonic Masculinity (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 2005) that includes the subjugation of subsumed modes of masculinities as well as hegemony over women. Demetriou extended the original conceptualisation of HyM to suggest that the dominant 'masculine bloc' in any given socio-historic context undergoes a continuous process of reinvention to maintain its relevance by appropriating subsumed forms of allied masculinities to retain its overall dominance over women. It is therefore reasonable to proposes that, just as contemporary HM appropriated aspects of 'gay masculinities' (Connell, 2000; Demetriou, 2001), so too could the universal tropes of 'caring' (emotion, interdependence and relationality) be appropriated (Messerschmidt, 2018), especially in the post COVID-19 world. However, HyM could also represent a position in the spectrum of masculinities that moves away from hegemony and towards egalitarianism.

HyM could be symbolically placed in the in the middle of a spectrum of masculinities which incorporates forms of both hegemonic and caring masculinity. As already discussed, (Demetriou, 2001) describes hybrid masculinity as being a mere step away from the traditional domination inherent in HM, but I am focusing on a 'transitional' conceptualisation that moves away from HM and towards Caring Masculinities, yet can still include patriarchal performances of HM. In parental research, debate also centres on the often-damaging conflict between caregiving fathers and the structural hegemony that pushes back against involved fatherhood (Hunter et al., 2017; Murgia & Poggio, 2013; von Alemann, Beaufays, & Oechsle, 2017). With the undeniable renaissance of machismo populist masculinity, even amidst the global pandemic, the role of Caring Masculinities as 'one of the next, positive steps toward engaging men in gender equality' (Elliott, 2016, p. 244) must be reclaimed if it is to change the dominant narrative.

New fathers in the UK today face an uncertain future in the post-pandemic world where societal norms and unpredictable pressures will bear down heavily on working family life. In this precarious context, a prominent recent example from the UK prime minister, Boris Johnson serves to illustrate the dangerous possibilities of HyM. From his initial hesitancy to confirm his role in hands-on nappy changing (Woodcock, 2020), he was later at pains to proclaim his nappy changing credentials (Barr, 2020). This chameleon example serves to encapsulate the potential risk of a performance aspect of HyM to integrate popular traits for rhetorical public consumption. Such performances are demonstrably attractive to powerful individuals to promote their conformity to the socially acceptable 'gender performance' (Butler, 2011) of masculinity. With the prospect of populist caring rhetoric and 'postfeminist' appropriations of care within constructions of the 'new man' (Gill, 2014; Rumens, 2017), the 'masculine bloc' (Demetriou, 2001) is mutating to remain 'hegemonic' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018) rather than 'transitioning' towards egalitarian caring masculinities. In working parent contexts, this is occurring through the espousal of popular traits of 'caring about' (Bunting, 2020; Elliott, 2016) that cannot easily be refuted (e.g. stating you are an 'involved father'). Such a cynical mutation of hegemonic masculinity based on rhetorical performance could bypass the crucial 'caring for' experiences to instead reform a 'hybridized hegemonic masculinity' (Messerschmidt, 2018, p. 82).

Egalitarian 'Caring' Masculinities

As a marginalised concept, Caring Masculinities (CM) (Elliott, 2016) is a potentially exploitable idea within the still-hierarchical reality of 'multiple masculinities'. The current global crisis, and the unprecedented imposition of home-based working, may well act as a

catalyst for another mutation and it is important to steer the conversation towards CM as a distinct rejection of domination through Hegemonic Masculinity. One key battleground for this theorisation is the difference between 'caring for' and 'caring about' in working parenthood.

Elliott (2016) conceptualised CM as the 'rejection of domination and the integration of values of care, such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality' (p. 241). The distinction between 'caring for' and 'caring about' (Elliott, 2016; Jordan, 2020) is integral to the pursuit of democratic equality. This distinction is highly relevant to the ongoing theorisation of ethical embodied care (Mandalaki & Fotaki, 2020) and familial care (Bunting, 2020; Jordan, 2020). Crucially, the 'caring about' language for working parents often relates to the provider role for working fathers. Hanlon (2012) suggests that '[d]efining men's caring as breadwinning, and defining men as caring by doing paid work, reduces the expectation that men should share equally in hands-on-caring work' (p. 113). What is needed is a clear expectation of consistent time and energy spent in the daily acts of embodied parental care, as well as other equally important forms of physical and emotional care.

Connell's foundational work highlights the importance of 're-embodiment', which could hinge on 'changing the division of labour in early childcare' (2005, p. 233). Fatherhood, alongside other familial acts of care, provides an unrivalled 'hands on' opportunity for men to experience 'caring for' a vulnerable dependent. Such experiences can reshape the idealised typology of HM and reject domination in alignment with the ongoing feminist project to reject sexism and misogyny (hooks, 2014, p. 117).

Elliott's (2016) hope for a 'rejection of domination' still feels like a utopian dream in the context of western neoliberal society and its attitudes to masculinity. The concept of masculinity is consistently problematised in UK media discourse, *The Guardian's Modern Masculinity'* series (Amrani, 2021) highlights the ongoing debate between traditional and multiple masculinities. As a subordinated masculinity, Caring Masculinity is emblematic of the unbalanced constructions of legitimate masculinity. Care work is undervalued in the UK (Bunting, 2020) and this reality reinforces HM for working fathers, the majority of whom still prioritise their worker identity (Borgkvist et al., 2020; Nesporova, 2019). As a possible antidote to this cycle, Elliott's 'caring masculinity' provides a positive framework for progressive masculinities (Messerschmidt, 2018), which can promote relatedness and empathy to the benefit of all working families.

Previous research on working parenthood and the role of carers includes foundational work from Hochschild and Machung (2012), which illustrated the nuances of the 'second shift' of domestic care predominantly done by working mothers. Doucet (2006) did research exclusively with primary caregiving fathers providing evidence of their nurturing capabilities in a response to the Risman (1986) question, 'can men mother'. Hanlon (2012) studied a range of working fathers and special interest groups that highlighted a spectrum of caring roles, and the continuing importance of paid work in working fathers' masculine identity. These studies identify the critical juncture of fatherhood as a potential transition to greater emotional and physical connectedness (Burgess, 1998) that can overcome traditional experiences of masculinity for some men. Physical 'caring for' a child goes beyond the important emotional commitment of 'caring about' (see recent example in Prasad et al., 2020); it demands a continuous physical and emotional commitment that can change fathers' sense of identity and their value of care.

One area where research can examine this phenomenon is with primary caregiving fathers who take the lead responsibility for childcare. These fathers can range from shared parenting arrangements, near-total responsibility as the 'stay-at-home-father' (SAHF), and the complete responsibility borne by single fathers. This group of fathers are at the vanguard of CM-related research which explores their re-embodied experiences (Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Chesley, 2011; Doucet, 2006; Hanlon, 2012; Lee & Lee, 2018; Liong, 2017; Medved, 2016). SAHFs especially symbolise the potential next step of egalitarian parenting, yet they represent a minority (3.8%) of UK society (Burgess & Davies, 2017). The small proportion of SAHFs in the UK highlights that the majority of UK working fathers are an important focus for research problematising the rejection of domination as an aspiration for modern masculinity. Quantitative research has shown a clear relationship between fathers' involvement in the first 9 months of a child's life and the prospect of their continued involvement aged three (Norman, 2020; Norman, Elliot, & Fagan, 2014). Furthermore, Norman et al. found that part-time working fathers positively influence the continuation of full-time mothers in employment, which demonstrates the important role caregiving fathers can play in the journey towards equitable employment amongst parents.

Despite the unprecedented caregiving needs caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic, quantitative research shows that the caring burden still falls on women (Lacey, 2020; ONS, 2020). The 'Feminist Frontiers' special issue highlighted the exhausted and overworked human narratives behind these statistics (Guy & Arthur, 2020; Özkazanç-Pan & Pullen, 2020). My experiences of sole childcare during the UK lockdown has had a

transformational impact on my identity (Abdellatif & Gatto, 2020) and further affirmed my personal alignment with Elliott's principles of CM. Evidence from the *Fatherhood Institute* encouragingly shows that UK fathers have increased their childcare contribution in the home by 58% compared with pre-pandemic levels (Fatherhood Institute, 2020) and, following increasing caregiving opportunities for may how have worked from home during lockdowns, a majority (65%) of surveyed fathers reported better relationships with their children (Burgess & Goldman, 2021). I hope others have embraced these tangible experiences and that this may finally lead to a rejection of domination. For now, I return to the influence of dystopian fiction and subversion to find avenues through which I, as a researcher, can construct a subversive counternarrative.

Dystopian Fiction and Working Parents

Dystopian Fiction (DF) can contribute to the growing body of research disrupting our hegemonic social science methodologies to discover something new and subvert the gender norms of organisational reality, especially concerning parenthood. During the late twentieth century, DF examples like *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1996 [1985]) and *The Children of Men* (James, 2018 [1992]) laid the foundation for a speculative exploration of exploited parenthood and fertility. More recent offerings like *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife* (Elison, 2016) and *Red Clocks* (Zumas, 2018) identify and explore the physical barrier of parenthood having a disproportionate effect on women's experiences, while also offering subversive characters and collective approaches to resist this. I draw on these fictional examples of subversion in part two of my literature review where I present five parenthood demands for the future of working parenthood. Part two contributes to the 'writing differently' agenda in management and organisational studies that was promoted by Gilmore et al. (2019) in their eponymous Special Issue editorial. They critiqued conventional, 'scientific' management research as a form of writing that 'excises much of what it is to be human' and, as I hopefully address in part two, 'the poetics of our humanity' (p. 4). Part Two represents as shift from conventional to unconventional writing (Plakoyiannaki & Budhwar, 2021), and foregrounds the Dystopian Fictocriticism in Chapter 5.

Part 2 - Parenthood demands: resisting a dystopia in the workplace

[this section is an abridged original manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Human Resource Development International Journal on 23 Mar 2020 - https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2020.1735832] (see appendix 2)

> *I can clearly remember the confident words of one biologist … "It may take us some time to discover the cause of this apparent universal infertility." We have had twenty-five years and we no longer even expect to succeed... For all our knowledge, our intelligence, our power, we can no longer do what the animals do without thought. (James, 2018, p. 7)*

For all ***our*** scholarship, policy negotiations and organisational practices we, as parents, colleagues, and academics, have also failed to achieve parenthood equity. The persistence of the problem includes the motherhood wage penalty (Gangl & Ziefle, 2009), job application bias against mothers (Rhode, 2017), and endemic workplace incivility based on women's choices not to follow familial pathways (Gloor, Li, Lim, and Feierabend, 2018). With these examples, we face a systemic, cultural problem oriented around parenthood as a crucial gendered career juncture. This juncture demands creative thinking and emotional openness to problematize and imagine another future; dystopian fiction (DF) provides one avenue to achieve this.

P.D. James' novel, 'The Children of Men' (2018 [1992]) imagined a future where societal experiences for men and women are defined in relation to an existential threat of global infertility. Their lives are controlled and pacified in a hyper-masculinised patriarchy. In this stark reality, a group of individuals rise up to challenge the ruling ideology and demand change. Their message is succinct and targeted at five major problems that symbolise the erosion of humanity that typifies their society.

Contemporary experiences of *parenthood*, as a proxy of *fertility*, replicate a systemic 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 2005), which rewards men's careers at the expense of women in a hierarchy which values HM. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe HM as a symbolic, hierarchically dominant form of masculinity, changeable over context and time, and representative of a mythical and aspirational model of an ideal masculinity that prioritises men. HM, as a spectral presence in working parents' experiences, provides the antagonistic counterpoint for my proposed 'five demands': a manifesto for parents and a starting point for organisational change.

These five demands form a subversive manifesto through my content choices, and methodology stylistics, or 'scriptology' (Rhodes, 2019), which includes form and content from DF and autoethnography. My scriptology acts as a vehicle to disrupt the expectations of academic writing on this subject, and with the ambition to reach audiences outside of this academic space. I take direct inspiration from DF as a basis for the structure and content of the demands to position them as radical for academic and non-academic audiences. I hope my reader will reflect on and engage with my proposed solutions to the parental problem. I request that you join me, by enlisting others into social justice movements, such as trade unions, to change the parental narrative in our respective organisations.

The Five Parental Demands

1. Openly negotiate and make transparent organisational parental policies
2. Strengthen civil rights for marginalised mothers
3. Abolish the silencing of fathers in parental discourse
4. Stop 'deporting' mothers out of their career paths
5. End the anticipatory discrimination of potential mothers

In this section I attempt to follow in the illustrious footsteps of many fiction writers who have previously proposed alternative feminist visions such as Herland (Perkins Gilman, 1915) & Woman on the Edge of Time (Piercy, 2016 [1976]). Additionally, second wave feminist writers (e.g. Beauvoir, 2011 [1949]; Firestone, 1979; Greer, 2012) raised social consciousness of gender inequity preceding the neoliberal era. They proposed utopian alternatives to some of the persistent constraints of parenthood, which are as yet unrealised.

Inspired by Feminist Manifestos

Before I proceed to my five demands, it is important to briefly define what I mean by the term 'feminist manifesto' or 'femifesta' (David, 2018). Manifestos, in a political context, are synonymous with collective statements of purpose and democratically mandated action for a narrow timeframe (David, 2017). Feminist manifestos allude to this framework, but diverge through their oft-radical intent and creative integration of utopian and fictional ideas. David (2017) places the emphasis on education as the vehicle for change and this is consistent with the consciousness-raising aspect of these five parental demands.

In contemporary contexts, we face a split within the feminist movements, between the Sheryl Sanberg-inspired 'Lean in', neo-liberal aligned movement, and the radical anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchy movement (Fraser, Bhattacharya, & Arruzza, 2018). I align my five demands to the latter interpretation, though acknowledge that these demands represent my individual interpretation as a starting point for potential, future collective development. I do not believe 'great ideas come from individual geniuses' (Weiss & Brueske, 2018, p. 1) rather, I agree that 'collectively written manifestos help create feminist space and actors' (Weiss & Brueske, 2018, p. 2). With that in mind, my *five parental demands* cannot be described as a 'femifesta' but can hopefully contribute to a later iteration of a collectively agreed feminist manifesto for future parents to resist patriarchal organisations.

There is a rich history of feminist manifestos that my five parental demands pay homage to, but vary from, through my dystopian fiction infused scriptology. Weiss & Brueske (2018) lists 150 examples of feminist manifestos, 'the unflinchingly angry, the necessarily dogged, and the unapologetically passionate' (p. 2) that date back to C17th. The selected manifestos, across a broad geographical spectrum, often represent intersectional, collectively agreed goals including (but not limited to) working class women labourers, indigenous and immigrant women, LGBTQ & climate change. Such a range of manifestos suggests that it is folly for me to attempt a unifying set of parental demands in the workplace context. Instead, my demands seek to start the conversation and encourage you, the reader, to use these demands as a starting point to debate these demands and create your own collective parental demands in your own contexts. Equally, I ask my academic audience to respond to these demands with their own perspectives on this vital organisational social justice issue.

Harding, Ford, and Fotaki (2012) identified a hidden 'treasure house' of undiscovered feminist ideas including Greek mythology as a provocation to future writing. I draw on two foundational feminist manifestos as inspiration for their use of fiction narratives with ground-breaking impact. 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (Cixous et al., 1976) and Donna Haraway's visionary 'Cyborg Manifesto [abridged]' (1991) both enter the liminal space and embrace 'flexibility in form' (Weiss & Brueske, 2018, p. 2) with allusions to mythology and fiction, while setting a direction of women's writing. Cixous' fearless admonishment of phallocentric writing, and insistence on women's agency and ownership of their bodies and sexuality, forged a new arena for feminist writing in academia. Her declaration, 'And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it.' (p. 876) implores the reader through its affecting passion. Haraway's manifesto responded

with similar passion to the dominant neoliberal landscape and emerging technological landscapes, 'Who cyborgs will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival.' For her, the prospect of a technology-enabled communication was existential. Cyborg writing heralded the potential deconstruction of identity binaries and boundaries in the 'task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control' (p. 175).

Both these examples radically differ from conventional (dominant paradigm) academic writing, and project our thinking forward into a 'brave new world' ripe with opportunities for marginalised voices to be heard. Rhodes (2019) describes 'feminine creation' as a means to arrive at a 'scriptology' that challenges 'masculine stereotypes of rationality, rigorous method and explicit knowledge production' (p. 33). Alternate scriptology approaches include the fifteen point manifesto Adichie (2017) produced, which invites the reader into a deeply personal conversation with her friend (who recently had a baby) about feminist principles to teach them. Adichie's second parental suggestion to 'do it together' is especially pertinent to the five demands I outline here, and the form of her essay serves as a clear and radical evocation of the need to remove hierarchies in parental roles *and* academic writing.

I incorporated my own parental experiences into my five parental demands in an attempt to make myself vulnerable and challenge patriarchal expectations of working fatherhood. I present my examples as a counter narrative to the ideal worker paradigm, which exclude parental experiences from operational reality. I also incorporated dystopian fiction extracts to disrupt your reading of this manifesto and potentially take you into a speculative, liminal space where these fictions can teach us something about our realities. I hope you will read these vignettes and extracts as an invitation to be more open and speculative with your colleagues, and as vehicle to shift our collective workplace cultures through discourse and action.

Inspired by Dystopian Fiction

I propose a multi-faceted radical approach to the problem of working parent inequity through this dystopian fiction inspired manifesto. Critical storytelling, initially identified as a major theme by Rhodes and Brown (2005a), has further developed into an important and emerging theme amongst female authors in organisational research (Beigi, Callahan, & Michaelson, 2019). Importantly, between 1975 and 2015, the use of story and fiction has become a method for more critical perspectives from female authors, 'disrupting

conventional narratives' (p. 1) and enabling more egalitarian gender representation for critical organizational storytelling outputs. DF uniquely offers an opportunity to develop critical 'counter-narratives' (Frandsen, Kuhn, & Wolff Lundholt, 2016) to our patriarchal reality and provides a framework for subversion through progressive, action-focused *demands* in organisations.

As an allegory of our 'problematic reality' (Griffin, Learmonth, & Piper, 2018), DFs are variously defined as speculative, flawed societies; recognisable by prominent tropes of oppression, fear and estrangement (see examples in Claeys, 2018). Other relevant DF tropes to the five parental demands are *fertility, patriarchy, and subversion* (see *The Children of Men* by James, 2018 and *The Handmaid's Tale* by Atwood, 1996). These tropes guide and inform my approach to my parental demands. Atwood's (2017) insistence on only using penalties in her fiction that replicate the horrors of the past illustrates DF's unique power to shock and disrupt our current thinking. Incorporating DF also allows me to engage in 'counterfactual imagining' (K. Stock, 2017) to speculate and warn about the possible future for parents and critically reflect on recognisable mirrors to our past and present (A. Stock, 2016).

A dystopian fiction approach to manifestos

In DF, subversive characters offer a sense of hope and formulate blueprints for resistance that organisational actors can learn from. *The Children of Men* (James, 2018) depicts a future UK society, resigned to extinction after 25 years of global infertility. The authoritarian leader exploits societal vulnerability and promises 'security and comfort', but at the expense of freedom and dignity for many of his subjects. The novel provides examples of the oppression of the elderly, destitute and immigrants, all to maintain order, security, and comfort.

The Children of Men offers a narrative of hope and resistance which inspires these parental demands. A small group of co-conspirators, known as 'The Five Fishes', rise up against the status quo by communicating an alternative, values-based message of dignity and respect. They transform their message into five demands that they distribute to the people as a manifesto, which this essay re-appropriates in the context of organisational reality:

1. Call a general election and put your policies before the people.

2. Give the Sojourners full civil rights including the right to live in their own homes, to send for their families and to remain in Britain at the end of their contract of service.

3. Abolish the Quietus.

4. Stop deporting convicted offenders to the Isle of Man Penal Colony and ensure that people already there can live in peace and decency.

5. Stop the compulsory testing of semen and the examination of healthy young women and shut down the public porn shops.

(James, 2018, p. 158)

Adapting this manifesto from the fictional imagination, the following sections transform its fictional potential to address the present reality of parental, patriarchal inequity in contemporary organisations. I present these demands as a subversive manifesto in content and form for working parents everywhere who deserve to have the closeness with their families that I enjoyed for the first year of my child's life, long may it continue.

THE FIVE PARENTAL DEMANDS

1. Openly negotiate and make transparent organisational parental policies

I begin with this demand as a believer in the imperative of collective approaches to collective problems, and the importance of never leaving people behind to achieve this. Recent DF 'Red Clocks' (Zumas, 2018) provides a chilling portrayal of the impact of autocratic 'pro-life' parental policies that promote 'wholesome' family values derived from doctrinal, conservative biblical interpretation. Such singular policies marginalise minority groups such as single parents and LGBTQ couples and force women to seek out unregulated herbal practitioners like 'The Mender' character, for remedies that subvert systemic restrictions.

The restrictive family policies also trap a pregnant teen character, 'The Daughter' into desperately, and dangerously, seeking an unregulated abortion to avoid her life-changing fate. It is only at the end of the novel that we see the bravery of a wider group willing to

organise and resist, in spite of the risk to their personal liberty, to protect the rights of the vulnerable and marginalised in society. This bravery has a huge impact on main character 'The Biographer', whose concluding reflections allude to a shift towards collective responsibility:

> *'She wants to be more than one thing…*
>
> *…To quit shaking her head.*
>
> *To go to the protest in May.*
>
> *To do more than go to the protest.*
>
> *To be okay with not knowing…*
>
> *To see what is. And to see what is possible.' (Zumas, 2018, pp. 348-349)*

I gained insights into what is possible in parenthood in the early days of my life as a parent, benefiting from parental policies, hard-won though incremental collective bargaining.

> *I caught my breath, held my chest, and with each whimper, nuzzle and twist of the new-born baby sleeping on me, I pleaded with them to stay asleep. A one-handed lit review at 10pm was not what I expected, but it was working. The fears I had carried up to that time; of compromising or being inadequate as a parent, started to ease as each day passed. My supervisor's empathy, workplace flexibility, and peer support meant I could navigate my way through this hazy, sleep deprived soup of emotion. Knowing I was supported made it feel possible.*

Sadly, my own experience of organisational policies and practices represent an exception to typically negative fatherhood experiences in western organisations (Collier, 2019; Murgia and Poggio, 2013). As a cis-gender, white man, I know I speak from a privileged positionality, but as a son, husband, colleague, and friend, I yearn to see greater social justice in all parental experiences. One way organisations can move towards parental equity is by adopting progressive policy, beyond statutory baselines, to protect family life. As DF examples show, when policies are unjust, employees are forced to pursue dangerous pathways to subvert and resist.

Unjust policies occur when applied via individualised workplace negotiations which are subject to biases. When individuals apply different interpretations to policy, they negotiate exceptions that should be available to all and undermine collective rights (Weststar, 2012). Senior figures can exercise disproportionate influence on organisational policy,

which can further exasperate the risk. A small illustration of this comes from Sheryl Sandberg's 'lean in' revelation about demanding pregnancy car parking spaces (closer to the building) at Google after her own pregnancy experience (Cohen, 2013). Though she should be lauded for this positive intervention, the story highlights the problem of relying on individual interventions for collective rights. What if Sandberg decided this right should only apply to executives with important meetings to attend? Who would have challenged her?

We must tap into the collective unease at unjust policies. It is not enough to gripe in isolation. Sensing a lack of transparency, evidence suggests employees engage in 'backstage resistance' (Ybema & Horvers, 2017, p. 1244) to subvert organisational policies through covert acts, while maintaining a surface level of conformity. This form of subversion may help individuals' sense of personal justice, but cannot help the whole. Collective responses require collective models to base our demands on. I recently established a workplace parenting network to bring people together for peer support and a shared purpose alongside our trade union colleagues. The network also aspires to grow into a community at work for mutual support (practical and emotional) to subvert the pressures of patriarchal work cultures. We will support the lobby for better parental policies, and aspire to follow the example from our Nordic counterparts.

Nordic shared parental leave policies (introduced in early 1990s) have started to change the meaning of parenthood. Their original aim was to encourage women's participation in the labour force (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2011) by using a 'special quota for fathers' (p. 165), which has increased participation for fathers. Nordic policies also include flexible parental allowances where fathers 'serve both work and childcare' (Brandth & Kvande, 2016, p. 287). However, Brandth and Kvande (2016) also contend that fathers' rights to flexible protected parental leave has not resulted in equal participation as many fathers remain secondary caregivers with some suffering heightened stress with increased work-life tension. It is a tension that will not easily disappear, but Nordic policy change has shifted the dial towards greater gender equity for all.

In sum, as Haraway suggests, unified approaches risk marginalising some people, but I maintain that they are the foundation of ongoing discourse for collective rights. It is very difficult to account for the often-hidden dark side to any policy, and policy change alone is insufficient to overcome cultural barriers, but without change we cannot learn from mistakes and make further improvements. The following demands seek to realign our

thinking beyond legislation and policy, toward social justice through collective responsibility.

2. Strengthen civil rights for marginalised mothers

> *'We stand between Janine and the bed, so she won't have to see this…she's still having the pains for the afterbirth, she's crying helplessly, burnt-out miserable tears' (Atwood, 1996, pp. 136-137)*

Janine's plight in *The Handmaid's Tale* represents the patriarchal hierarchy applied to fertile handmaids in Gilead. After carrying her baby to term, the infant is immediately transferred to the commander and his wife. As compensation, her hollow prize for a successful pregnancy is remaining a 'Handmaid' in servitude to another commander for further exploitation in pregnancy. I draw on this dark, dystopian vision, stark though it seems, to approximate the underappreciated and exploited 'emotional work, day-to day deliberations, and frequent sacrifices to manage responsibilities' (Horne & Breitkreuz, 2018, p. 128), that many women endure in the workplace and home (Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

I speak of strengthening civil rights concerning parental experiences in a bid to extend concepts of respect and fairness concerning women's labour (physical and emotional). Acker and Dillbabough (2007) describe women's work replicating domestic responsibilities, which is 'insufficiently credit[ed]' (S. Acker, 2012, p. 423), and primarily benefits the organisation, not the mother. Hochschild's (1979) theory of 'emotional labour' can frame an argument that employers expect a degree of free, 'autonomous emotional labour' (Callahan & McCollum, 2002) from mothers in exchange for their perceived accrued debts to the employer. These debts could include accrued parental leave and flexible working to meet childcare demands. Mothers, on their return to work, may conform to perceived 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979, p. 564) on how they should repay their social debt and 'go the extra mile' (Gloor, Li, Lim, and Feierabend, 2018, p. 47) to perform their 'ideal worker' role through emotional sacrifices and additional effort. The emphasis seems wholly placed on women, while men escape scrutiny in their civil responsibilities.

I believe an emphasis on 're-embodied masculinity' (Connell, 2005) can shift parental experiences. Current models marginalise mothers and 'reproduce masculine values' (Vohlídalová, 2017, p. 167) such as 'aggressiveness, decisiveness and independence' (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). The emotional labour that many men expect of their partners is a consequence of their limited involvement in the physical acts of fatherhood (e.g.,

changing nappies, feeding, bathing etc.) and the associated emotional connection that brings. Supporting this assertion, research in Sweden suggests that mothers perceive the significant impact the role of their partner plays in enabling or constraining parental equality (Stertz, Grether, & Wiese, 2017). Men who contribute to an equitable share of parental working responsibilities demonstrate a commitment to equal civil rights for women. I call on fathers everywhere to take this responsibility seriously.

My own process of parental 're-embodiment' started mere seconds after my child was born:

> *I cradled our new-born baby for the first time, their squashed, pink face peered out into the world, vulnerable and dependent. I looked at my wife through a melee of bodies, beeps, white light, and machinery… my inner voice implored, 'Please don't die…' She stared ahead, sombre, and distant. Doctors and nurses followed protocol; a nurse spoke to me, but I don't know what she said. 'I just want her to be OK…' I replied before she was wheeled to surgery… Afterwards, as my wife help our baby for the first time, I wept.*

This experience taught me how precious family time is and to never take it for granted. Each nappy change is an opportunity to connect, it's time you can't substitute, and organisations should value it by promoting family time in their cultures.

The task is not simple for organisational contexts. Recent research shows the increasing pressure for women to remain in contact with the workplace during maternity leave (Ollilainen, 2019). The 'ideal worker' paradigm demands continuing interaction with the workplace during parental leave, unfairly diminishing a parent's civil right to family life. Acker and Dillabough also describe career 'pace' where the 'expected productivity is too great to allow for lapses and spaces' (2007, p. 313). Demanding career paths might necessitate a tough decision as the 'pace' and pressure creates the conditions for women to remain childless. However, childless workers (mainly women) may also face moral backlash from their colleagues (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017) due to social expectations. To that end, the third demand identifies the challenge to patriarchal organisational cultures and parental discourse.

3. Abolish the silencing of fathers in parental discourse

Fatherhood is often an inconspicuous storyline in DF; *The Road* (McCarthy, 2009) is a notable exception. 'The Man' demonstrates guardianship and love for his son throughout their struggle to survive, while navigating parent/child discussions. Nowhere is his love

more deeply expressed than when [spoiler alert] 'The Man' is dying and saying goodbye to his son:

> *[The Boy:] You said you wouldn't ever leave me.*
>
> *[The Man:] I know. I'm sorry. You have my whole heart. You always did. You're the best guy. You always were. If I'm not here you can still talk to me. You can talk to me and I'll talk to you. You'll see. (McCarthy, 2009, p. 298)*

McCarthy's prose offer insights into the depth of emotion inherent in the father's relationship with his child. Written in homage to his own relationship with his son (Adams, 2009), the love and connection on display in this novel evokes an honesty sometimes lacking, or silenced in patriarchal workplace discourse. This demand is highly personal to me and centres on the barriers men face in the workplace and in themselves. McCarthy's language choices in *The Road* (specifically the parental dialogue) create an immersive sense of openness and love between a father and son. Emotional language is sorely lacking in the workplace and this must change! We need to get away from 'breadwinner' men 'babysitting' their children. Importantly, we must start referring to mothers and fathers as 'parents' who have an equal stake in their family and the workplace.

The essentialized labels, 'mother' and 'father' are imbued with historic gender injustices. Haraway's (1991) cyborg manifesto critique of feminist essentialism provides a useful parallel to parental essentialism. Just as hierarchies exist in feminism, the same is true of masculinities where concepts of 'breadwinners' and 'ideal workers' still prevail (Locke & Yarwood, 2017). The language we choose for parents must challenge the socially constructed sex-role division of labour and power (Connell, 2003). Our language choices become symbolic of the barriers in place that inhibit parental equality.

As an expectant new parent, I became aware of the ease at which fathers can covertly exist as a worker (Horvath, Grether, & Wiese, 2018) in a culture of silence in the workplace (Murgia and Poggio, 2013). I delayed disclosing my expectant parent status because (physically) I could. This maintained the separation of work from my family, and it is something I regret. Since becoming a parent, I talk openly about parenthood at work to normalise this discourse. I am conscious that a father's parental identity is often suppressed by constructions of the 'breadwinner' and 'ideal worker' (Vandello, Hettinger, Bosson, and Siddiqi, 2013). It is incumbent on each and every new father, as an ally to working mothers, to become a working ***parent*** and inhabit that new role with pride, not secrecy.

Unfortunately, barriers persist in the form of 'financial costs, gendered expectations, perceived workplace resistance, and policy restrictions' (Kaufman, 2018, p. 316), which limit father's involvement. Financial barriers are emblematic of societal gender pay inequity, where women's structurally lower pay means they often default as primary carer. Systemic changes following pay reporting may begin to alleviate this barrier, but it will take time to see positive results. Gender perceptions and workplace resistance include both cultural and language barriers that we can each individually affect with our language choices. I discussed policy in the first demand and models of policy change in Nordic countries; 'daddy quotas' represent a minimum baseline for progressive policy making that can change patriarchal attitudes and overcome financial barriers to parenting through re-embodied masculinity.

Nordic parental policy has led to some organisations including parents as representatives on boards (Brandth & Kvande, 2019); this empowers workers to perform check and balance guardianship for employees' parental rights and culture. The cultural conversation including senior management parental advocacy can also extend to encouraging employee preparedness for fatherhood (Kaufman, 2018, p. 321). This is not an easy road; a Norwegian study showed that flexible parental leave served to reinforce father's position as secondary, rather than empowered carers (Brandth and Kvande, 2016). As with most policies, there can be unforeseen negative consequences to changes that seem utopian, but there are undoubtedly potential benefits to fathers becoming more involved.

> *One of my favourite times of day is my baby's bedtime. I remove their dirty nappy, bathe them, dress them for bed, and read them a bedtime story. I love to create a sense of calm for them throughout and cuddle them as I read softly. After their final feed with mummy, I usually tuck them in. Over the months, this routine has become very precious to me.*

I frequently work flexibly from home; it allows me to interact more with my child during the daytime and stay connected to my familial responsibilities. As a result, I feel I can embody 'caring masculinities' (Connell, 2005; Elliott, 2016; Lee & Lee, 2018) that are otherwise harder to maintain and integrate into workplace discourse. A study of 'stay at home fathers' in Norway highlights the development of 'caring masculinities', which includes 'caring competencies' such as nappy changing, reading, bathing etc. (Brandth & Kvande, 2018). Supporting fathers to develop 'caring competencies' can be beneficial to organisational cultures as it can break down the myths of 'separate spheres' and foster greater collegiality.

As with other policy shifts around flexible working, the outcomes of longitudinal studies indicate negligible uptake for low income, or unemployed fathers (Duvander, 2014; Eydal & Rostgaard, 2011), whose masculine identity is under greater threat (Thebaud and Pedulla, 2016). In pursuing progressive policies for parents, we must be mindful of avoiding a social stratification consequences whereby those with financial means can benefit from an evolution in their masculinity, while those without financial freedom are silenced (Hunter, Riggs, and Augoustinos, 2017). In the UK, as per Nordic examples, this barrier will continue to stratify fathers by income, but removing other barriers can still have an effect for silenced fathers.

Outside of state intervention, or organisational precedent, as individuals we must join collective lobbying voices. I implore you to join trade unions or create employee networks to share and amplify your views in solidarity. Acknowledging my privileged status, I greatly benefit from engaging in open conversations with other parents and encourage parental discourse with fathers. Silenced fathers need the space (and excuse) to talk about their parental experiences. Creating an inclusive parental community with a collective voice can benefit all parents. The next demand concerns the current impact of this silencing on mothers and proposes approaches to shift this narrative.

4. Stop 'deporting' mothers out of their career paths

The inevitability of the current career deportation for mothers, dispassionately marginalising women regardless of emotional cost, is reminiscent of the exploited cloned children of Hailsham School in *Never Let Me Go*:

> *'Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs… You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided' (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 73)*

Hailsham children have a singular purpose, to reach adulthood and provide organs that elongate the lives of the 'real' people they were modelled on. Societal impositions of women's purpose as primary caregivers is currently modelled on a similar exploitative system.

By imposing primary childcare responsibilities on most women (regardless of preference), we too are exploiting women's bodies to serve and propel the male 'ideal worker' (J. Acker, 1990; Locke & Yarwood, 2017) into the next phase of their career. This

emotionless prioritisation of workplace efficiency and productivity, modelled on a patriarchal ideal workers, renders privileged men the beneficiaries of the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 2005), while women remain the exploited 'other'. What is forgotten in this systemic gender imbalance is the injustice for those women who wish to pursue their careers as well as being a parent. It is wrong and it must be stopped.

I make no apologies for this depressing evocation of DF exploitation. I want my reader to consider how these physically exploitative acts might benefit them too. I am conscious of my own culpability as a full-time student/researcher. My career is enabled by our shared decision for my wife to take parental leave as the primary carer for our first child. Every circumstance is different, our choice reflected our specific circumstances. Outside of those of us who are fortunate to choose parental leave options, and retain their career pathway, the risks are far greater.

There is currently an inevitability to the cliff-edge moment where women's careers stall, regardless of increasing work flexibility (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019). Research shows that mothers, especially, suffer increasingly negative prospects relative to the length of parental leave (Aisenbrey et al., 2009), when they disclose parental status in job applications (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007), and are more likely to prioritise family needs when negotiating contract terms (Bowles, Thomason, & Bear, 2018). All these factors contribute to career stagnation and wage penalties (Gangl and Ziefle, 2009).

Many mothers 'face a choice of assimilation or denial in the workplace' (Amsler & Motta, 2019, p. 85), especially considering the incivility and bias already discussed. One consequence of this assimilation pressure is that women's success is contingent on whether 'babies were timed with career considerations in mind' (Santos & Dang Van Phu, 2019, p. 2). Such conditional success suggests that women must conform to patriarchal workplace ideologies and work-based schedules in order to progress, if not, they risk deportation from career tracks.

I raise this demand in light of known detrimental effects on working mothers who rail against patriarchal organisational cultures (Cahusac and Kanji, 2014). This problem requires a fundamental reconfiguration of the meaning and implications of parental leave and a focus on the gatekeepers of parental rights and opportunities, line managers (Fodor & Glass, 2018) and partners (Stertz et al., 2017). Line managers and partners have a crucial role to play in protecting career pathways and prioritising fairness for parents returning to work.

One approach some parents take is to foster positive relationships with their line manager, raising emotional capital in order to benefit personally. This relationship is further enhanced when the line manager is a parent (Fodor & Glass, 2018). However, this approach reinforces inconstancies and injustices at work. The onus should lie ***with*** the employer to lead the culture and set a higher standard for employee human rights. Leaders must empower line managers to apply empathic, favourable interpretations of parental policy. Otherwise, individual interpretations based on inconsistent individual values can benefit some, but not others.

In academic writing, consistency with norms can sometimes be the problem. Autoethnography is subversive writing which can humanise our field to influence counter narratives. In my scriptology approach, I incorporate my own experiences and informal language as a nod to far greater autoethnographic and unconventional writing (for an overview, see Rhodes, 2001b, 2019). Such writing, when taken from a critical perspective, presents authentic individual accounts and exposes hegemonic workplace conditions via representations of marginalised experiences. O'Shea shares their transgender and queer experiences using a queer theory lens in their auto-ethnographic writing (2018), their beautiful prose provide a privileged insight into their lived experiences:

> *It went unnamed, buried away in a grave so shallow its spectre haunted me for years until 3000 days ago I ceased denying and accepted it as me. This 'difference' that makes me what I am names me 'nonbinary transsexual': a small label that sutures this girl's life. (O'Shea, 2018, p. 5)*

Without these pioneering voices, many (including me) would be 'haunted by the spectre' of their own ignorance. It should not be the responsibility of the oppressed to 'invite witnessing' (Amsler and Motta, 2019) of the neo-liberal dehumanisation, or to educate the privileged. I thank those who share their unique and often devastating experiences to shift our collective perceptions of what it means to be human in organisations. My hope is that further humanisation of discourse can change the narrative of deported mothers too.

Autoethnographies can create a space where parental experiences, especially of marginalised and deported mothers can reach those ignorant of the individual impact. This is even more important for those whose experience has been tragic, such as miscarriage:

> *My baby is gone. I have never experienced this before but I know with absolute and unmistakable certainty that I have lost my baby today. I*

> *feel… despair. And shock. Shock at my despair. (Boncori & Smith, 2019, p. 77)*

Reading this heart-breaking reflection, it is important to pause and consider how a colleague you might know may also have experienced similar trauma.

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Please also consider how, due to neo-liberal attitudes prioritising productivity and efficiency, they may have buried their emotions. Autoethnographies can disrupt our quantifiable thinking in academic research and provoke debate with their alternative depictions of suppressed reality in the hegemonic culture of the workplace. This demand evokes the emotional aspect of parenthood and implores the reader to open themselves up to each other's vulnerability to create a greater shared empathy and responsibility to each other to stop the deportation!

5. End the anticipatory discrimination of potential mothers

My final demand opposes egregious, judgemental 'workplace incivility' that mothers experience due to their potential to bear children later in their career (Gloor et al., 2018). This demand considers 'abject appearance theory' (Mavin & Grandy, 2016) and perceptions that 'feminine bodies are "out of place" in organizations' (p. 1096). Specifically, I propose that the imagined projection of pregnant bodies is used as a stigma to impede women's careers in patriarchal organisations. This is pertinent for early career women whom peers may view through the lens of 'disgust-attraction and be perceived as unprofessional' (p. 1112). They may also be measured against a projected future, 'mother-like' pregnant bodies.

I call on readers to be brave in your allegiance with early career women, and refer to the action of the Five Fishes in the Children *of Men* whose determination to ***do something*** rallied against overwhelmingly oppressive circumstances:

> *Theo said: I don't think you'll start a revolution on the issue… people don't care enough.*
>
> *Julian said: We want to help them to care (James, 2018, p. 84)*

This simple subversive goal demarks our everyday acts of kindness compared with instrumental concerns for productivity, efficiency and the 'ideal worker'. It is unfair that any women experience mistreatment based on assumptions that they may, one day, have children. I present the inverse argument of fathers and their potential to have children, which garners no such incivility, in fact my experiences have highlighted only positive responses from colleagues.

This incivility phenomenon affirms gender stereotypes whereby women are perceived as primary carers and mothers-in-waiting; an assumption which extends to 'managers' perceptions of their family-work conflict' (Hoobler, Wayne, & Lemmon, 2009, p. 951). Some evidence also suggests postponing childbirth actually causes further workplace mistreatment due to an incongruence with expected familial duties (Berdahl & Moon, 2013). Women face a double-bind scenario where the only perceived solution is to conform to hegemonic masculine expectations and sacrifice their own career.

I return to men's responsibilities as the recipients of the 'patriarchal dividend', to shift this narrative through allegiant action. Additionally, we must recognise a woman's right to choose whether they want to have a family, not impose social expectation on each other based on hegemonic attitudes to family and gender. As a parent, it is my privilege to speak about parental issues and call for civil justice for all parents, I do so for my wife's career, my family, colleagues, and friends. We all have a responsibility to ***do something*** to help people to care more about each other, whether that's challenging examples of anticipatory discrimination, or reflecting on our own internal assumptions of gendered parenting. Changing such attitudes requires us all to take responsibility in subverting the effects of our cultural model of Hegemonic Masculinity.

Conclusion

In this section, I use the DF tropes of 'fertility' and 'masculinity' as a pivotal influence on my 'scriptology' of five parental demands; a manifesto inspired by *The Children of Men*. Using storytelling in the flourishing critical landscape of feminist academic writing (Beigi et al., 2019), one of the primary contributions is my 'scriptology' (Rhodes, 2019) approach to a feminist-inspired manifestos for organisational change. My use of DF vignettes and autoethnographic accounts of parenthood are intended to disrupt conventional academic reading, expose my personal vulnerability, and promote caring, 're-embodied masculinity' (Connell, 2005). The examples I presented are sometimes traumatic, but also joyful as

parenting often can be. I propose manifestos should draw on storytelling more to reach a wider audience and inspire social justice action in organisations.

This manifesto intends to jolt the reader into action (collective and subversive) within their organisational contexts. I promote collective resistance to patriarchy through critical discourse, policy lobbying, and individual responsibility as parents. These five demands present a new scriptology for manifestos, intentionally disruptive and emotionally open with DF as 'inspiration and source' (Phillips & Knowles, 2012). I hope this combination can inspire a creative platform for working parents and embolden them to articulate their own parental demands towards a more equitable future in organisations.

Finally, I present a quote from *The Children of Men* which encapsulates the creative and radical leap required of individuals, the academy, and organisations to overcome our patriarchal reality and contribute to genuine change:

> *"The world is changed not by the self-regarding, but by men and women prepared to make fools of themselves." (James, 2018, p. 157)*

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This study adapts Fairclough's approach to dialectical-relational Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by integrating Dystopian Fiction (DF) (see figure 2). The purpose of this adaptation is to investigate what Fairclough describes as a 'social wrong' (2013) via a novel approach that seeks new insights into the persistent problem of gender-based inequity for working parents. The gender-based inequity I am focusing on is encapsulated by the 'motherhood penalty' (Brearley, 2021) for working mothers, and, to a lesser extent, the 'patriarchal deficit' (Bailey, 2015) for working fathers. I explore the influence of hegemonic masculinity (HM) (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) in a UK context by applying an Althusserian interpretation of ideology (2014) as a framework of patriarchal expectations and norms. I suggest that these norms are 'always already' present in the discourse of working parents and their colleagues and that these norms affect workplace behaviours that privilege and reward the male 'ideal worker' (J. Acker, 1990) and 'breadwinner' model of masculinity.

My approach to CDA seeks to identify the influence of HM in the discourses of working parents, taking inspiration from DF tropes (see appendix 1) and narratives to blur the lines between conceptual and theoretical bases of empirical analysis towards a subversive, change-oriented analysis. I use DFCDA to identify examples of HM in participant interview data that can highlight a range of interrelated discourse influences (e.g., individualised between family and friends, localised with colleagues and organisational cultures, and in macro ideological state/global contexts). These 'dialectical-relational' discourses (Fairclough, 2013) signify the process of 'interpellation' [2] (Althusser, 2014) that 'hails' working parents as subjects of patriarchy within organisational and societal contexts.

I undertook this research from a radical humanist, post structural feminist perspective oriented towards social justice through pursuing a counternarrative of egalitarian gender equity in organisations.

[2] Interpellation, as coined by Louis Althusser, is the process whereby ideological ideas are internalised and reproduced by individuals. 'Concrete individuals' are hailed as 'concrete subjects' of dominant systems (such as patriarchy) and are described as 'always already' subjects of the ideological norms of society. Through the rituals of social norms affiliated with working parenthood, subjects are 'hailed' as subjects to participate in the reproduction of these norms. For example, when an expectant father is invited by a colleague to discuss their career prospects and encouraged to assume their responsibility as a 'breadwinner', their acceptance of this conversation and conformity with this expectation illustrates interpellation to patriarchal discourse and serves to reproduce patriarchal norms.

Chapter outline

This chapter begins with an outline of the subjectivist basis of my approach with brief overviews of my ontology, epistemology, and methodological choices before my positionality statement. Given my research incorporates the liminality of fiction, it is important to establish the personal motivations for my choices. Next, I provide an overview of the ethical considerations that shaped my approach to this research from a critical perspective. Throughout, I hope to emphasise the rationale for my innovative, subjective approach, which I justify in the context of the dominant problem I am challenging through my disruptive methodology.

I outline my Dystopian Fiction-informed-Critical Discourse Analysis (DFCDA) method to establish the justifications for my adapted approach to this established method (Fairclough, 2001; Van Dijk, 1993). I include an overview of the principles of this method, alongside a brief overview of the important elements of theory ('Multiple Masculinities' (Connell, 2005) and 'Interpellation' (Althusser, 2014)) that underpin my analysis. I also provide a breakdown of Fairclough's (2013) dialectical-relational interpretation of CDA, contextualised with parental discourses. The dialectical-relational approach I adopt for this DFCDA also accesses three major DF discourses, which I refer to as 'tropes', namely 'Parenthood', 'Masculinity' and 'Subversion'. The interaction of these tropes in a dialectical-relational analysis with the discourses of my research participants forms the *novel* approach of the DFCDA.

I use the principles of dialectical-relational critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001, 2013) for my data collection because this approach encourages analysis at individualised textual level (micro), alongside collective, cultural (meso) and ideological (macro) levels of influence. The interaction between individual identity construction, intermediary localised dialogue, and societal-cultural ideological influence is pertinent to my theoretical and conceptual exploration of the influence of 'ideological masculinity', otherwise known as patriarchy.

Patriarchy is an important term within this methodology and is referred to here as a structural gender hierarchy that privileges an idealised form of 'Hegemonic Masculinity' (HM) (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) especially in the westernised, UK context. Traditional tropes of patriarchal or hegemonic masculinity are often defined according to a range of behaviours (e.g. efficiency, aggression and competition (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010)). These behaviours can be affiliated with individual, collective, and organisational decisions linked to parenting. Micro, meso and macro levels of discourse can reveal how individuals are influenced by or reproduce

structural ideology via the often unconscious process of 'interpellation' (Althusser, 2014). In this research, I apply a dialectical-relational approach to DFCDA to examine whether hegemonic masculinity is the dominant discourse influencing parental experiences and decisions from individual, collective and organisational perspectives.

I integrate Dystopian Fiction (DF) into my CDA method (DFCDA) because the use of fiction is an established analytical method to problematize and rethink organisational and social problems (Czarniawska-Joerges & De Monthoux, 1994; Gabriel, 1991; Rhodes, 2001b), particularly when considering gender (Griffin, Harding, & Learmonth, 2017; Learmonth & Griffin, 2018). DF provides a unique range of genre-specific tropes that inform my critical, gender-focused approach, including the important themes of 'masculinity' and 'subversion'. Subversion describes the process, or intent to overthrow, an established, dominant social order, which in this context is patriarchy (Bourdieu, 2001; Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In DF, subversion relates to the individual actions and collective organising of oppressed characters who resist and attempt to overthrow dominant social structures (see collective resistance groups, 'Mayday' in *The Handmaid's Tale,* and 'The Five Fishes' in *The Children of Men*). In this research, I use the term 'subversion' as an analogue to social justice action via collective organising that resists organisational norms. My use of dystopian fiction in this method is one of my main contributions to unconventional methodologies in organisational and social science research (e.g. Bryman & Buchanan, 2018; Plakoyiannaki & Budhwar, 2021).

The remainder of this chapter includes a description of my interview design and participant overview. I provide justification for my approach to the interview process, which remains consistent to my founding methodological choices. To conclude, I briefly discuss my intention to integrate fiction and my autoethnographical experiences into my discussion chapter in the spirit of 'fictocriticism' (Gibbs, 1997; Rhodes, 2015). I fictionalise my discussion chapter to blur the lines between the disruptive dystopian fiction narratives that can be shocking in their portrayal of oppressive future societies. I also fictionalise to amplify the narrative of subversion and hope for working parents. I integrate autoethnography to blur the lines between the empirical stories I found and the personal story I lived while researching parenting. I justify this in homage to disruptive feminist writing (see examples: Cixous, Cohen, & Cohen, 1976; Haraway, 1991) to promote what I deem to be the marginalised voices of caregiving working parents as an evocation to challenge prevailing narratives in workplace and academic writing contexts. Consistent with my use of autoethnography, the next section outlines my positionality statement and ethical considerations that underpin my research.

Ontology & Epistemology

Ontology: Becoming a parent has a significant impact upon the careers and organisational experiences of working people, typically resulting in a 'motherhood penalty' or a 'patriarchal dividend'. The existing gender-based social injustices in society are acutely magnified when employees become working parents. This injustice is due to cultural attitudes embedded in common discourses of 'breadwinner' centred HM, and systemic patriarchal structures, such as restrictive statutory leave entitlements, that sustain and reproduce the patriarchal gender order.

Epistemology: Knowledge about masculinities and parental norms is nebulous and socially bound to different local, national, and global cultural contexts. Masculinities theory espouses a socially constructed knowledge of HM as a context specific and constantly adaptive mode of masculinity. I embrace social constructionist principles of knowledge creation through subjective, humanist interpretations of perceived reality, coupled with the disruptive use of dystopian fiction to problematize and blur the lines between empirically derived 'facts' as bases for narratives in organising. My use of CDA is consistent with social-justice-oriented knowledge creation.

Positionality

My positionality is intrinsically entwined with my research in this topic. As a new parent and a cis-gender, straight, white man, I experience the duality of my research influencing my personal life, and my personal life influencing my research. I chose to incorporate elements of autoethnographic writing in my thesis to embed my own experiences with those of my participants and to demonstrate how this duality was crucial to developing a deeper, personal understanding of this research.

I believe it should be normalised for all parents to take equitable responsibility for childcare (inclusive of caregiving) because this normalisation will highlight the existing gender-based inequity effecting women's careers if they become mothers. Highlighting this current problem as a collective concern for men and women can act as a catalyst for policy and cultural change to better support working parents. For this to happen, cultural representations of fatherhood must change, particularly the construction of hegemonic masculine identity (associated with the fully committed 'ideal worker'). UK-based structural factors (Brearley, 2021; Burgess & Davies, 2017), and in most other western, global contexts (Hodges & Budig, 2010; Murgia & Poggio, 2013; Rocha, 2021), continue to constrain equal involvement for men and women. Through personal experience, I know that women face a 'motherhood penalty' that reduces career prospects once they become working parents due to the financial barriers of childcare and the normalisation of primary caregiving. In contrast, though men benefit from the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 2005)

of privileged career advancement, they also experience the ‘patriarchal deficit’ (Bailey, 2015) of limited contact time with their children.

I see this research topic as a semiotic ‘point of entry’ (Fairclough, 2013, p. 243) to critically focus on gender-based inequity in organisational contexts as evidenced by the Gender Pay and Care Gaps. This ‘point of entry’ represents a complex problem that connects the macro ideology of patriarchy with the social practices of parental caregiving decisions as influenced by individuals’ perceptions and workplace interactions. The problem of gender-based inequity, particularly in western contexts, is reproduced via the social processes of patriarchal hegemony that positions men as dominant and women as subjugated (Beauvoir, 2011 [1949]) within most social practices (e.g. employee relations, promotions, operational decisions) within organisations. To address this problem, I have already attempted to influence social practice through my use of the term ‘parent’ as a collective label inclusive of all gender identities. I use this term as often as I can instead of ‘mother’ or ‘father’ to symbolise and normalise the importance of the fair distribution of responsibilities and roles untethered from ideological and structural gender norms (Butler, 2011).

I acknowledge that my privileged identity places me in an awkward position when conducting critical research in this area, especially when arguing for better provisions for fathers alongside mothers. However, I believe that more men need to contribute to this research topic if genuine change is to occur. I also acknowledge that my research, based in a common link organisation, naturally finds common socio-economic bases of experience with my own, which is a limitation of my data. I base my researcher perspective on my roles as a husband, son, father, friend, and colleague who seeks to contribute to a better balance for parents. Gender imbalance and injustice represent the core motivation for my research focus and my ongoing reflexive journey as a working parent.

Masculinities and me

My personal construction of masculinity is opposed to the socially idealised form of western HM (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) that continues to impose a top-down discursive influence upon subordinated gender expressions of masculinities and femininities. Drawing on a wealth of studies of men and masculinities (Brandth & Kvande, 1998; Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 2005; Edwards, 2006; Hearn, 1996; Herdt, 1994; Kimmel et al., 2005; Reeser, 2009), I consider intersecting modes of masculinities (e.g. positive masculinity, caring masculinity, gay masculinity, female masculinity etc.) as a basis for deconstructing some of what I perceive to be damaging traits attributed to

hegemonic masculinity (e.g. prioritising work over family, suppressed emotion, marginalising others, aggression etc.). I believe that greater appreciation of the range of masculinities that exist can enable people to unlearn some of the dividing lines that affect gender relations in society, this is particularly pertinent to my research topic of working parents and parental roles.

The main formative influences on my perceptions of masculinities have come from my relationship with my dad as a male role model and parent who resisted some of the normative traditional male behaviours. I have also been influenced by my brother who became a parent before me, has always openly resisted any association with HM, and actively projects an alternative identity and sense of 'masculinity' to this day. Outside of family, I was strongly influenced by a number of male teachers who offered alternative, empathetic, and caring approaches to being a professional. I have learned from all these various modes of masculinity to construct my own sense of identity as a working parent.

An equally important influence on my sense of masculinity has been my mum and grandmas, all of whom are, and were, storytellers. Their strong influence has taught me the value of listening and empathy with others. I was also very close to three great aunts who experienced poverty as children brought up by a single mother. They worked extremely hard to pull themselves out of poverty through their own independent careers. All three were successful in their fields (one internationally) and lived together throughout their lives, never relying on the income of a husband or partner. I frame my own thinking on gender and masculinities in relation to their experiences as, in many ways, their lives as childless women resonate with contemporary patriarchal commitment to work and success criteria that are associated with the 'ideal worker'. I often reflect on what they achieved and the personal sacrifices they might have made to maintain financial security; such choices are emblematic of the social problem of working parent inequity that I am concerned with in my research.

Ethical considerations for my research method, participants & data

Social justice and fairness form central tenets of my ethical considerations and these personal values continuously influence my ethical approach to research. I seek to establish a compelling counternarrative to the gender imbalance in working parent reality and promote, through cultural and policy-based action, fairer, more caring conditions for working parents. I have undertaken empirical research and I am aware of the 'moral ambiguity' (Reynolds, 1982, p. 2) inherent in examining personal, subjective experiences of parenthood and masculinities. However, I believe it is in these personal stories that

research can provide new insights and approaches to improve the lived experiences of working parents. Additionally, I acknowledge that by abstracting my research through integrating fiction into my thesis analysis and interpretation, I am open to accusations regarding how ethical this method is. Again, I justify this methodological choice by drawing on the relational impact of fictions on our daily reality (e.g. *The Handmaid's Tale* iconography in social activism - Beaumont & Holpuch, 2018) and the value of speculative fictions in instructing society on the risks and pitfalls of existing oppressive regimes. I see this as a vital aspect of my approach to critical ethical research.

My approach to this research follows the critical ethics agenda of 'challenging power relations as well as reflecting on [my] own place within hierarchies' (Israel, 2014, p. 18). By critically examining the presumptive norms, including reflecting on my presuppositions concerning the working parent gender imbalance, I hope to 'highlight deficiencies in those underlying presumptions' (Ransome, 2013, p. 103). The presumptive norm of masculine organisations (numerically and culturally) was theorised by J. Acker (1990) as a product of state patriarchy that privileges men's economic and corporate domination at the expense of women. Rhodes and Pullen (2018) proposed that the 'ethics that glorifies the corporation is infused with a masculine ethos that privileges values such as strength, power, and victoriousness' (Rhodes & Pullen, 2018, p. 484). They also define the feminine aspect of ethics being in service to the dominant, corporate masculine form. By taking a critical perspective on the organisation as a corporate entity suffused with masculinity, my ethical approach intends to challenge the fairness of this presupposition.

I apply a critical ethical perspective to parental responsibility too and agree with Knights (2015) and Jordan (2020) that the underlying norms of parenthood experiences are gendered with the expectation of feminised care, a norm that requires critical theorization to deconstruct this binary. This power imbalance is appropriately encapsulated in the ubiquitous 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 2005), and is a product of a business ethics that prioritises HM values or aggression, dominance and competitiveness, over empathy, care and social justice. My approach to critical ethics places the working parents at the heart of my research and I prioritise improvements to their workplace experiences as the ultimate measure of success for my research.

By adopting a critical ethical approach, I challenge the basis of many assumptions such as my use of an unconventional methodological approach (Bryman & Buchanan, 2018). One core assumption of much conventional research is 'that ethics is gender neutral' (Rhodes & Pullen, 2018, p. 495). Considering the range of evidence I presented in my literature review, and the macro level data highlighting the Gender Pay Gap (UK

Government, 2020a), caregiving disparities (ONS, 2020), and underrepresentation of women in senior/executive roles (Advance HE, 2019; Goodley, 2020), the idea that an organisational research ethics could be neutral appears to be flawed. Conventional methodological approaches form the bedrock of academic social research, but can also reproduce gender imbalance (Beavan, Borgström, Helin, & Rhodes, 2021) due to the necessary conformity with patriarchal measures of success. My interpretation of critical ethics in this context requires an unconventional methodology to disrupt and deconstruct the norms, both in the object of my research, and in the mode of my research method. Fictocriticism (Rhodes, 2015) meets this test criterion to reveal as much, if not more, about our shared reality than conventional empirical data analysis (e.g. Czarniawska-Joerges & De Monthoux, 1994; Learmonth & Griffin, 2018; Phillips et al., 2014; Rhodes & Brown, 2005b). A major benefit of my fictocritical approach is to create a compelling narrative, which can represent collective experiences and influence policy and organisational change to hopefully benefit the working parents who participated in my research

I strive to remain consistent with other social justice research ethics that are imbued in 'relational commonality' (Mandalaki & Fotaki, 2020) alongside my own sense of integrity and values as a guide to presenting a compelling counternarrative. In taking this approach, I align with Pullen and Rhodes (2015) who suggest research should integrate embodied experiences within the researcher's process; valuing care, compassion and relationality, not attempting to construct pure 'objectivity', an aspiration that I view as bordering on fictionalisation anyway. In my research, I am interacting with the most human and embodied of experiences, those of family and parenthood. It is, in my view, impossible to detach complex (and often contradictory) human emotion from such personal research; it should be undesirable to even attempt to do so.

My approach to an embodied and critical ethics also integrates DF to problematise the presuppositions of the rationalised, controlled masculine conventions of traditional research. As Buchanan and Bryman (2018) contend, if I chose to adopt more conventional sociological methods in my research, I would be likely to reproduce the same findings as previous working parenthood research (e.g., Burnett et al., 2012; Gatrell, 2005; Kaufman, 2018), without meaningfully reimagining the problem and contributing new knowledge. My approach is centred on fictional speculation and critical perspectives on social problems. My departure from the sequential, 'rational' nature of conventional research could be viewed as compromising the required rigour of ethical research, but as Knights (2015) highlights, the ingrained linearity of organisational research acts as a product of hegemonic masculinity. I subvert this linearity through my critical perspective

on hierarchical ‘power and authority being attached to male bodies’ (Rhodes & Pullen, 2018, p. 492), and nowhere is this issue more acute than surrounding working parenthood and embodied experiences of care.

Alongside my critical ethical approach, I also adopt an ‘ethics of care’ that prioritises the emotional resonance of my research (Ciulla, 2009; French & Weis, 2000). My caring orientation is pertinent to my use of masculinities theory (Jordan, 2020) within what has, historically, been a feminist sphere of family decision making (Beauvoir, 2011 [1949]; Firestone, 1979; Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Israel (2014) describes the ethics of care as located within the ‘broader progressive feminist ethical commitments to illuminating women’s experiences, understanding them within oppressive power relations, and acting to achieve greater social justice’ (p. 19).

I adopt an ethics of care to illuminate the important aspects of care and embodiment related to women’s experiences, and the historically under-explored experiences of care for fatherhood. This is theorized in a wider societal concept of masculinities by Elliott (2016) as ‘Caring Masculinities’ (CM), which she proposes as a progressive, egalitarian mode of masculinity that can reject domination. I adopt this caring approach to highlight the importance of equal caregiving expectations for working parents. Mulla and Hlavka (2011) describe ethics of care as ‘affective rather than principled, depending on empathy and receptiveness’ (p. 1510) and I believe my immediate empathy and sympathy for the experiences of expectant and new parents, as a working parent, provides a caring basis for my ethical approach. I embrace the relational nature of my interactions with the participants in my research and the organisational context I am examining.

From the outset of this study, I felt it was important to interact in a relational, empathic manner with all participants. This was primarily due to my interpretation of the nature of my research subject as highly personal and imbued with individual values and beliefs that are incompatible with traditional ideals of a distanced, scientifically rational researcher (Plakoyiannaki & Budhwar, 2021). I recruited participants according to some pre-existing professional contacts, and by snowball and inter-colleague referrals. With some of my interviews, there was the inherent risk of familiarity with some participants and the additional risk of making tacit assumptions about their contributions due to my familiarity (Ransome, 2013). However, I justify this risk according to the embodied nature of this research topic, which I believe requires the researcher to establish trust and closeness with the participants (see examples in Gatrell, 2005; Hochschild & Machung, 2012). My method required a degree of baseline trust to elicit greater depth in the responses from

the participants, and to ensure they understood my own commitment to the integrity of their data from a professional and personal perspective as a working parent.

I prioritised the confidentiality of my participants and my use of 'fictocriticism' and autoethnographic contributions in this thesis serves as a further protective shield to my participants' identities (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2012, p. 89). By fictionalising data I have been able to construe participant experiences alongside my own narrative (Holt & Zundel, 2018, p. 49). The fictocriticism narrative will integrate my own reflexivity concerning participant meanings and their holistic selves beyond 'quotable' contributions. I write reflexively in the fictocriticism chapter in order to recreate the multiple perspectives present within the data narrative (Cunliffe & Ivaldi, 2020, p. 5) and transform these multiple stories into a meaningful fiction. This approach obscures participant identity even more than traditional pseudonym and anonymisation approaches. In line with the importance of my participants, I also took responsibility for the confidentiality and security of their data, which I securely stored in accordance to the principles of the General Data Protection Regulations (European Union, 2018).

The ethical considerations I have described here centre on critical and caring principles concerning the current social injustice facing working parents. I acknowledge my own subjective positionality within the research process and believe my emotional engagement in this topic (Abdellatif & Gatto, 2020; Gatto, 2020) is an asset rather than a liability (Boncori & Smith, 2019; Pullen & Rhodes, 2015). I believe my personal investment in this research has guided the compassion and empathy that has been at the forefront of my interactions with participants and my approach to the data analysis and interpretation. My ethical approach culminates with a fictocriticism that both amplifies the research narrative and protects the identity of the participants in my research.

The next section of this chapter will provide an overview of my analysis method (Gatto & Callahan, 2021) to explain how I have integrated dystopian fiction into a dialectical-relational approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2001, 2013). I also explain how this method aims to uncover examples of 'interpellation' (Althusser, 2014) of individual working parents as subjects to 'hegemonic masculinity' and patriarchal norms in organisations.

Critical Discourse Analysis – Revealing 'interpellation' with dystopian fiction

Discourse, in this method, can be written texts (e.g., policies), spoken dialogue (e.g., interviews and meetings), formal statements (e.g., management announcements in

emails), images (e.g., photo elicitation used in interviews and visuals to represent relevant issues) and body language (e.g., how people express themselves through their physical movements, posture and eye contact etc.). Discourse is therefore a multifaceted, 'multi-story' (Buchanan & Dawson, 2007) that can be construed in relation to various contextual factors, not purely limited to textual analysis of words spoken or written on a page. My primary focus was the spoken dialogue of my interview participants as semiotic of gender inequities for working parents in one organisation. I construed this discourse in relation to cultural and structural social practices that form a wider context of gender and working parenthood as a societal discourses in the UK and global west.

The CDA method is critical of hierarchical power and discourse has historically been described by Luis Althusser (2014) and Michel Foucault (1971) in relation to language use and hegemonic state power. Foucault's post-structuralist theory of discourse aimed at deconstructing normalised meanings of discourse in its socio-historic context. Similar to this approach, the formative discourse analysis method also finds its routes in linguistic scholarship including 'sociosemiotic discourse' (Halliday, 1978), which theorises language in relation to context-dependent usage and the interpretation of symbolic discourse. Examples of such discourse include the patriarchal construction men as 'breadwinners' and the iconography of the embodied mother as nurturing primary caregiver within media, education, healthcare systems and legal frameworks.

Foucault's 'orders of discourse' defined a hegemonic 'discourse of truth' (Foucault, 1971) that excludes other forms of knowledge. Specifically, Foucault instructs the analyst to consider the history of discourse that defines the boundaries and silences of our contemporary interpretation of knowledge and 'truth':

> *It is supposed therefore that everything that is formulated in discourse was already articulated in that semi-silence that precedes it, which continues to run obstinately beneath it, but which it covers and silences. The manifest discourse, therefore, is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this 'not-said' is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said. (Foucault, 2002, p. 28)*

Foucault refers to the silences of the preceding discourse as a 'repressive presence' which resonates with the oft-times repressive nature of hidden masculine rules in workplace discourses. It is not unreasonable to draw an analogous link to the presumptive owners of such 'truth' through history, men, as having a hegemonic role in working parent discourse, too. Foucault asserts that discourse is historically and culturally imbued in everyday conversations and symbolism within society; discourse pre-dates our conscious awareness and acts as a source of ideological 'interpellation' to enduring regimes of

power. For my research, the power dynamic I am expressly interested in is that of hegemonic masculinity and the reproduction of a patriarchal workplace hierarchy as expressed through the language choices, and real-world experiences and decisions of working parents. Foucault establishes an analytical framework to investigate the basis of this discourse:

> *The question posed by language analysis of some discursive fact or other is always: according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules could other similar statements be made? The description of the events of discourse poses a quite different question: how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another? (Foucault, 2002)*

Authors in the CDA methodological field variously frame discourse according to their philosophical approach. Wodak and Meyer (2009) describe discourse as a construct which 'triangulates between society/culture/situation, and discourse/language' (p. 14). In my application of CDA, I propose that it is the rules of hegemonic masculine discourse that define the discursive experiences of working parent perceptions and shared reality.

Discourse and my approach to DFCDA

For my adapted DFCDA I focus on the text form of discourse in relation to participant semiosis during interviews. Fairclough (2003, p. 26) defines interviews as a 'genre' of social practice. My interview method means that I am accessing a snapshot of asynchronous social practice, including the past, present, and future within the working parent context. This is an important distinction from ethnographic methods in working parent research (see Hochschild, 1997; Hochschild & Machung, 2012), which allow the researcher to build a nuanced picture of participant life beyond the confines of the time-limited interview parameters. I am retelling one version of this parental story that draws on the relational discourses from family life, organisational social practices and structures and ideological influences that I encountered during my interviews. These discourses are combined with the interrelated sources of cultural discourse (e.g., media and education), academic theory (e.g., masculinities) and dystopian fiction.

From these interrelated sources, I construct a fictionalised narrative that disrupts the 'system of exclusion' that Foucault (1971, p. 10) describes concerning the historic and hegemonic development of societal discourse as masculine, particularly in academic writing. In effect, I align with working parent sociological research problematising hegemonic masculinity to deconstruct some of the dominant layers of patriarchal discourse that influence working parent experiences. Foucault described his work as

taking ‘critical’ and ‘genealogical’ approaches to analysis (p. 24) and I adopt a ‘critical’ approach in what Foucault labels as the ‘reverse principle’ to examine ‘exclusion, limitation and appropriation’ (p. 24) within working parenthood contexts.

My DFCDA aims to deconstruct the rules of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (breadwinner, competitive, powerful, assertive etc.) as a discursive norm that is signified through the ‘motherhood penalty’ outcome for women and the ‘patriarchal dividend’ for men. I follow a relational interpretation between researcher/participant experiences and empirical fact/fiction that problematises the historically excluded working parent subjects within organisation contexts (e.g., those who do not conform to the ‘ideal worker’ norm). These are subjects who are marginalised within the patriarchal discourse of men as breadwinners who are totally committed to their careers and organisations.

I interpret some of the complexity of relational parental discourses in organisations as interrelated and shared narratives with the potential to both reproduce patriarchal order and, conversely, engender counter-narratives for organisational culture and policy change. Buchanan and Dawson (2007, p. 669) suggest that ‘narratives are about and become the change process’ and it is through my critical and subversive analysis that I hope to generate a meaningful narrative for change. Using DF as an inspiration in this analysis provides the impetus to seek additional subversive allegorical narratives against the masculinised norms of working parenthood.

Phases of DFCDA

The next section provides details of the four phases of the DFCDA method as outlined in figure 2 (below).

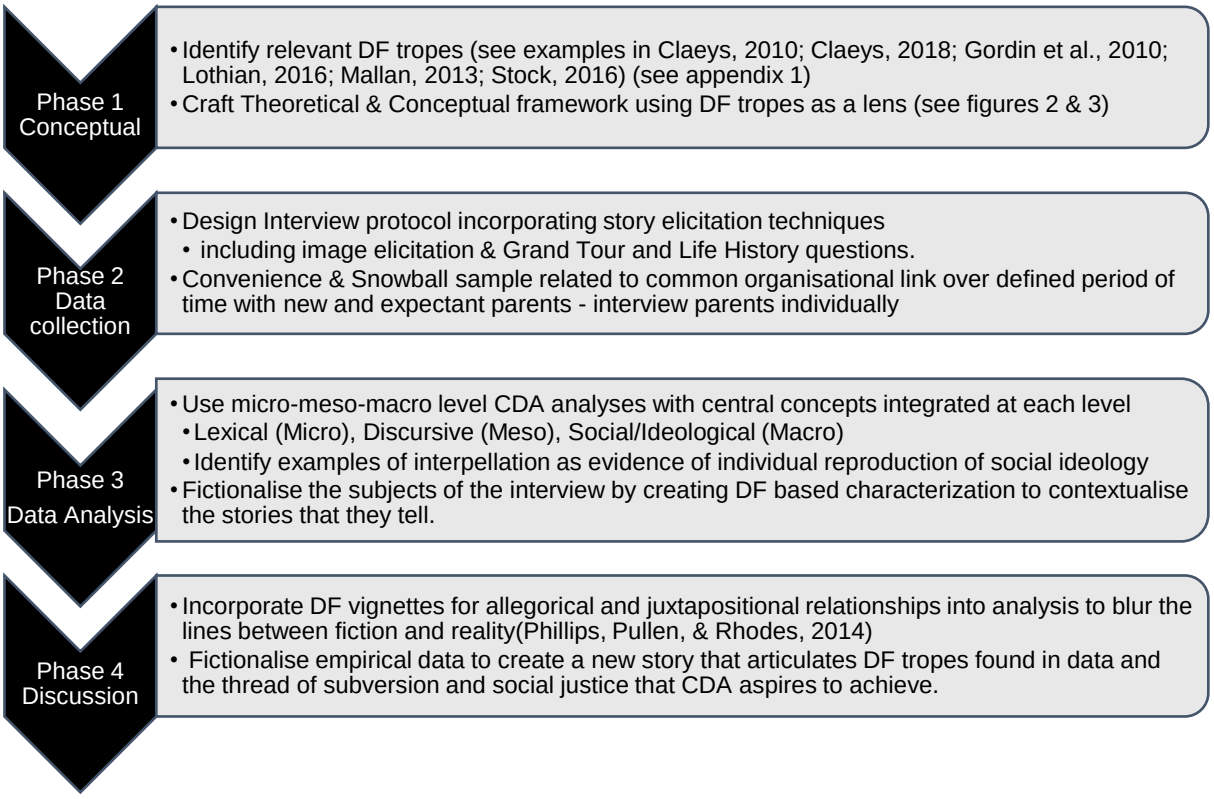

Figure 2 - Dystopian Fiction Inspired Critical Discourse Analysis (DFCDA)

Phase 1 of DFCDA: Conceptual & Theoretical

Tropes of Dystopian Fiction: Conceptual Framework

To integrate DF with CDA, I identified a range of tropes, associated with contemporary and iconic DFs (e.g., *1984, Swastika Night & Red Clocks*), as a means of exploring a uniquely speculative and creative critical space. I present some of these tropes below (see figure 3) as an outline of the connectedness of dystopian fiction to critical organisational research, which aims to address the contemporary 'wrongs' (Fairclough,

2013) in organisational reality. For a more detailed overview of the DF tropes that informed this research, see appendix 1.

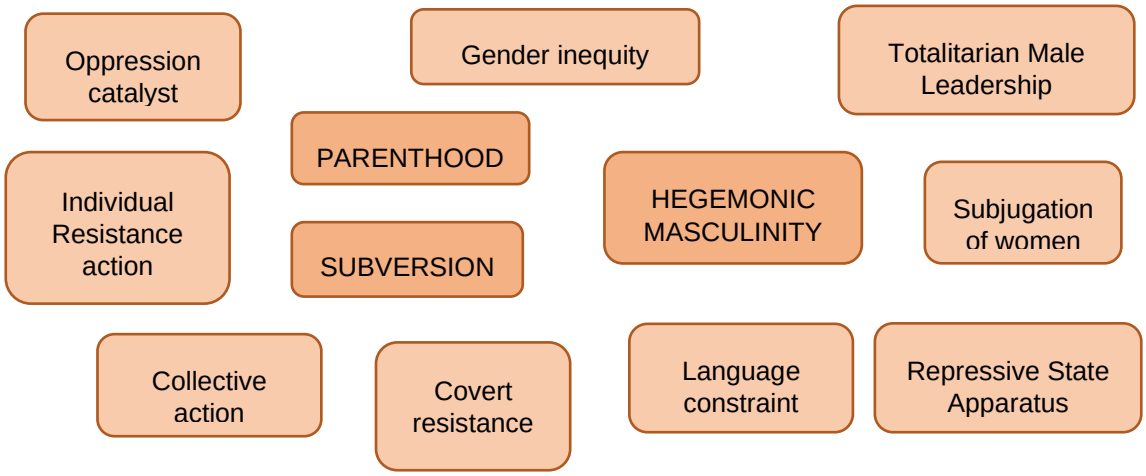

Figure 3 - Dystopian Fiction tropes relevant to gender and organisational research

This radial diagram (figure 3) represents the dialectical relatedness (Fairclough, 2013) of each trope by showing the proximal interactions between the major and minor tropes. For example, 'subversion', which is located at one side of the diagram, interacts with all other tropes e.g., 'Ideological masculinity', and 'parenthood'. These tropes conceptualise a landscape of dystopian fiction, which inspired this CDA method for researching gender inequity for working parenthood in organisational contexts. The next section provides an outline of the method before providing more detailed explanations of the theoretical and conceptual basis for this method, particularly pertaining to masculinities & gender.

Theoretical Framework

As discussed in my literature review, my theoretical framework was directly influenced by Dystopian Fiction tropes. Fairclough (2013) emphasised the vital role of underpinning theories as part of the abductive CDA methodology. I use Connell's foundational theorisation of 'masculinities' as the primary theoretical perspective on gender inequity for working parents in organisations. Masculinities theory also provides the explanatory basis for this 'social wrong' through the subjugating semiotic effects of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

I use a secondary lens of Althusser's theory of 'ideology' (Althusser, 2014) to interpret the consequences, and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity on working parents in organisational contexts. I present a relational discourse between the semiosis of macro patriarchal influences on subjects, versus the micro, individualised counternarratives such as Caring Masculinities (CM). I suggest that when the counternarrative of CM is amplified

for individuals and organisations, it can subvert HM by offering an alternative and more equitable dynamic between working parents, and organisations.

DFCDA conceptual Framework

My DFCDA conceptual framework (see figure 4) establishes a direct interaction between parental inequity, the role of masculinities (especially HM and CM), and emergence of collective, subversive approaches to resist and navigate patriarchal experiences.

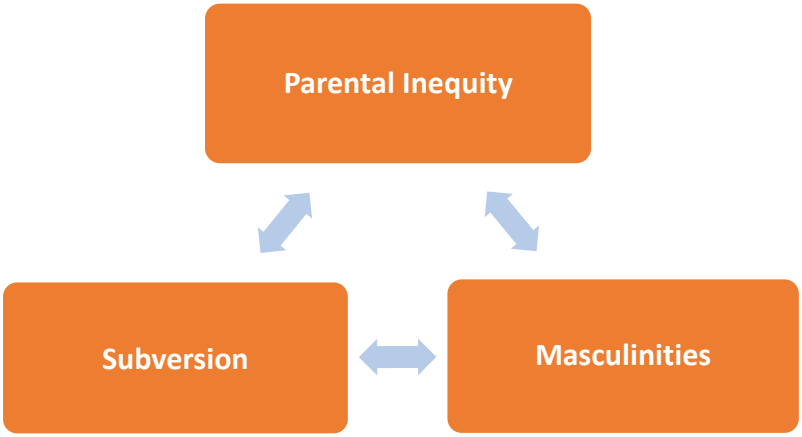

Figure 4 - DFCDA Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework provides the lens through which I coded micro linguistic analysis, meso relational themes and macro ideological level CDA. This lens helped me to identify language-based enablers and constraints, such as evidence of ideological, HM influences on parental decision making e.g., semiotic relationships between the label 'maternity leave' and mothers as primary carers, or the collective organising potential of the 'parental club'. By exploring the participants' perceptions of their roles, relationships and perceptions of organisational policies, processes, and culture, I was able to analyse a range of dialectically related discourse.

I used two theoretical frameworks to analyse this discourse, Althusser's interpretation of ideology (Althusser, 2014), and Connell's (2005) theory of multiple masculinities (including HM) as a guiding basis for identifying 'constraints' affecting participants experiences. Althusser's concept of the 'Ideological State Apparatus' places the family, education and culture at the heart of ideological 'interpellation', while the 'repressive state apparatus' act as the instruments of enforcement, underpinned by the use of symbolic violence (e.g., legal language silencing female pronouns). In contrast, masculinities theory, which highlights subordinate forms of masculinity such as gay masculinity, geek masculinity and CM, offers a more inclusive basis for collective organising to 'enable' subversive discourse and action.

Returning to the Althusserian critical analysis lens, I used the theoretical concept of 'interpellation' to underpin my analysis of potential subjectification of working parents to the norms semiotically embodied by HM. Interpellation is a process whereby citizens are not only influenced by powerful forces, such as the state and big business, but are 'always already' hailed as concrete subjects (Althusser, 2014, p. 190) who internalise these ideological doctrines. When framed against HM, and the reproduction of patriarchal power (Beauvoir, 2011 [1949]; Bourdieu, 2001), parents are made subjects and active reproducers of patriarchy (by inculcating their children) through their conformity to patriarchal culture and structures. Their roles as, often unconscious, complicit subjects, reinforce gender difference and social roles for men and women in work and at home. By relating examples of interpellation to speculative, DF inspired 'counterfactual imaginings' (K. Stock, 2017), I expose the existence of working parent interpellation to patriarchal norms as a signifier of the insidious nature of HM that subjugates women and 'lesser' masculinities. This analytical process is intentionally disruptive and presents shocking comparisons between organisational reality and dystopian fiction.

A founding discourse analysis textbook by Fowler, Hodge, Kress, and Trew (1979) referenced the language control techniques in Orwell's *1984* (1949) such as 'doublethink' & 'newspeak' as means of manipulating mass conformity and constraining dissenting opinion. Contemporary DFs continue to explore how autocracies can impose their will and construct a master discourse through language control (E.g., *Vox* (Dalcher, 2018) and the 100 word per day limit imposed on all women to overtly symbolise the patriarchal order). The discourse of working parents is perhaps not as extreme, but there remains a patriarchal fervour in the skewed, yet normalised discourse of privileged fatherhood and the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 2005; Hodges & Budig, 2010) and overburdened mothers (Gatrell, 2005; Hochschild & Machung, 2012). In the next phase of this method, I describe the process of recruiting working parents as integral to my primary empirical data collection.

Phase 2 – Data Collection and Interview Design

Data Collection

The first principle of my data collection plan was to use a common location, which would enable easy access and trust between me and my participants. My primary research site is a university faculty setting where all my participants have a connection, either as a worker or partner of a worker. I additionally undertook a small number of interviews in participant's homes or via video call. These interview locations were selected to ensure both parents could easily attend regardless of childcare. This was an important baseline

for my research as it established a consistent prioritisation of participant comfort and security. I hoped this approach would also encourage my participants to feel safe in sharing their stories in familiar surroundings.

The second principle was to interview either expectant or experienced parents (ideally with babies, but inclusive of preschool children). The initial intention of this approach was to conduct some second stage interviews with expectant parents to see if there were any changes in their perceptions of working parenthood after becoming parents or returning to work. Unfortunately, due to data collection timings and other personal factors, I was only able to do second stage interviews with 3 participants (one couple who were expectant in phase 1 and new parents in phase 2, and 1 parent who was a new parent in phase 1 and experienced in phase 2). All second phase interviews remained connected to the primary organisational setting.

The type of work undertaken in the primary organisation setting means my participants are not representative of wider society. The staff are typically involved in academic teaching, research, and administration. There is a diverse range of staff and students, due to a range of international, and diverse British staff & students in the faculty. I believe this was a minor influence on my research as I did not select based on ethnicity or sexual orientation.

As mentioned, I occasionally conducted interviews in participants' homes, a neutral location, or via video call, which affected the conversation dynamics. These alternative settings influenced the power dynamics, especially during home visits where I became an outsider within the participants' home. However, the benefit of these examples, as I perceived it, was that I was aware of the enhanced relaxation exhibited by the participants. Specifically, I recall one example of a lounge table adorned with coffee and cake which contributed to an especially homely mis-en-scene in contrast to the rather plain setting of university classrooms where most other interviews were conducted. I felt that, once the rules of hospitality and informality were observed, these home settings offered greater opportunities for participant openness due to what I interpreted as their comfort and relaxation. I also conducted one interview over online video call, which provided an artificial sense of my partial welcome into the participants' home. Again, the integration of the family space and the interview changed the dynamics of the interview, which was more prone to domestic themed interruptions and tangential discussions. I was always conscious of the shift in power between interviews I conducted in the primary research site and in participants' homes and adapted my approach to these interviews to

ensure my tone was flexible and responsive depending on my sense of the participants' level of comfort.

Sampling criteria

My sample was primarily selected based on convenience and snowball sampling methods from within a common link organisation, which therefore offers a unique snapshot of working parent expectations and experiences in this context. This was a methodological choice as I wanted to ensure my participants were comfortable to share their experiences and expectations with me based on trust derived from familiarity and peer referral. With a baseline of trust and reciprocity, I was able to apply my interview protocol with a degree of unconventional creativity, which is reflected in my interview design.

I followed two guiding sampling criteria for the expectant and experienced working parents in this research with the intention to speak with working parents with relatively immediate experience of becoming working parents in the organisation. For the expectant parents, I sought participants who were due to have a first child in the coming months (typically 2nd or 3rd trimester due to UK conventions to disclose pregnancies until after the 1st trimester). For the experienced parents, I primarily sought participants with children who were either new-born or in the early years age range (1-4), which normally involves a mixed approach to childcare prior to full time school attendance. This pre-school age range was important as it requires a decision from working parents in terms of childcare options (e.g., stay at home parent, nursery, extended family or mixed).

Participant overview

My participant population is almost 50/50 men and women, which enabled me to access men and women with direct experiences of working as parents at the research site. The experienced parents were relatively early in their working parent lives, which was intentional in my recruitment process to ensure the participants could also recall their expectations of working parenthood with greater clarity. The ages of the experienced parent participants' children ranged from 6 months to 4 years old (though one father had an older child from another relationship that predated his experiences at the organisation. The majority of my participants were white, British (90%) which was consistent with the regional demographics of the link organisation.

The spread of 19 participants was split with 6 expectant parents and 13 experienced parents (see table 2). Unfortunately, on one occasion I was only able to access the father in a married couple, which is why there is an odd number of participants. I included his data in this research as he offered unique insights, which added to the overall data though I was unable to compare his responses with his partner as I have done with the other

participants. Some of the experienced parents were expecting new children to join their families and some of the experienced parents had only just become parents. This meant my participants were able to provide a range of experiences and expectations based on a variety of stages in the parental journey from planning to reality. My own transition from expectant to experienced parent has almost directly tracked the start of my data collection to its conclusion over a nine-month period. This meant I was able to empathise with parents and adapt my questions better towards the end of my interview cycle. I summarise my participants in the table below.

Demographics & parental information	Men	Women
Total	10	9
Ethnicity	9 white 1 BAME	8 white 1 BAME
Working pattern	9 FT / 1 PT	4 FT/ 5 PT (1 used AL to achieve 80% working for 12 months on return to work.)
Parental Leave **(for the purposes of this table, I use the policy title to describe the leave taken e.g., maternity & paternity)**	• 7 – 2 weeks Paternity • 1 – 2 weeks paternity + 1 week AL • 1 – 2 weeks paternity + 2 weeks AL • 1 negotiated circa 8 working days absence from work due to less than 6 months service	• 5 – 12 months maternity + 2 months AL • 5 – 12 months maternity • 1 – 11 months maternity • 1 – 10 months maternity • 1 – 6 months maternity + 1 month AL

Childcare **(note added when based on expectations)**	• 1 FT Nursery (expectations) • 1 mother full time with some family help • 1 Nursery 4 days per week (expectations) • 4 Nursery 3 days per week, 2 days with mother (1 based on expectations) • 1 Nursery 3 days per week, 2 days shared between grandparents & parents (expectations) • 1 Nursery 2 days per week, 2 days shared between parents, 1 day with grandparent • 1 Nursery 2 days per week, 3 days shared between grandparents & parents (expectations)	

Table 2 - Participant overview descriptive summary

Based on my sample, it is clear that nearly all parents conform to a conventional model of parental leave and childcare (Mother taking the majority of parental leave and also doing more childcare). Only one family planned to have their child in full time nursery care, and only one family had their child solely cared for by a parent (in this case the mother). The majority had a split of 2-3 days in nursery and the remainder shared between parents and grandparents. The majority of parental childcare is still provided by the mother who typically worked on a part time basis. These demographics align with the literature assertions that women are providing the majority of childcare, which may be contributing to a 'motherhood penalty' in their careers. No parents had taken shared parental leave, though many had discussed it.

Interview Design

My interview design was consistent with my use of DF and storytelling methods. I drew on a variety of research methods and my own skills as a qualified business coach to elicit the depth of participant contributions necessary to gain meaningful insights into parental expectations and experiences. I initially framed my interview questions drawing on previous studies (see Gatrell (2005) and Hochschild and Machung (2012)) around the principle of exploring the intersections of three topics, 'Roles', 'Relationships' and 'Policies'. These topics were discussed in relation to the participant's experiences and/or expectations of working parenthood. I used these three topics to build momentum from the participants' individualised 'roles' and personal 'responsibilities' towards the more structural and organisational 'policies' and 'culture' discussion. I decided that the policies

discussion would work better if it occurred later in the interview and could therefore happen after the participants eased themselves into the interview with open discussions of their family lives and parental identities first.

I designed my interview protocol in phases according to the process outlined by Glesne and Peshkin (1992). I drafted my semi-structured interview questions based on open questions addressing the pre-determined topics, with scope for expansive and tangential discussions. This principle underpinned my interview protocols (see appendices 3 & 4) and provided a basis for consistency, while enabling a conversational style, and engendering individualised, rich responses from the participants.

Image elicitation

The opening questions of my protocol used participant-led image elicitation (linked to the three interview topics), which I chose in order to establish a more egalitarian baseline for the interview. From early in my interview design process, I felt it was important to incorporate images into my protocol to encourage the participants to engage in collaborative, reflexive and visual storytelling (Jenkings, Woodward, & Winter, 2008) that could encourage the participant to indulge in creative thinking. I wanted the participants to access and reflect on abstract visual stimuli prior to and during the interview as a means of accessing a liminal space between the interviewer and the respondent as co-constructors of the interview narrative. Equally, I believe that incorporating visuals 'can jolt subjects into a new awareness of their social existence' (Harper, 2002, p. 21), which was highly valuable for a topic that is heavily imbued with conventional understandings of parental roles & responsibilities.

Prior to their interview, I circulated a bank of abstract images (mainly photographs and some drawings) to my participants with three prompts (see figure 5). This was to elicit responses that could explore during the interview. I followed a conventional ice-breaker approach to build rapport with my participants (Warhurst & Black, 2015). However, I also hoped my participants would reflexively engage with unconventional nature of this approach and reflect on the protocol topics before we met so that they would be more prepared to offer richer responses to my questions concerning their stories.

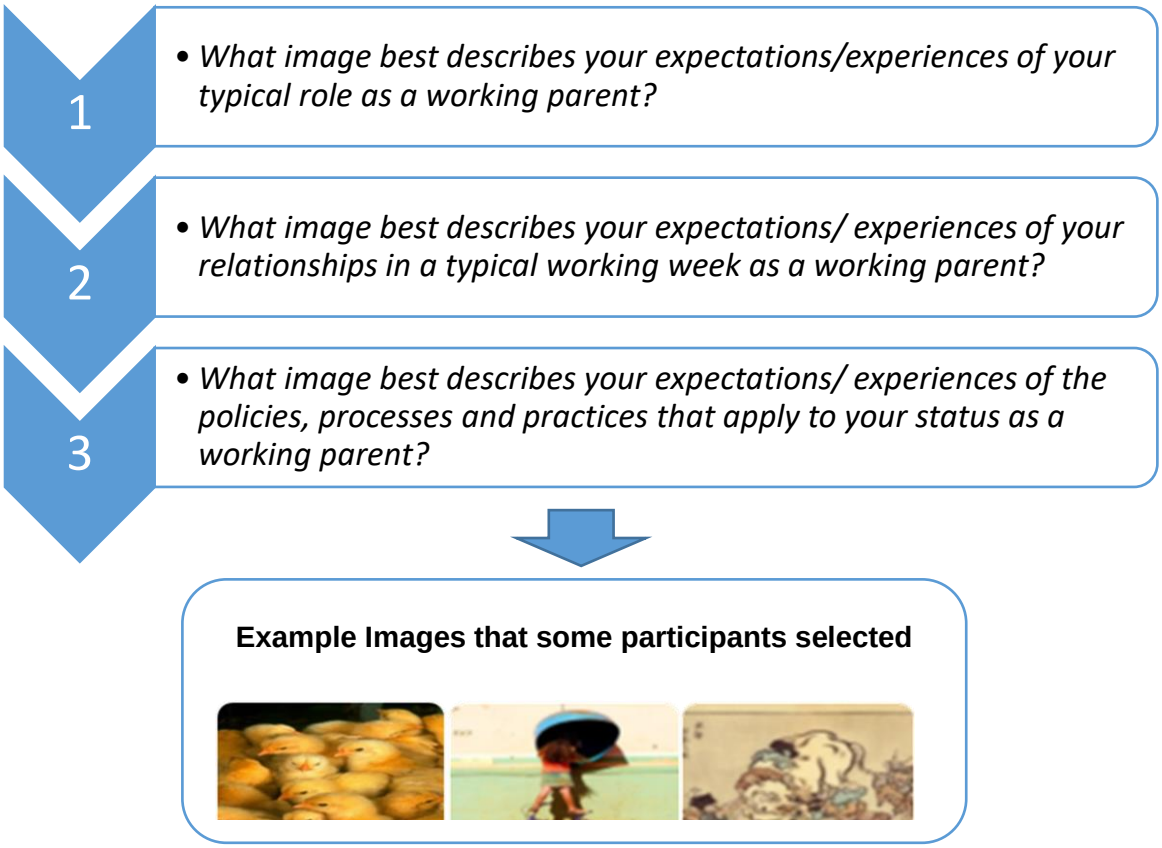

Figure 6 - Image elicitation interview questions and example images

My approach to image elicitation approximates a hybrid of conventional 'ice-breaker' photo elicitation and reflexivity, and 'auto-driving', which Hurworth (2003) defines as the interview driven by the participants. I hoped that the images could form a bridge between me as the interviewer and the interview participant as a common reference point for shared discussion (Harper, 2002, p. 20). I encouraged my participants to speak openly about their choices by typically asking '*please talk me through your image choice for this question prompt'*, while also probing beyond their initial response. I followed the principle that 'images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words' (Harper, 2002, p. 13). Through engagement with visuals, I hoped participants might expand their initial impressions of their roles, policies, and relationships through figurative thinking. I also anticipated that this freedom might unlock some of the discursive language barriers that could occur through the plain question and answer approach.

Importantly for this interview design, the collaboration between the participants and me as the questioning researcher encouraged participants to 'move beyond the contents of photographic representation to the "life-worlds" of the interviewee and those represented, i.e. the larger phenomena,' (Jenkings et al., 2008, p. 8) Many participants commented on

the process of selecting an image and how immersed they had been in selecting the best representation of the three topics. This was encouraging feedback and meant the participants had typically arrived at the interview already thinking about their images in association with their expectations and experiences of working parenthood.

Overall, the image elicitation aspect to my data collection provided an engaging, creative, and open basis for meaningful discussions with the participants. I wanted the process to facilitate and contribute to a part-deconstruction of some of the rigid hierarchies that are inherent in the interview process (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 82). I deliberately handed control over to the participants to set the agenda of the conversation based on their image choice, interpretation of the prompt and rationalisation of that interpretation. My efforts to democratise the interview through the image elicitation element also fed into the rest of the interview as I chose to share some of my own experiences with the participants to contribute to our shared construction of meaning and build rapport through reciprocal discourse. To delve deeper into participants' experiences, I also included questions to elicit an expansive 'life history' narrative style response.

The Grand Tour: Inspired by the Life History approach

All questions in my interview protocol were framed according to the three thematic topics (Roles, Relationships and Policies) which began with the three image elicitation prompts. The priority of this approach was to elicit participant narratives that went beyond instrumental, surface level responses. A major influence on my approach to questioning comes from Connell's research in gender and masculinities. Connell uses a 'life histories' approach to interview design (Connell, 2005, 2021) when she asks the participant to tell the story of their life from as early as they can remember. I drew on some of the principles of this approach with my with my 'grand tour' style questions (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) which asked participants to go back to the start of their working parent journey (see example below). These questions naturally connected to their own family history and many discussed their parental identity in association with their own formative experiences with their parents. This approach often led to very expansive answers and I had to be flexible in terms of what direction the conversation might take (Connell, 2005, p. 90). My follow up questions specifically defined the timeframes in relation to experiences of parenting, including as an expectant parent.

Primary Grand Tour Question: *I want to take you back to the start of your journey as a parent/parent to be. What were your immediate thoughts about work-life balance when you first found out you were going to have a baby?*

There were benefits and risks to the 'grand tour' style question model and these manifested through some tangential discussions that were sometimes less relevant to my research. However, I encouraged participants to follow the thread of their responses as this was consistent with my methodological approach to storytelling. I wanted to encourage the participants to share their stories unencumbered by question framing.

Questions added later: the ideals of parenting

I incorporated an additional question topic after interviewing the first four participants and re-visiting academic literature from my integrative review (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The questions that I included were all centred on the concept of 'ideals' in parenting and work (Borgkvist, Moore, Eliott, & Crabb, 2018; Borve & Bungum, 2015; Collier, 2019). In my later interviews, and my second stage interviews (with the first two couples), I asked participants to respond with their reaction to the following prompts:

How do you respond to the following concepts, please respond in whatever order you prefer?	
Ideal Mother	*Ideal Father*
Ideal Worker	*Ideal Parent*

I felt that this question construction allowed participants to respond to the question in three potentially revealing ways. Firstly, they could respond to each ideal in turn, accepting the premise of the separate ideals and describing any differences they perceived between each ideal. Secondly, they could choose which order they responded to the ideals and this could indicate a preference or familiarity with some ideals over others. Thirdly, they could challenge the premise of the question construction, specifically the idea of different ideals for mothers and fathers. Finally, I hoped their response to the 'ideal worker' question could reveal their attitudes to my theoretical postulation of hegemonic masculinity as template for 'ideals' in the workplace that subjugates caring responsibilities for working parents.

I attempted to maintain a degree of distance in the delivery of these subjective questions and used it as an opportunity to engage in balanced discussion on the idea of gendered ideals in parenting when the participants did challenge that premise. This process felt consistent with my facilitative, rapport building interview method, an approach that also drew on my coaching knowledge.

Notes, reflections

I recorded each interview using audio-only to capture the spoken word and tone of our shared discourse. During each interview, I also took frequent notes to highlight when my

participants shared something that was immediately relevant to my own methodological lens. This approach differs from conventional inductive methods (Plakoyiannaki & Budhwar, 2021) and the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). My method specifically aligned to speculative ideas through my use of DF and the theoretical bases of multiple masculinities research (Connell, 2005; Kimmel et al., 2005). My note taking followed a process of abductive reasoning to make connections between my immediate impressions of the dialogue as informed by body language and non-verbal signals, and my theoretical and conceptual framework. I also recorded a periodic, thematic private blog of my experiences during my PhD, which includes a reflection on what I experienced and learned while undertaking interviews.

Finishing data collection

The notes I maintained provided me with a good sense of my progress towards 'theoretical saturation' (Glaser & Strauss, 2017, p. 61). This point was not a systematic process (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), rather I assessed my theoretical saturation based on iterative and intuitive data analysis of the various working parent arrangements I encountered (e.g. primary earner status and alignment with traditional social roles). This determination was important to support my assertion of the existence of working parent subjectification via 'interpellation' to the idealised ideological hegemonic masculinity framework in family and organisational contexts.

Once I completed the three second stage interviews (one couple, and one father whose partner was unavailable) to gain some supplementary insights into the differences between expectations and experiences, I knew my data was 'rich and thick' (Geertz, 2008; Grenier, 2015). The second stage interviews contributed to my construction of a counter-narrative of the parental journey from expectant to experienced parenthood and was important in developing my fictocriticism plot. The next phase is the data analysis which formed the foundations of the themes and character development for phase 4, the fictocriticism.

Phase 3: Data analysis

Phase 3 describes the primary analytical process of DFCDA. CDA is a method that is concerned with the examination of dominant power abuses, injustice, and ideological influences in society (Van Dijk, 1993). Such influences are discovered in CDA through discourses (be they verbal, written or visual) and social relations (Fairclough, 2013). Importantly for my use of DF, CDA offers an approach to exposing and subverting the inequity in social contexts through critical understanding of discourse (Van Dijk, 1993).

CDA presupposes that dominant discourses constantly influence our language choices to reproduce the social inequalities of dominant social forces. These can be identified more clearly in examples such as populist political speeches, which sometimes draw on nationalistic rhetoric to stir emotional attachment to ideas of patriotism and national destiny (Shabi, 2021). Recent media debates on the historical bias applied to remembering Winston Churchill (the good and the bad (Limaye, 2020)) highlight how such ideological discourse can obfuscate historic abuses associated with the imperialistic 'will to knowledge' (Foucault, 1971) that is often pursued at the expense of colonial exploitation.

CDA is not limited to deconstructing the manipulative discourse markers of powerful political speeches. It can also be used to examine the everyday 'naturalized' discourses of a social group and social practices (in this case working parenthood) to identify the influences affecting their attitudes and behaviours. This is done by examining their discourse (language choices and their wider meanings in context) and what that can reveal of their conscious and unconscious thought processes. Figure 6 provides an overview of the social events, practices, and structures (contextualised to working parent discourse) that align with the micro, meso and macro level of CDA I apply to my analysis.

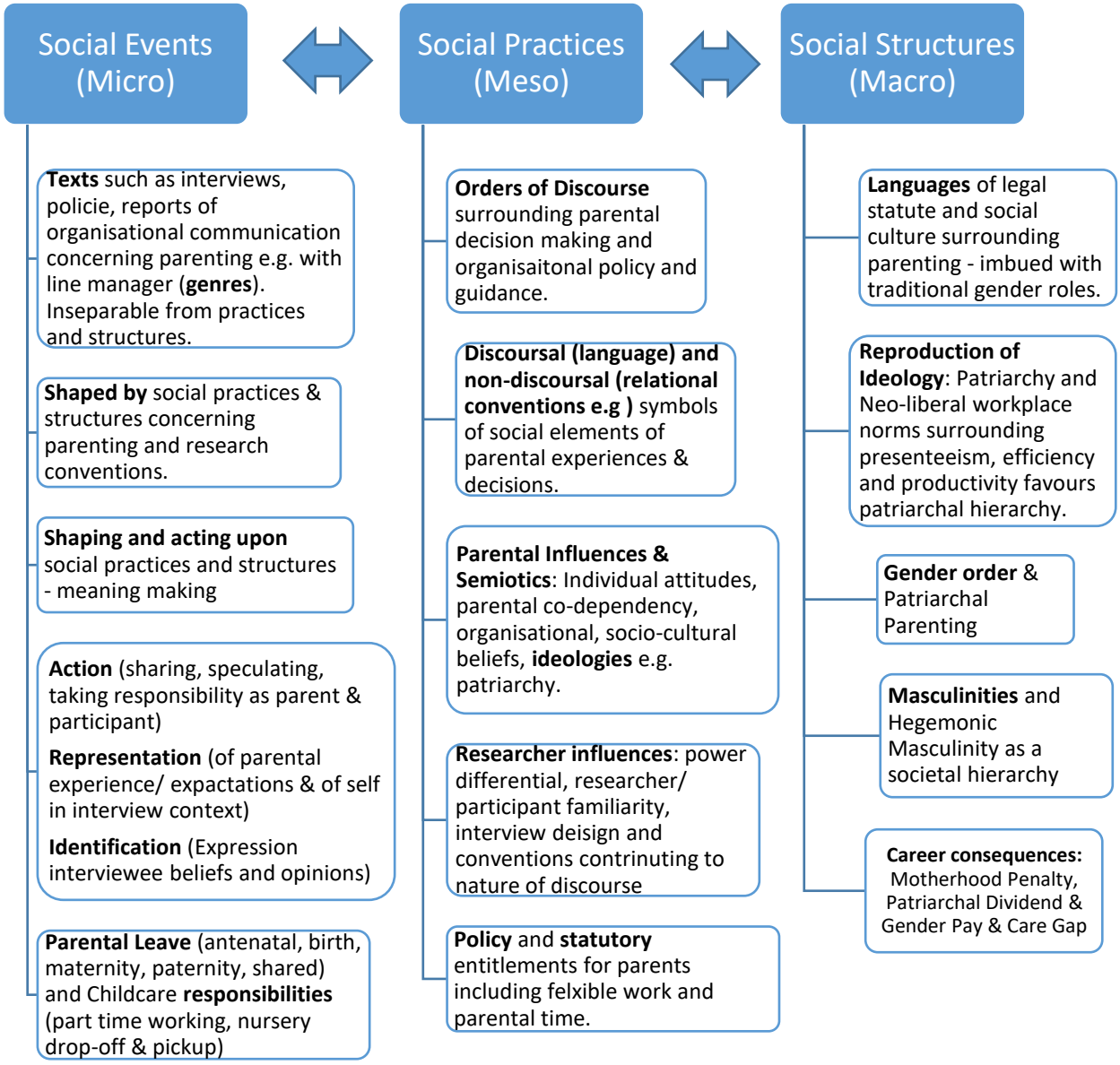

Figure 7 - Social Discourse Layers: Micro, Meso & Macro (adapted from Fairclough, 2003, pp. 21-28)

Figure 6 shows the various levels of discourse that I integrate into my DFCDA. I follow the dialectical-relational approach to discourse (Fairclough, 2001, 2003, 2013) in that there is not a distinct separation between micro discourse events (e.g. a conversation with a colleague about parenting experiences, or a poster on a wall), meso practices (e.g. a formal HR process to arrange parental leave, or a formal discussion with a line manager) and structural macro discourse (e.g. institutional governance and patriarchal workplace culture). The dialectical-relational model of CDA aligns to Althusser's theory of ideology because the influence of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal interpellation occurs at all levels of hierarchical society. This subjectification is signified in parental discourse promoting mothers as primary caregivers and fathers as breadwinners.

To explain the interpellation process, CDA examines the existence of a common cultural knowledge of working parent expectations, such as the separation of parental roles according to gender, and the influence of ideological HM and structural patriarchy upon that discourse. This spectrum of discourse layers (micro, meso, macro) is interconnected and interdependent to varying degrees depending on context and to differing degrees of effect. The literature review highlighted how structural factors (e.g., statutory parental leave entitlements) and cultural factors (e.g., patriarchal discourse) can outweigh the influence of social events (e.g., protests) on organisational norms (e.g., patriarchy). Figure 7 illustrates this imbalanced flow of influence, which I interpret as a 'social wrong' for working parents and is the central basis for my methodological approach of integrating DF to subvert this.

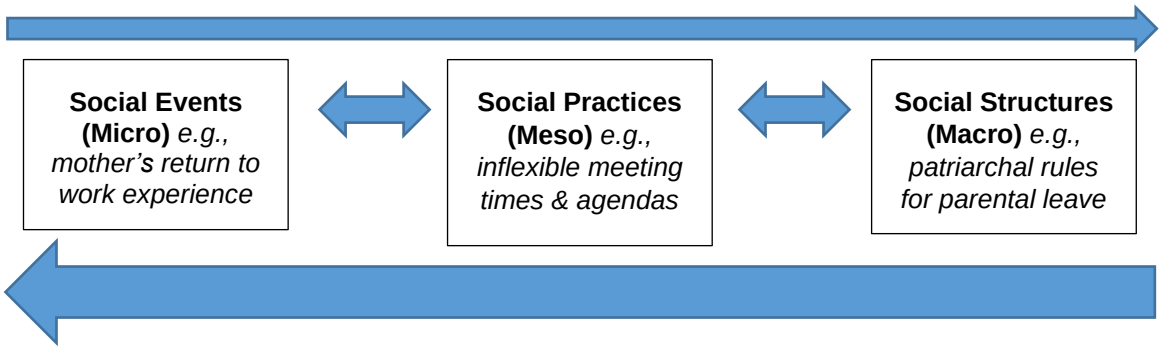

Figure 8 - Ideological discourse and the unbalanced spectrum of social influences on working parent gender inequity

Phase 3.1: Incorporating Dystopian Fiction tropes into CDA

I use the dialectical-relational CDA method (micro, meso and macro discourse) in confluence with DF tropes (Masculinity, Parenthood, and Subversion) at all stages of my critical discourse analysis. I use a DF conceptual framework (see figure 3 and 4) as a guide in this process and incorporated the three DF tropes into a systematic analytical process comprising four stages to reference relevant DF inspired themes (see figure 8).

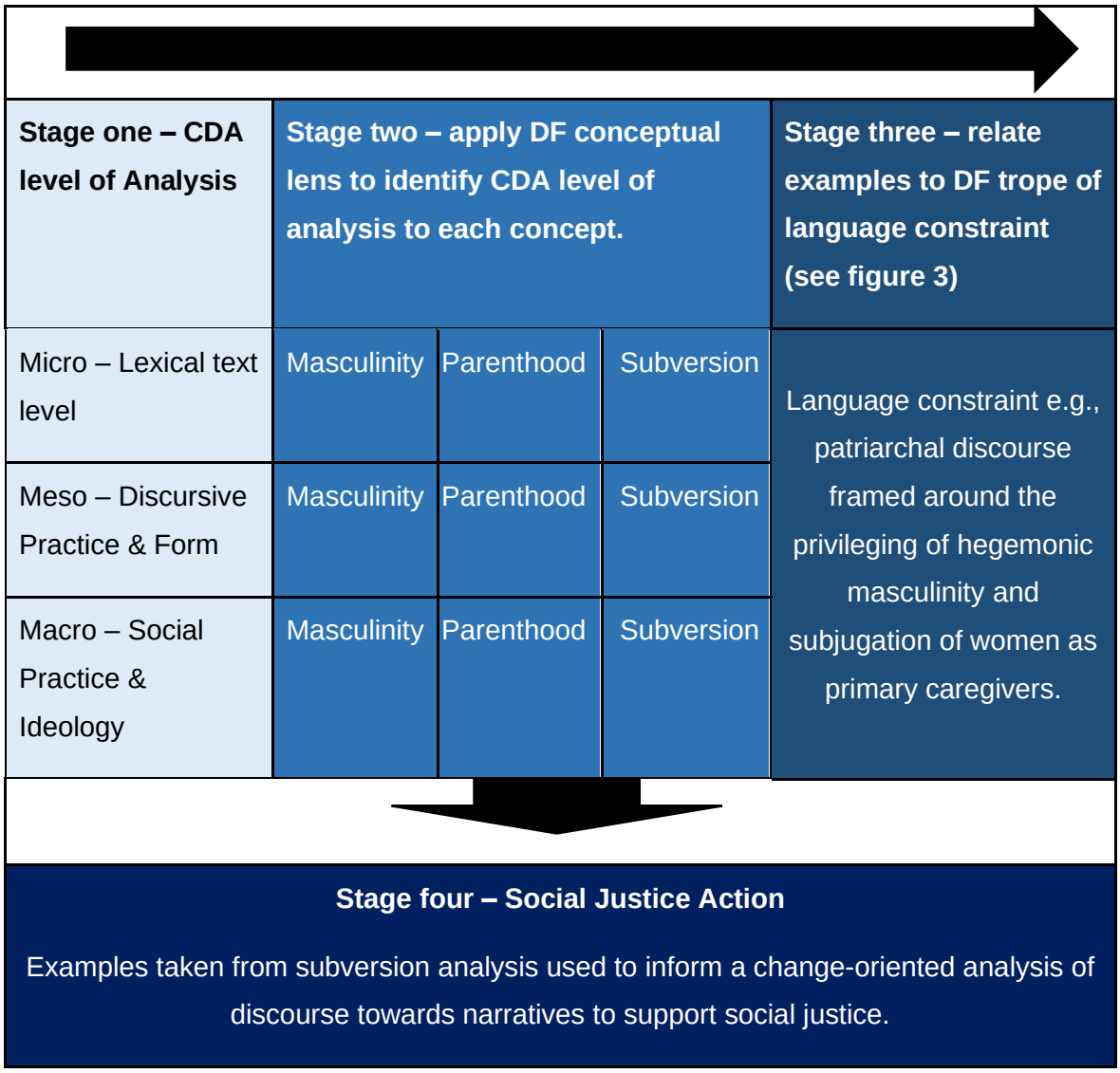

Figure 9 - DFCDA Stages of analysis

This process brings the conventional CDA into the abstract space of dystopian fiction, yet retains the critical interrogation of the social justice problem, especially through its focus on masculinity, parenthood, and subversion as my central tropes of dystopian fiction. At stage 3, Figure 8 introduces the minor trope of 'language constraint' (see figure 3) as particularly relevant to the analysis phase of this study. Language, as an influential facet of working parent discourse, is highly relevant to DFCDA which examines how dominant patriarchal discourse frames the expectations and experiences of working parents e.g., what is an 'ideal' mother or father. The language of working parenthood is imbued with patriarchal culture and structures that connect to many of the themes discussed in the literature review chapter. The following sections outline how stages 1-4 of the DFCDA method works for working parent discourse, drawing on DF and CDA literature.

Phase 3.2: How Working Parent Discourse fits the DFCDA model

As a foundational scholar of dialectical relational CDA methods, Norman Fairclough describes the crucial analysis of the interdependencies of social events with social practices and structures. He also emphasises the importance of being 'transdisciplinary' to enable a more nuanced CDA, which can gain new insights and theoretical perspective on an identified social problem:

> *it is not simply a matter of adding concepts and categories from other disciplines and theories, but working on and elaborating one's own theoretical and methodological resources so as to be able to address insights or problems captured in other theories and disciplines from the perspective of one's particular concerns. (Fairclough, 2013, p. 295)*

With my special interest centring on the sociological phenomenon of gender imbalance in for working parents, I am working in a transdisciplinary way by integrating Dystopian Fiction and arts-based disciplines into my method. DF inspired my use of Althusserian ideology, and critical masculinities theorising (e.g., Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Elliott, 2016; Messerschmidt, 2018) within this research field, which endorses the usefulness of the transdisciplinary approach. My transdisciplinary approach aligns with Fairclough's description of 'elaborating one's own theoretical and methodological resources' and has provided fresh critical perspective to my research by harnessing fictions to inform my literature review, conceptual and theoretical framework, analytical method and interpretative form (fictocriticism).

The dialectical-relational framework for interpreting discourse is the gateway to examining the often-ingrained language markers of social injustice. This is exposed in dystopian fiction examples such as 'Newspeak' and 'Double-think' in *1984* (Orwell, 2004), the idiomatic 'blessed be the fruit – may the lord open' ritualistic discourse of *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1996), and the misogynistic 100 word per day limiter for women in *Vox* (Dalcher, 2018). DF highlights, in disturbing clarity, that language restrictions or language use can be weaponised to control people. In the case of working parent discourse, these language markers are more subtle. The gendered distinction between the bureaucratic burden of 'maternity leave' policies acts as a signifier of mothers as primary caregivers, which contrasts with the universal simplicity of most 'paternity leave' policies that signify men as secondary carers, unburdened of the primary parent responsibility.

The gendered differences present in occupational parental leave discourse reinforce an ingrained 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1979) of 'social roles' for men and women that reproduce gender differences to the detriment of women (Eagly et al., 2000). The majority of women find their expected social role is implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) written into

the workplace policy texts, health care literature and media depictions of motherhood as presumptive primary caregivers. In addition to the detrimental effect of gendered symbolic violence on women, men also encounter 'symbolic annihilation' (Tuchman, 2000) from parental discourses through constructions of caregiving; normalised discussions of parental responsibility associate 'maternal' and 'maternity' with nurture and caregiving, while 'paternal' and 'paternity' is often associated with patriarchal hierarchy and a secondary support role. This is colloquially expressed when fathers are described as 'babysitters' for their own children, or formally expressed in the meagre two weeks of dedicated statutory paternity leave entitlement. The gendered differences in these examples illustrate the imbalanced dialectical-relational discourse of working parenthood that is ingrained in all levels of discourse.

Phase 3.3: Micro, Meso Macro Analysis: A DF interpretation of CDA

My approach to the method of DFCDA follows a systematic and loop analysis of the spoken accounts of my interviewees to interpret the layers of discourse within their statements. In practice this involves micro analysis of the language choices that symbolise or explicitly describe the influence of masculinity on individual decisions and workplace social events. At a meso level, I consider the local and relational discourse between working parents, and within the interrelated workplace social practices for parents. Finally, at the macro level, I identify associations between the language choices of the participants and their ideological influences pertaining to social structures that reinforce and reproduce 'HM' as a signifier of patriarchy.

Micro Analysis

CDA involves linguistic analysis focussed on language choices (Fairclough, 2003). I analyse these choices to illustrate and highlight incidents of symbolic, subtle, or implied agendas in verbal discourse. Additionally, language choices in policy texts can reveal rigid forms of discourse, which can illustrate embedded biases. Specifically, I refer to lexical choices such as adverbials, hyperbole, repetition, and subject emphasis, as well as pronouns and labels to describe roles. These choices signal implied and explicit meanings in language, and critical analysis can problematize where ideologically influenced, and unconscious biases may exist.

Linguistic analysis can highlight language choices related to behaviours consistent with interpellation to patriarchal norms, or subversive resistance. For example, micro analysis can look for 'relations of collocation' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 37) whereby language symbolises the overarching attitude or ideology of a social structure or practice. The word 'maternity' collocates with socio-culturally bound ideas of maternity 'rights', 'pay' and

'leave' that are often perceived as signalling major legislation and an expected caring responsibility equated with statutory time allocation. This relationship is very different when considering common interpretations of 'paternity', which collocates with 'leave' and 'pay' to conjure ideas of minimal involvement for fathers immediately after the birth of their children.

Finally, by adopting a dystopian fiction lens, I identify micro language examples that signify elements of a controlling patriarchal influence on parental decision making. The lexical choices from expectant and experienced parents can generate a semantic field evocative of DF, which is both disruptive and shocking when considering traditional nurturing ideals of parenthood. This method highlights associations with DF to emphasis the influence of organisations as incubators of patriarchal discourse.

Meso Analysis

CDA cannot work in isolation at a linguistic level; this method requires dialectical relational connections to wider concepts and implications. Meso analysis considers the implications of social events and practices as representative of cultural discourse within a local context. For example, a pertinent social event may be a negotiation between an expectant parent and their line manager, which is an event imbued with the established norms and discursive practices of previous line manager interactions with other colleagues.

To establish a relevant meso context with the participants in this research, I referred to and prompted participants to discuss their perceptions of existing policies and practices linked to relevant workplace figures (e.g., line manager or HR). These meso discourses can act positively or negatively upon the subjects as either constraining or enabling factors that affect individuals' perceptions of their workplace options as working parents. This method seeks to identify examples of hidden rules (von Alemann et al., 2017) and vocational norms (Collier, 2019) that can create psychological boundaries organisational contexts, which also includes the influence of 'gatekeepers' (Fodor & Glass, 2018).

Meso discourse can also refer to existing idiomatic or collective socio-cultural narratives (including from DF) that exist beyond the scope of individual experiences. Idiomatic examples that are imbued with historical significance include 'like father, like son', which is a colloquialism that can be used to rationalise patriarchal attitudes. Fictional DF narratives of collective meso discourse include the resistant Five Fishes organisation (see literature review) that resists the totalitarian rules imposed by The Warden of England, via a collective act of subversion in *The Children of Men*. By seeking meso examples of 'subversion', this analysis seeks to find evidence of collective, relational discourse

between working parents that can inspire social justice action towards cultural and policy change.

Macro-analysis

The third level of analysis is at the macro level, which draws a clear line between the individual experiences and decisions of participants and the ideological narratives, such as patriarchal norms, which may have influenced them. This is a crucial level of discourse within the analysis as it elevates the decision making beyond individual agency and local influence to the level of state ideology and ideological state apparatuses as proposed by Althusser (2014). Additionally, the macro level analysis highlights the transdisciplinary aspect of CDA, which draws on theories and related disciplines as theoretical and conceptual frames for analysis.

At the macro level, there is also an opportunity to highlight parallels between DF and reality when individual circumstances can mirror nightmarish macro-DF examples. The macro level provides a basis for explicit blurring of the lines between fiction and reality, such as 'Kafkaesque' bureaucracy (see examples in *The Trial* (Kafka, 2006)). Drawing comparisons to seemingly extreme DF examples highlights the disruptive reality of closer parallels in our 'real' macro environment. I suggest that this DF inspired analysis framework is very helpful for research that aspires to critically subvert what it expected in masculinised academic writing (Gilmore et al., 2019; Grey & Sinclair, 2006). Importantly, this integration of DF has influenced my analytical coding of interview data, which provided a critical, subversive emphasis to my coding practice.

Phase 3.4: Codes

As typical with qualitative research, I used codes to label emerging themes as I progressed through my analysis. In line with the overarching DF-inspired conceptual framework (Masculinity, Parenthood & Subversion), I developed iterative open codes (115 in total) as data analysis progressed. These initial codes were intuitive in nature, many of which were closely related, and reflected my immediate responses to emerging categories from the data. The most popular codes became important themes in the analysis chapter, while other codes were amalgamated into major and sub-major themes. Below I outline the seven major and 17 sub-major themes I encountered during data analysis to summarise how this indicative coding progressed in practice (this will be explored in detail in the next chapter).

Major and Minor Indicative codes in hierarchical order of frequency

1. **Individual Identity Construction as a Working Parent**

- Breadwinner alignment for men
- Primary caregiver alignment for women
- Vulnerable Masculinity
- Ideals of motherhood, fatherhood, and parenthood

2. **Parental Burden**
    - Motherhood Penalty
    - Physical burdens e.g., sleeplessness and repetitive aches and pains of caregiving
    - Emotional burdens e.g., parental mental health
3. **Rigid Structural Organisational Masculinity**
    - Neo-liberal working pressure
    - Normative masculine paradigm for parental leave and flexible working
4. **Cultural Organisational Masculinity**
    - Gatekeeper as a vital influence on working parent rights
    - Passive Fathers not taking responsibility for accessing full range of parental policy
    - Fatherhood silenced in the workplace either through culture or societal influence
5. **Positive Stories of Working Parenthood**
    - the positive experiences I encountered throughout the interview and analysis phases of my research.
6. **Hegemonic Masculinity as an Ideology for Organisations and Working Parents**
    - Breadwinner expectations attached to ideal worker framework
    - Total commitment to career and organisation
    - Uncompromising approach to organisational operations
7. **Parental Club**
    - Subversive attitude to masculine norms of organisational working practices
    - Subversion of parental leave policy.

The codes were greatly influenced by my literature review, DF tropes, and my social justice agenda. I arranged these themes in line with DF narratives for the purpose of constructing a representative counternarrative to the masculinised norms of working parent experience. I followed this abductive process for the levels of discourse I was analysing, too, which I structured in accordance with my theoretical and conceptual frameworks: Masculinity (in a dominant sense), Parenthood (traditional and egalitarian forms), Subversion (resistance to normative, patriarchal culture and rules).

Subversive examples discovered at each stage of analysis provided a basis for a narrative of resistance that can contribute to an overall parental discourse of subversion. This can also contribute towards the central goal of critical discourse analysis, which is to influence policy and cultural change against social injustices. I used DF to create a liminal space where the interpretation of my data is not bound by representing traditional versions of reality, instead I fictionalise the data to contribute to a compelling narrative for change. The next section of this chapter describes the unconventional methodological considerations I followed when planning to create a fictocriticism, which integrated elements of autoethnography, as a novel form of thesis discussion.

Phase 4: Discussion through Fictocriticism and Autoethnography

Phase 4.1: Fictocriticism

Fictocriticism (Gibbs, 1997, 2005; Rhodes, 2015) in organisational research relates to a growing body of research utilising fiction and other artistic forms as sensemaking (Weick, 1995), and importantly creating counternarratives for research. Proponents of the use of fiction in organisational or management contexts include Barbara Czarniawska, whose work includes detective fiction narratives and other canonical novels as allegorical of organisational phenomena (Czarniawska-Joerges & De Monthoux, 1994; Czarniawska, 1999, 2004). Similarly, others have taken contemporary fictions from television such as ‘The Simpsons’ (Rhodes, 2001a), or Disney (Griffin et al., 2017; Griffin et al., 2018); these approaches are established in contemporary organisational research. Popular fiction proves especially important in its dual role as sense making lens and influence upon organisational actors.

Fictocriticism is not purely a singular approach to fictionalising my discussion. In line with contemporary research, which cites a range of fiction as allegorical of organisational and management phenomena (Czarniawska, 1999; Gabriel, 1991, 2016; Gabriel & Connell, 2010; Phillips & Knowles, 2012; Phillips et al., 2014; Rhodes, 2001b, 2015), I draw on DF to blur conceptual lines between DF narratives and organisational phenomena throughout my research. I utilised DF characterisation and plots to inspire my research conceptual framework of parental inequity, masculinity, and subversion. I also took inspiration from DF as a framework for my writing; specifically, I refer to my literature review sub-chapter of the five parental demands. Finally, DF informs the structure of my fictionalised discussion to facilitate a uniquely disruptive and subversive fictocriticism narrative for social justice.

One of the important abstractions that I hope to achieve in my use of DF is the juxtaposition and integration of DF as data and a genre in my research. My writing

engages in ‘a meta-discourse in which the strategies of the telling are part of the point of the tale’ (Gibbs, 1997). Gibbs cites feminist writers (e.g. Cixous et al., 1976; Haraway, 1991) who she suggests wrote fictocriticisms of traditional academic writing, and the reproduction of dominant academic style and form, which serve to reinforce the self-same gender injustices I have discussed in this chapter. Fictocriticism is a resistant, radical form of writing that challenges the authority and validity of the conventional social sciences academic form and style to promote marginalised voices and pursue social justice. An affective a-typical fictocriticism involves invention and the integration of reflexivity. I previously alluded to the importance of reflexivity in my research, and I will discuss it further in my discussion on autoethnography later in this section.

Rhodes (2015) discusses fictocriticism as ‘genre-bending…hybridised writing’ which concerns itself with the act of breaking genre rules to ‘challenge the hierarchies operating between them and the repression such hierarchy enacts’ (p. 294). I am obscuring discourse genres (Fairclough, 2003) encompassing interviews, academic literature, autoethnography and fiction to present a subjective, but hopefully persuasive, response to my research problem. I do so to contribute to the body of criticism of gender hierarchies in the workplace related to parental decisions (as outlined in my literature review). I hope my fictocriticism can represent the ‘multiplicity of subjective experiences’ that Jiwa (2013, p. 104) discusses in reference to ethnicity and autoethnography. My fictocriticism challenges any false presumption that an autoethnography can be representative of any group by creating characters as amalgams of collective experiences. I apply this principle of amalgamation to my interview data, personal experiences, the academic literature, and dystopian fiction. My hope is that I have constructed an affective, DF-inspired fictocriticism that disrupts comfortable readings of this topic and asks the reader to pause and reflect on the problem from a new perspective.

Autoethnography is an important strand of my fictocriticism method. I have already incorporated evocative autoethnographic (Boncori & Smith, 2019; O’Shea, 2018) vignettes as data in my five parenthood demands literature review chapter (Gatto, 2020) and draw on my experiences in my analysis and fictocriticism discussion chapters, too. I use my own experiences to enhance, enrich and interpret the lived experiences I encountered though interview with the working parent participants in this study. I share my personal vignettes in the hope that I may contribute to the de-essentialising narrative of caring masculinities within the gendered motherhood/fatherhood paradigm. I also wish to promote my transformative experiences of ‘re-embodied masculinity’ (Connell, 2005) as an example of greater involvement and understanding for fathers as parents in working contexts.

Phase 4.2: Autoethnography

My research focus has developed to become an increasingly appropriate site for auto-ethnographic methodological influences. Autoethnography is a powerful means of sharing marginalised experiences through individual accounts of specific social phenomena. Kempster and Parry (2018) suggest that autoethnography can open opportunities for theory development in the context of 'difficult to reach but important phenomena' (p. 168), which approximates the challenges of accessing the lived experiences of time-poor working parents. They also propose a major benefit whereby 'insights from one autoethnography can open up rich avenues of discovery' (p. 169). Grenier (2015) goes further, saying 'it allows the author to incorporate multiple voices like theory, subjective experience, and even fantasy' (p. 335). Given my use of DF, as integral to my method and my fictocriticism approach, autoethnography represents a justifiable additional source of data and writing style. However, I acknowledge the criticisms inherent in adopting this style of writing, including accusations of lacking research rigour or being 'a bit airy-fairy' (p. 334) or denigrated as 'self-obsessed' and targeted for online abuse from fellow academics (Campbell, 2017). I believe such criticisms are ill-founded and misunderstand the potentially transformative impact of honest autoethnographic writing upon the reader.

My autoethnographic writing aspires to normalise my physical and emotional experiences as a new parent who embraces caregiving as part of my personal sense of masculinity. As discussed in the literature review chapter, the process of re-embodiment through caring masculinities and caring competencies, such as nappy changing and fathers taking sole responsibility for children, is a vital avenue towards changing shared cultural constructions of parenting and masculinities. I want my writing to act as a counter-narrative to neo-liberal constructions of the HM inspired 'ideal worker' who keeps work and home life separate. I also hope that, by sharing my experiences (both affirmative and vulnerable), I can contribute to a widening of discourse on what it means to be a working parent and what role masculinities play in this identity.

Conclusion

It is fitting that this chapter begins and ends with my personal story as a direct influence upon my research. I cannot separate myself from my methodology; it is infused throughout with my personal subjective perceptions and deeply held values and motivations. I have provided an overview of my positionality in the hope that I can reasonably justify my methodological choices, which have frequently 'blurred the lines' between fiction and reality. Becoming a working parent during this PhD has become an integral influence on all aspects of my methodology, and I am attempting to live 'caring

masculinities' (Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Elliott, 2016; Jordan, 2020) as a vehicle to 'masculine re-embodiment' (Connell, 2005) and as a rejection of domination (Elliott, 2016). In my research, my personal story enabled me to connect with the participants in my study and it is this connection that I hope has provided the rich data for my analysis and dystopian fictocriticism chapters.

My ethics section highlights my use of critical ethics in alignment with my research motivation to contribute to social justice for working parents. I also adopt a reflexive 'ethics of care' that incorporated the emotional and nurturing values that are highly influential when exploring this subject. Overall, my ethical position charts a different course to the conventional methods of masculinised social sciences academic research, which often draws on the principles of gender neutrality, measurable and quantifiable data, and positivist interpretations as a paradigm.

I actively subvert conventional research methods by integrating DF into my Critical Discourse Analysis (DFCDA) method. DF tropes and ideas marry effectively with CDA to enhance my methodological focus on HM as an influence on working parent discourses, as well as providing a template for examples of subversion. CDA draws a distinct line between the micro normative gender performances (Butler, 1988, 2009, 2011) in our everyday discourse and the ideological HM influences acting upon us from a structural societal level. DF enabled me to consider speculative interpretations of this 'social wrong' (expressed through the semiosis of HM) in working parent discourses, and present them in a novel, unconventional way to form a compelling counternarrative.

To be consistent with my methodological principles, my data collection was an open and unconventional approach, too. I encouraged all interview participants to speak openly and embraced their tangential dialogue to foster trust, and respect in the interview relationship. My use of image elicitation encouraged participants to provide extended and meaningful narratives, drawing on associative visualisation rather than just episodic, chronological recall and reflection. I also established a baseline of trust and mutuality with the participants through sharing my own experiences of parenting, which is consistent with my dialectical-relational approach to DFCDA. My approach was deeply rooted in an embodied and involved sense of my own role within this research topic and I often found myself recognising facets of participants' reflections that echoed my own experiences. These moments affirmed my commitment to 'writing my doctoral thesis differently' (Weatherall, 2018) and the importance of allowing my own emotions to affect and shape my writing process.

Finally, my approach to ‘writing differently’ derives from the unconventional method of ‘fictocriticism’ as a vehicle to challenge dominant forms of writing. In addition to drawing on DF at all stages of my thesis method, I fictionalise my discussion chapter to provide a compelling DF counternarrative that disrupts conventional approaches to data interpretation. Additionally, I incorporate my own autoethnographic contributions surrounding my expectations and experiences of parenting to enrich the story of my research and allow my own vulnerabilities, joys, and re-embodied masculinity to play an integral part in my research story.

Chapter 4: Analysis

Introduction

Patriarchal discourse in organisations influences working parent experiences in a variety of ways. It is perceived in different ways, from the coerced and constrained acceptance that some primary caregiving mothers exhibit, to a patriarchal career dividend, associated with HM, that is willingly accepted by some fathers. This chapter incorporates the tropes of Dystopian Fiction (DF) to inform an adapted Critical Discourse Analysis (DFCDA). By using DF, I reveal incidences of the influence of patriarchal discourse and the process of 'interpellation' (Althusser, 2014) to the patriarchal norms of parental inequity in work and family contexts, symbolised by the 'breadwinner' as a model of HM. I will also share some examples of positive experiences and, crucially, active, and potential subversive action that can shift the tide from dominant masculine discourse to collective solidarity.

This chapter will review seven themes (see appendix 5) that represent micro, meso and macro levels of discourse. As discussed in my methodology chapter, I interpret three layers of discourse according to textual analysis (micro), dialectical-relational analysis (meso) and ideological socio-cultural analysis (macro). Within this framework of three levels, I also integrate dystopian fiction allegories to provide interdisciplinary, meta-analysis of parental reality alongside speculative fictions. Below, I outline the seven themes and briefly summarise the characteristics of each alongside associated theoretical links:

- **Individual Identity Construction as a Working Parent**
    - This theme emerged as a constant consideration for the participants expressing their perceived working parent identities, reminiscent of 'performances' (Goffman, 1990) in the workplace. Identity construction incorporates different stages of the working parent journey from expectations in pregnancy to experiences of work-life tension.
- **Parental Burden**
    - The 'parental burden' is an umbrella term that encompasses the 'motherhood penalty' (Aisenbrey et al., 2009; Budig & England, 2001; Correll et al., 2007; Gangl & Ziefle, 2009), alongside the physical burdens of sleeplessness (S. Acker & Armenti, 2004; Rose, Brady, Yerkes, & Coles, 2015) and physical caregiving (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Locke & Yarwood, 2017; Wakabayashi & Donato, 2005) while trying to '*keep the plates spinning*'.
- **Rigid Structural Organisational Masculinity**

    - This is the first of two related organisational masculinity themes. This theme focuses on local organisational policies and procedures oriented around preparation for parenthood, return to work, and the lived experience of a working parenthood.
- **Cultural Organisational Masculinity**
    - This theme represents discourses that emerged concerning the maintenance and reproduction of culturally dominant masculinity. These were often informal, tacit discourses concerning interpersonal, relational interactions, which serve to reinforce and reproduce the gender regime in the workplace.
- **Positive Stories: Patriarchal Dividend**
    - There were limited positive accounts of working parenthood that could be attributed to the organisation context, rather than the expected joy of becoming a parent. This section specifically addresses the patriarchal dividend through the lens of flexibility as enabled by the masculine organisation.
- **Patriarchal Discourse and Hegemonic Masculinity in Organisations for Working Parents**
    - This theme explores the ideological influences affecting individual working parent attitudes and actions. As Gatrell describes in her empirical 2005 'Hard Labour' research, though the rise of the involved father has accompanied a shift in societal expectations of working parents, the reality is still reflective of hyper masculinised structural and ideological patriarchy.
- **Parental Club**
    - This final theme is placed last as an indication of the causality of the preceding themes. The 'Parental Club' became a proxy for collective acts of subversion, both formal and informal within a knowledgeable meso discourse of collegiate working parents in creating their own solidarity within informal, local networks.

These seven principal themes emerged from my data analysis of 19 parents (three of whom were interviewed twice with a gap in time). As discussed in my methodology chapter, I follow an abductive approach in arriving at these themes. Some of the themes align with findings from my literature review (such as cultural and structural masculinity in organisations), while other unexpected findings emerged (such as the parental club as a collective experience for working parents).

Method Recap

As previously discussed, my conceptual framework drew on dystopian fiction tropes of 'masculinity', in an absolutist patriarchal framing, alongside 'parenthood' and 'subversion'. I applied these themes deductively to my data set as a lens through which I could construct a social justice narrative. As espoused in CDA methodology (Fairclough, 2013), this analysis contributes towards social justice narratives in working parent research with a view to subverting the social 'wrong' of working parent gender inequity.

In the next section of this chapter, I will review each theme systematically and provide illustrative examples from my participant interviews. I code each participant with a pseudonym (see table 3), which are taken from dystopian fiction characters in the novels that directly influenced my construction of the dystopian fiction tropes (see appendix 1). None of these pseudonyms were selected to draw character comparisons with the participants; any perceived similarity is purely a coincidence. In this chapter, I demonstrate the three phases of my dystopian fiction inspired critical discourse analysis and present this using side by side presentations of quote and micro/meso/macro discourses (see example in Gatto & Callahan, 2021) at the start of each theme.

Participant #	Participant Pseudonym	Participant #	Participant Pseudonym
1	Offred	11	Montag
2	Nick	12	Jean
3	Ruth	13	Patrick
4	Tommy	14	George
5	Didier	15	Emma
6	Susan	16	Bernard
7	Allie	17	Lenina
8	Tunde	18	Winston
9	Oryx	19	Julia
10	Crake		

Table 3 - Participant Pseudonyms

Coding rounds

To apply the four stages on DFCDA that I described in the Methodology chapter (see figure 8 repeated below) I undertook four rounds of coding. These included one indicative round of thematic coding and three systematic rounds of Dystopian Fiction Inspired Critical Discourse Analysis (DFCDA). The first systematic round applied the micro, meso, and macro analysis in concert with the DF conceptual themes (see stages 1 & 2) in order to 'Identify the dominant styles, genres, and discourses' (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 30) that connected to hegemonic masculinity and subversion. The final two rounds were more

focused on stages three and four of DFCDA, which connects to the Dystopian Fictocriticism chapter that follows this chapter.

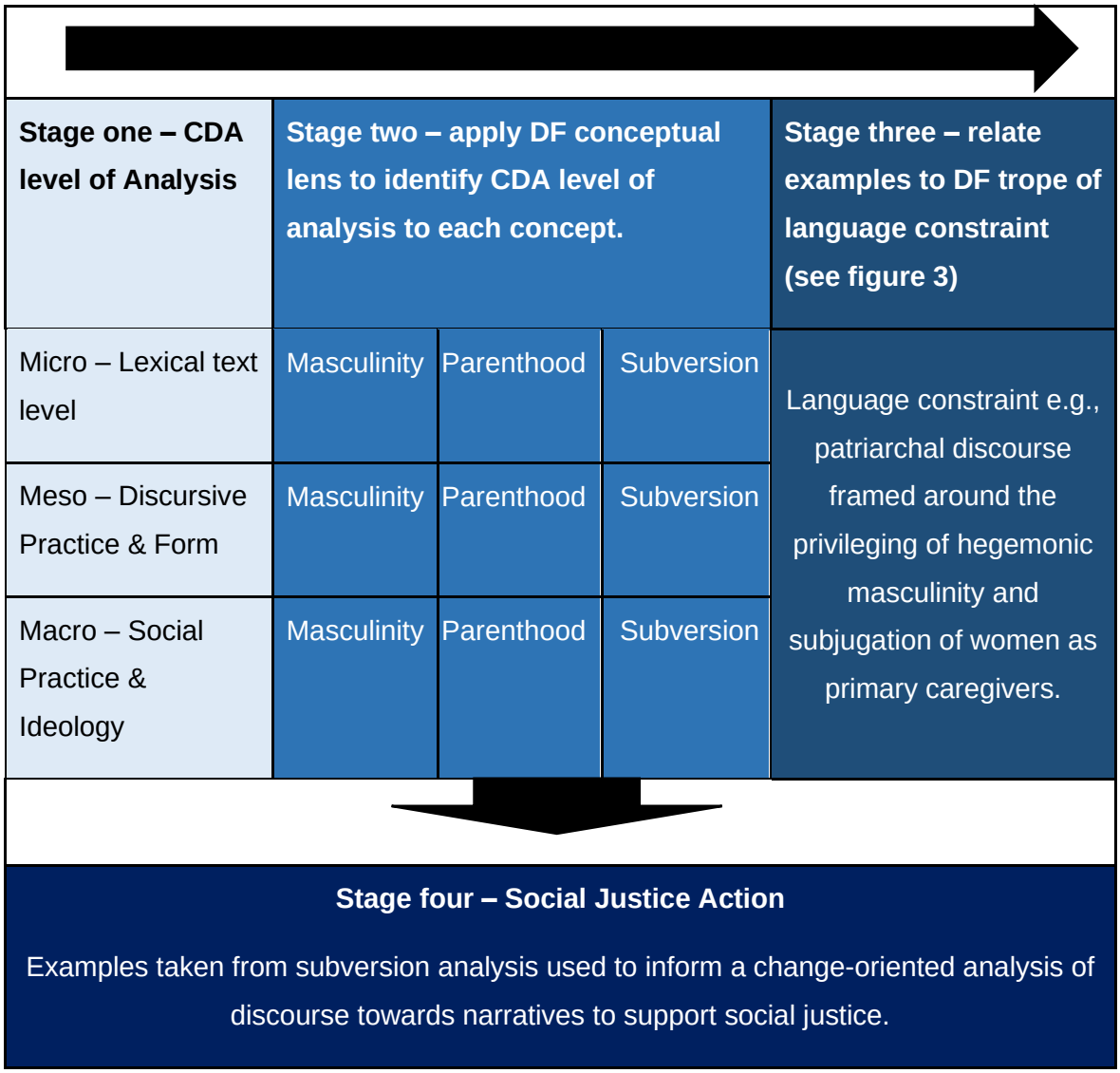

Figure 8 repeated

Round one: indicative coding

In round one of coding, I identified indicative themes and populated an informal table that represented my 'preliminary coding scheme' (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 132) of themes and associated quotes in parallel with my transcription process. This informal activity gave me important initial insights into the participants' stories in preparation for the systematic DFCDA coding rounds.

Rounds two to four: systematic coding

The systematic DFCDA coding was separated into three sequential rounds from broad sub-codes and multiple discourses, to specific major codes and discourses (Glesne &

Peshkin, 1992, p. 134). In round two, I identified themes (115) and discourses (see figure 8, stage 2), as well as indicative links to relevant literature. In round three, I refined a range of sub-major and sub-major themes. In round four, I decided on major themes informed by the previous rounds, and assigned associated character roles for the subversion dystopian fictocriticism.

A blended approach to DFCDA coding

The DFCDA process involves a blended approach of deductive DF informed discourses: 'Parenting', 'Masculinity' and 'Subversion', and fiction allegories, with intuitively ranked, inductive theme generation during each round of analysis. As I align with Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach to CDA (Fairclough, 2001, 2013), I interpreted each participants' contribution as a form of 'working parent' social practice or social event (e.g., navigating policy and discussing parenthood with colleagues or partners). I used this approach to connect participant experiences to macro level 'semiotic elements' (p. 27). These 'semiotic elements' could reinforce the influence of patriarchal discourse, or offer the basis for individual or collective subversion. By undertaking three systematic rounds of DFCDA analysis, I reviewed layers of the participants' discourses in a 'progressive process of sorting and defining' (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 133) to identify 'semiosis as an irreducible element of all material social processes' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 205). For the working parents in this study, the primary focus for semiosis of hegemonic masculinity linked to 'breadwinner' discourse, and subversion linked to critical perspectives of existing social practice & processes.

The semiotics associated with working parent expectations and experiences exist at micro, meso and macro levels of discourse. Below, I provide detailed examples of these systematic coding rounds to represent my journey 'entering the code mines' (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, pp. 132-137) of my data. I also provide a rationale for my systematic approach in an effort to control some biases associated with sequential coding.

Coding round two

In this round, I reviewed each participant's transcripts and identified contributions that represented thematically significant links to the triad of discourses 'parenthood', 'masculinity' and/or 'subversion' (see example table sample below). I reviewed each participant in chronological order from earliest interview to latest (with the exception of the three participants I interviewed twice who I analysed together for consistency). This meant each participant was analysed in the sequence with their partner to allow comparisons between partners. I applied initial theme codes to each contribution and prioritised them according to the most prevalent or important ideas. I also coded each quote according to

a hierarchy of discourses to illustrate how each contribution was simultaneously exhibiting multiple discourses. Finally, I made initial links to existent theory or literature that could relate to the ideas discussed in each contribution.

Quote	Comment	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Primary Discourse	Secondary Discourse	3rd Discourse	4th Discourse	Links to theory
P6 - *you can imagine So, talk, talk more about your, your husband is not there. You know, so and some job also very demanding he goes to work about eight o'clock and even before it I think every day, he comes back when seven o'clock sometimes after seven is it pm* MG - *Long day* P6 - *So you know, you cannot see me Husband for this time and you've just given birth, imagine what's going to do to you, you know. So yeah, I feel like the policy needs to be improved in terms of paternity leave. Yeah. Physically*.	Meso discourse of the vulnerable parental social practice for mothers as marginalised in the order of discourse that prioritises masculine social practice of the ideal worker. Macro discourse of patriarchal policies that serve to perpetuate the motherhood penalty in interdependent, relational ways through the downstream impacts of mental health impact on isolated mothers through sole childcare.	Mother as Primary Caregiver	Organisation: Masculinity	Policies enabling or constraining parental involvement	Meso Parenting	Meso Masculinity	Macro Masculinity	Macro Parenting	Murgia and Poggio (2013) Gatrell (2005) Hochschild (1997)

Table 4 - Coding round two: systematic interview analysis for DFCDA

Coding round three

This round refined the previous coding to identify a series of sub-major themes. I reviewed each contribution in counter-chronological order to mitigate for some possible biases towards the first participants that may have influenced my round two theme generation. I also began to consider how these themes could contribute to a narrative for the dystopian fictocriticism chapter.

Round 3 – Sub-Major Theme	Round 3 – Discourses	Round 3 - Character attribute	Round 3 - Organisation attribute	Round 3 - Possible Character?
Absent father in working parent week - ideal worker expectations of working fathers	Meso discourse of silenced fathers in organisational discourse	Motherhood Penalty	Normative Masculine rigidity	Subversive agent

Table 5 - Coding round three: systematic interview analysis for DFCDA

Coding round four

In round four I refined the analysis to seven major themes (see below):

- Individual Identity Construction as a Working Parent
- Parental Burden
- Rigid Structural Organisational Masculinity
- Cultural Organisational Masculinity
- Positive Stories of Working Parenthood
- Dominant Masculinity as an Ideology for Organisations and Working Parents
- Parental Club

These themes form the structure for the data analysis that I present for the remainder of this chapter. The themes are not equally distributed, this is due to the varying weights of evidence from the data. I also discuss some examples of working parent responses to the 'ideal worker/parent' questions, and comparisons between participants' responses to some questions. This analysis will be embedded within appropriate themes.

Thematic Analysis

This section is separated into the seven themes to provide illustrative examples from my data that support each major theme, while also providing some nuances that formed the sub-major themes and discourses in phase 2. For each theme, I display one thematic analysis example using a table format to show the systematic process of DFCDA I have followed. For the remainder of each theme, I present analysis of each participant's contribution using indented quotes. I have also used three highlight colours in the quotes to indicate micro/meso/macro analysis discourses.

Individual Identity Construction as a Working Parent – Primary Micro & Secondary Meso Discourse of Parenthood and Masculinity

Working parents construct their individual identities according to a range of factors. This section focuses on the internal enablers and constraints that act upon each parent differently, though often fall down the lines of gender and the cultural ideology of the 'breadwinner' father and the primary caregiver mother (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Burnett et al., 2012; Gatrell, 2005) as an enduring patriarchal paradigm. Foundational feminist writer, Simone De Beauvoir alluded to the motherhood penalty for women in 1949 that endures in the UK today (Brearley, 2021):

> *'Woman's enslavement to the species and the limits of her individual abilities are facts of extreme importance; the woman's body is one of the essential elements of the situation she occupies in this world. But her body is not enough to define her; it has a lived reality only as taken on by consciousness through actions and within a society; biology alone cannot provide an answer to the question that concerns us: why is woman the Other' (p. 71)*

Seventy years later, women are still marginalised as the 'other' in the identity construction of many working parents, and their access to the masculine norms of organisational reality is partly constrained through internalised identity construction for women and men. Judith Butler encapsulates a post structuralist perspective on 'otherness' in her deconstruction of the reified hegemonic masculine discourse expressed in our everyday language:

> *'Within a language pervasively masculinist, a phallogocentric language, women constitute the unrepresentable. In other words, women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity.' (Butler, 2011, p. 13)*

For working parents, the 'othering' often begins through the physical manifestation of the 'unrepresentable' pregnant mother in the workplace, but I also believe there are aspects of the 'unrepresentable fatherhood' (McLaughlin & Muldoon, 2014; Murgia & Poggio, 2009) and a 'patriarchal deficit' (Bailey, 2015) at play in parental identity construction. The macro discourses of hegemonic masculinity in this section also reveal a narrative of reproduced patriarchy through the individual 'interpellation' (Althusser, 2014) of working parents as subjects of the gender hierarchy in organisations (J. Acker, 1990).

Considering the representation of the 'other' in dystopian fiction (DF), there are many pertinent examples. Limiting the theme to parenthood, two DF characters stand out as representations of motherhood, and one father also highlights the experiences of men within patriarchy. In the oppressive, autocratic state created in *The Children of Men* (James, 2018), the expectant mother's principled othering is an act of subversion. In

contrast, the protagonist in *Red Clocks* is othered through her desire to become a mother against a conservative political ideology of anti-abortion, heteronormative family legislation. The 'othered' father in *Swastika Night* is a victim of patriarchal discourse and the imposition of traditional fatherhood as an honoured performance of HM that alienate fathers from their children. His experiences of separation from his children (especially his daughter) are comparable to the 'patriarchal deficit' (Bailey, 2015) concept in contemporary working parenting studies. There are detrimental 'othering' effects on both fathers and mothers, but significantly greater disadvantages are expressed through the othering of working mothers.

The 'other'

The first example below illustrates participant Offred's physical and emotional 'othering' that affects her identity construction. Offred was visibly in the latter stages of pregnancy and fatigued at the time of the interview. In this extract the baby's movement forms a catalyst for her re-embodied reality as a working parent. This creates a tension with her previous working life and 'ideal worker' (J. Acker, 1990; Baker & Brewis, 2019; Ollilainen, 2019; Zuo & Tang, 2000) identity. Furthermore, her embodied experiences herald a sense of identity shift and 'emotion work' (Hochschild, 1979).

Quote	**Critical Discourse Analysis**
Offred *- I can feel a baby moving and I'm tired and I'm much less mobile and I think the baby has become something much more real than it was at the very start some and I think that's probably influenced it as well and I think I lost my emotional… and I cry at the drop of a hat. and that's probably that's probably fuelled how these things have changed as well.*	**Micro Discourse** of parental physicality for mothers. Offred uses figurative language to evoke the sensation of pregnancy, 'I can feel the baby moving…'. This micro discourse shows how Offred's pregnant body and baby have become inescapably 'more real' and entwined with her working parent identity.
Mark: and do you think those emotions are managed within the organisation? *Offred: I think I probably do a very good job of hiding how I actually feel about it.* *Mark: oh ok*	**Meso discourse** of new parenthood tensions with masculine performativity in relational discourse at work and home 'I think I lost my emotional… and I cry at the drop of a hat'. Here Offred hints at insecurity for her divergence from the perceived norm of emotional control stating 'I probably do a good job of hiding how I actually feel about it…' to draw on stoic masculine behaviours.

Offred: yeah, in the sense that before I am very keen not to let anyone down **P1A_728-735**	**Macro discourse** of 'emotion work' to 'other' herself within the masculine discourse of the organisation, I am very keen not to let anyone down'. Offred's comment here indicates interpellation in her desire to maintain the normative 'status quo' as an 'ideal worker' and productive employee

The discourses of physical identity change and interpellation to the masculine norm of the 'ideal worker' in Higher Education contexts (Ollilainen, 2019) illustrates how the process of 'othering' is a micro, meso and macro constraint acting upon working mothers. In *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1996), expectant mothers symbolise both hope and dread as they navigate extreme patriarchy as oppressed surrogate Handmaid. In the example represented above, the study participant, Offred, also shares a mixture of the wonder surrounding new life, alongside conformity to masculine discourse in the workplace. This example is a microcosm of similar contributions from the three other expectant mothers in the group I interviewed. All were successful within the organisational norms of their careers and all found themselves adapting to the patriarchal norms of pregnancy in the workplace.

There were some examples of positive peer support related to the physical impact of pregnancy to counterbalance Offred's experiences. Allie, an expectant parent in her third trimester, spoke to me in a positive and confident tone throughout her interview. She was jocular and honest in sharing her pregnancy experiences as shown in the example below:

> ***Allie**: my immediate team has been brilliant in terms of my sickness so for example yesterday I emailed the team, 8 in the morning, but I've been sick from 1 in the morning it was 8 and I'm still being sick I've got up to get ready and I've emailed everyone and just said I know I'm on duty today and I'm continuing to be sick I'm not going to be able to make it today. And every single person, without fail, just said yeah that's fine. And, at no point of time during the rest of the day did I feel that I was letting anyone down.* ***P7_834-841***

Similar to Offred, Allie constructs a micro discourse of physical pregnancy and emphasises the visceral impact of nausea with the repetition of 'being sick' 'still being sick' and 'continuing to be sick'. This repetition mirrors the cyclical nature of sickness for expectant mothers and contrasts to the constant commitment expected of the 'ideal worker'. Allie describes a more open approach to her sickness with her meso discourse of

parental support from the 'immediate team…' who act as enablers of her identity construction as a working expectant parent. Here, Allie is re-constructing her identity by integrating her physical pregnancy into normal working discourse with colleagues, who reciprocate the 'new normal' by being supportive. This meso discourse contradicts the oppressive macro discourse of not 'letting anyone down' and contrasts with Offred's example of concealing her physical state. However, Allie still demonstrates awareness of the masculine norms of the ideal worker paradigm.

Another expectant parent, late in her third trimester spoke of her students' positive support, but also repeated similar awareness of 'compromises' she expected she might have to make. By curtailing her openness as a pregnant women, she conformed with the hegemonic masculine discourse that marginalises working parent interactions in the workplace.

All the expectant mothers I interviewed were partly instrumental in 'othering' themselves through interpellation to masculine discourse, while also being 'othered' through the normative, patriarchal culture of their workplace. Encouragingly, peers and students within this context were very supportive of expectant parents when included in an open discourse of physical identity. There was a sense of acceptance amongst expectant mothers that their identity will change, and there was some sense of anticipating the 'motherhood penalty' (Correll et al., 2007; Hennekam, Syed, Ali, & Dumazert, 2019; Kanji & Hupka-Brunner, 2015; Slootjes, McKinstry, & Kenny, 2016). In contrast, the 'patriarchal dividend' received by fathers as 'breadwinners' was rationalised by a range of participants as part of the expected norm of the workplace. The mutual endorsement of this fatherhood identity from men and women alludes to further interpellation to patriarchal norms in working parent identity construction.

Rationalising fathers' career prioritisation & the breadwinner identity

Whichever way they rationalised it, the majority of the fathers I interviewed continued their career as 'breadwinners' and made no compromise to their careers. Conversely, women often consciously protected their partner's careers and sacrificed themselves in the process. In this first example, Oryx who was imminently due in her third trimester, but pragmatic in her assessment of her and Crake's parental identities, discussed her acceptance of Crake's identity as the provider in their relationship:

> ***Oryx*** *- ...although he's [**Crake**] keen to be involved he will have less involvement because of, there's an element of hunter gatherer instinct, male instinct with, there is some of that, where, you know, he wants to provide for the family he wants to be the batman who does that. you know. you know he's a very male, male and that's, that's fine and I've gone with*

> *that. Not because I believe in that, not necessarily, but because I understand the nature, human nature, but I also from the financial point of view it makes more sense.*
>
> ***Mark**: Sure, sure. That's absolutely fine.*
>
> ***Oryx**: Whether that's to my detriment or not it might be career wise. We try not to let it be [**pause**] it depends on your support network as well.*

Oryx's micro discourse of, 'I've gone with that' indicates a degree of agency in her decision, but her comment, 'I understand the nature, human nature' highlights her interpellation to the masculine norm of essentialism. There is a meso discourse of her awareness of the discursive motherhood penalty when she refers to 'my detriment' the dialectical relational comment, 'we try not to let it be' and 'support network' indicates her interdependent identity construction as a working parent. However, her long pause suggests a degree of uncertainty. Oryx also refers to the macro discourse of the breadwinner identity that 'makes sense' financially. She also demonstrates her interpellation to reproduce traditional cultural masculine tropes of the 'hunter', 'male instinct', 'male, male' and 'batman' as innate identity traits for her husband, Crake.

Oryx's contribution demonstrates the process of rationalisation as she prioritises Crake's identity, even at the potential expense of her own career. This example relates to the essentialist rhetoric utilised in the novel, 'Swastika Night' (Burdekin, 1985) and the opening creed extolling the 'heroic virtues' of masculinity. Drawing on discourses of immutable 'human nature', Oryx shows clear signs of interpellation to patriarchal hegemonic masculinity and the breadwinner model of family life. First time, expectant father Crake was consistent in his self-identification as a breadwinner, too. Speaking with a relaxed and open manner throughout the interview, he shared his expectations of his role compared to his observations of exhausted colleagues arriving at work:

> ***Crake**: I feel very much from my point of view it will be a bit easier than Oryx because obviously Oryx will be the lead carer as it were. I've got to go out and win the bread, as it were. Still quite traditional in that way, a bit old fashioned, but I do see that largely as my role.*

Crake's response here does not deviate from Oryx's representation of his identity and role as the breadwinner. His interpellation to macro patriarchal discourse is overt when he alludes to gendered social roles for women as 'obviously' the 'lead carer' (Eagly et al., 2000). Crake's identity construction is strongly aligned to patriarchal discourse of his financial responsibility to 'win the bread'. He also alludes to meso discourses of transitional and egalitarian parental roles (Hochschild & Machung, 2012) differing from his

'traditional' and 'old fashioned' approach. However, he is certain in his confirmation of breadwinning as 'my role'.

Oryx and Crake's mutual alignment with the roles of breadwinner father and caregiver mothers is a clear example of their interpellation as traditional working parent subjects within patriarchy. Crake's unabashed ownership of his 'old fashioned' approach suggests that he has little inclination to transition into the egalitarian 'involved father' role. Importantly, Oryx resigns herself to this from a pragmatic standpoint due to financial reasons, whereas I interpreted Crake's responses (throughout the interview) as constructing his fatherhood identity being intrinsically linked to being the breadwinner, regardless of financial necessity.

Experienced father, Montag, also expressed traditional views of his fatherhood role. He was thoughtful, relaxed, but assertive during his interview showing comfort in his traditional parental identity. His wife was the primary carer and he described this as a clear motivation for his identity as the breadwinner.

> **Montag**: *In terms of the ideal father. I think it comes a little bit from my background. Which is, I come from a very sort of working class. I get the kind of stuff one of the main, one of the main roles of a father figure is to provide things. My wife left work when she had our first. She's been off looking after our new one. So, I'm very much the main provider in the house and I think that's. I find that is quite an important part of what I see as being a father. If you're the main provider and that kind of puts quite a lot of emphasis on what I do at work, because in order for me to continue being the provider, I need to do certain things at work, so I need to produce at work as well. And work wants to see me doing things. Academics can be kind of precarious at times. So, there's a certain pressure to make sure that I'm producing what work want. So, then I can continue to provide.*

Montag's micro discourse emphasises traditional constructions of masculine parenthood. He describes his fatherhood role as 'provider' four times in this example and reinforces this assertion by qualifying it as the 'main' role and later the 'main provider'. Montag was drawing on hierarchical language to emphasise his perception of fatherhood priorities within his relationship. His meso discourse constructs his role through relational decision making, with his wife and his workplace. His role is relationally constructed with his wife and he is interdependent as the secondary caregiver with his wife as the primary caregiver who 'left work'. He is also interdependent with his employer by producing what work wants to remain employable and secure and this is linked to 'a certain pressure' to produce and remain the breadwinner, which reproduces the discursive workplace norms of breadwinner fathers and masculine ideal workers. On a macro level, Montag cites

socio-cultural influences of his background and upbringing; he draws on the stereotype tropes of traditional masculinity in working class families centring on the man as provider. This macro discourse, imbued with traditional masculinity, is the first influence he draws on when describing the ideal father, which indicates it is his primary influence alongside the imperative to 'provide'.

Montag's contribution represents one of the most traditional examples from the participants I interviewed of the father as the breadwinner. Sadly, despite asking Montag on more than one occasion, I was unable to arrange an interview with his wife to compare her view of his identity construction. In fact, throughout the interview, Montag referred to the mother of his children as 'the wife' or 'my wife' which further illustrates his traditional role as a patriarchal working parent and is another example of 'othering' by erasure from the narrative. Montag's decision not to facilitate his wife's involvement may indicate that he wished to maintain control of the narrative, or may simply have been a privacy concern, no reason was offered.

There were six other examples of fathers performing this provider role. For most, this role is rationalised by the inference of mutual agreement between parents and also a sense of individual motivation. The combination of financial imperatives to provide with cultural influences from socio-cultural experiences (past and present), remains a strong factor in the continuation and rationalisation of the breadwinner father. The next sub-theme expands on the relational aspects of identity construction.

Relational Identity construction

Relational identity in this section refers to the dialogue and a discursive context between parents that strongly influences parental decision making and identity construction. Tunde (expectant father), who came across as a self-deprecating and highly enthusiastic in the interview, discussed his decision process concerning caregiving and career choices. Identity construction, here, is framed around a masculine association with career fulfilment and ambition:

> ***Tunde**: Allie earns a lot more than me and I wasn't, at the time when we were planning it, and to the point when just shortly after we found out, I was in a job that wasn't the most... a very basic role. As much to get in my foot into the door. And I was saying to Allie, look if it makes sense, I'll quit my job and I'll look after them if that's money makes sense moneywise. Not through when I'm looking back probably not through like necessarily wanting to, but more because, because it made sense. In the same way that I guess that females in the 70s and 80s you know my mum quit work to look after me so … It's Allie earns the most money wouldn't make any sense for her to quit, and it would make our life very difficult to*

> *be perfectly honest. In between that time, I'm in between just shortly after when we found out I got a promotion at work, a far more fulfilling job, there's more prospects to move on. To the point where there's more money as well, but it's still I'm still sort of bringing him less money, a lot less money than Allie, definitely. If somebody is going to leave work, it would be me. But it… it would be a huge blow to me to do that now …* ***P8_164-184***

Tunde used the micro discourse of career status and earning power as a crucial influence on relational parental identify construction and the potential decision to become a stay-at-home parent. He juxtaposes Allie's role as a partner who 'earns a lot more', to his 'very basic role' as a dichotomous relationship that informs his initial intentions to be the primary caregiver. Interestingly, he does not share any intrinsic motivation to be a caregiver, it is framed as a pragmatic, financial option contingent on his work identity. Tunde then shares his dialectic relational discourse with Allie, to negotiate this proposes financial decision 'if it makes sense'. He then repeats variations of 'if it made/makes sense' to draw on macro discourses of marketized, rational decision making to decide parental caregiving roles, whereby the parent who is a financially lower contributor should be the caregiver. At the end of his contribution, his semantics shift to create a more intrinsic, emotional link between work as 'fulfilling' and with 'prospects', and the risk of leaving work as potentially 'a huge blow'. This emotive language emphasises the importance of his work identity as a priority within the relational working parent identity construction.

Tunde's partner, Allie also discussed their decision making and the influence of her caregiving parental identity. Allie's perspective on this is very interesting as we can see the complementary influences of Tunde's masculine occupational identity construction and Allie's nurturing, intrinsic motivation to be a caregiver:

> ***Allie****: … I just wanted to be there as their mother. I wanted to be there, but I would also, I would have been happy to have shared it with him. Erm [pause] and I understand from the financial point of view, that made total sense [pause] erm, but I still had that real point, there was one point where it was like, we were talking about him staying off permanently, him, him being the main caregiver and everything in my sort of, sort of feminist principles was going, yes! This is wonderful, and this is how it should be. But I, as a mum, or a potential mum,* ***[I was thinking]*** *'but what about me?'* ***[laughter]*** *'What about me?' So really selfish, but that's where my brain was… and I didn't expect that. I thought, oh I'll be back at work, I love my work. He could look after them, but really like emotive sense of this person, as it was at the time... and my, my need to give them care and to be there with them was something that really, really, I did not expect.* ***P7_220-231***

Allie's micro discourse evokes a clear sense of her emotional motivation to nurture and 'be there' and 'look after them' as a primary caregiver. This is reinforced when she states 'my need to give them care' which signals her intrinsic, nurturing motivation as a parent. Mirroring Tunde, Allie also cites the macro discourse of the rational, marketized 'financial point of view' that 'made total sense' as a factor in their shared decision. Notably, the micro pauses either side of that statement suggest a degree of trepidation concerning her commitment to that opinion. Another interesting micro discourse Allie used earlier in the interview was her rejection of the term 'breadwinner' and instead labels herself as the 'key salary', a symbolic choice to reject the masculine associations that could also be motivated by avoiding emasculating labels for her partner. In her meso discourse, she describes the relational decision making as a 'we' discourse and draws on her own meta-influences through 'feminist principles' when stating 'this is how it should be', which further establishes her support of gender equality in parenthood. However, this is immediately contrasted to the tension with her identity 'as a mum'. Her rhetorical exclamation, 'What about me?', sandwiching her own laughter, signals a pivotal shift from meso discourse back from the principles of feminist empowerment to her internal motivation and 'need to care'. She concludes this shift describing it as an almost unconscious outcome stating (almost incredulously) it 'was something that really, really, I did not expect'. This is an example of relational identity construction with the end result of the reproduction of traditional gender role parental caregiving in spite of a clearly acknowledged financial rationale for the father to assume the primary caregiver role.

The relational decision to bypass financial justifications for shared parenting between Tunde and Allie points to a degree of interpellation from both parents to reinforce patriarchal dynamics. Tunde's career and occupational identity is directly prioritised by his choice to step away from caregiving, and indirectly prioritised through Allie's preference for caregiving. This example echoes another couple I interviewed, Winston and Julia where Julia was the major earner in the relationship. Again, the relational discourse in their discussion centred on prioritising the Winston's occupational identity in concert with Julia's preference to perform a nurturing role. These examples signal the possibility that cultural influences act to preserve traditional representations of hegemonic masculinity with some primary earner mothers opting to become primary caregivers to fulfil an intrinsic need to care, which enables secondary earner fathers to retain their career identities. Gender hegemony also plays a significant role in the novel *The Power* (Alderman, 2016) where the hegemony is inverted as a consequence of a kinetic power, which evolves in women who become the new dominant gender. In this novel, as in these parental examples, the physical factors play a significant role in establishing role hierarchy.

However, it is the story of that 'power' that ensures gender-based hegemony is reproduced as an emotional and cultural influence on identity, especially for working parents.

Identity construction as a working parent is a broad theme and I primarily focus on the physical realities of pregnancy alongside the pervasive breadwinner/caregiver influences. These sub-themes interrelate with hegemonic masculinity and 'feminine' nurturing identities and emotional motivations. Simone De Beauvoir stated that '[t]o be a complete individual, equal to man, woman has to have access to the male world as man does to the female one, access to the *other;* but the demands of the *other* are not symmetrical in the two cases.' (Beauvoir, 2011 [1949], p. 818) This statement is still representative of the gender imbalance in identity construction for parents within this section. The 'male world' is still typified by the patriarchal norms of the workplace for fathers, working family life remains a site of resilient patriarchal norms before and after childbirth. Women, as presumptive primary caregivers, still encounter barriers (internal and external) through their own interpellation to these gender norms, and substantial structural factors related to returning to work and gender pay disparity that constrain their access to career progression.

Parental Burden

In this section, I predominantly focus on the physical burdens that impact all parents to varying degrees. This is typically expressed through the physical burdens of sleeplessness and time pressure for men and women. For experienced parents, the reality of physical parenting became is significant discourse, especially breastfeeding for mothers.

Sleeplessness and exhaustion

One experienced father, Bernard sat cradling a fresh coffee for our morning interview and displayed all the physical signs of a sleepless night. He described his physical transformation as a parent centring on sleep deprivation. Bernard had reduced his working hours alongside his partner and described examples of equal caregiving with his partner, while struggling to manage lack of sleep. He drew on a visual image of an old shoe to elaborate on his experience.

Bernard**:** *It feels you're experiences you know if there's a bit like you are a fit and healthy, working adult, and then you know, out pops a baby and you go back to the workplace and that fit and healthy adult suddenly then kind of feels weathered and aged and battered and bruised*	**Micro discourse** of parental fatigue and sleeplessness as a crucial parental burden. The repetition of 'sleep' and the almost incredulous chuckles signify the

and, and maybe that's just something to do with the timing of the question after three nights of not sleeping [chuckles]. But that seems to capture the essence of just kind of you know how it feels [pause] when you get back into the workplace and you're not getting enough sleep I'm here and, and work erm... you go to work to do to just that, you go to work and taking one hat on putting one hat on and the other one off the parent hat off. It's a kind of switch that you go to flick. That, that can take its toll I guess as well when you're not getting the sleep and all the rest of it. ***P17_12-27***	totalising impact of fatigue on his experience as a working parent. **Meso discourse** of the ideal worker paradigm in Bernard's workplace drawing on shared experience 'you know how it feels…' of trying to work and maintain the illusion of the worker identity with inadequate sleep. **Macro discourse** of separate spheres of working parent identity and the common analogy of 'putting one hat on' as a way of explaining the separation of role performances at work and home.

In Bernard's example, we see clear similarities to Offred's earlier account of expectant parental experiences of pregnancy through their performance of self-othering to conform to their working identity. However, this example from Bernard was more of an outlier amongst other working fathers who generally retained a stoic or pragmatic attitude to their parental workplace performance. Another mother, Ruth (on parental leave at the time of the interview) described a very different arrangement with her partner, Tommy, as they prioritised his sleep and career.

> ***Ruth****: one thing that we decided to do when Alex was born actually worked quite well for us, was the in terms of night feeds getting up in the night and things like that. I know some people try and do it very equally. It may have been, potentially, that Tommy wasn't being very fair that I did all of that. But actually, we decided that it would work as well as Tommy having to go back to work quite early. We decided as well that in those early days that we kind of needed one of us to hold it together. That we couldn't be doing with even if we have sort of, sort of equal, getting up in the night or anything like that. We couldn't be doing with both of us completely shattered.* ***P3_465-482***

Ruth didn't show obvious signs of fatigue during the interview, but she chose her words very carefully at times during our conversation. She began this response with meso discourse of contemporary 'involved fatherhood' and the idea that 'some people try and do it very equally' as an opposite stance to her decision. She continues with macro discourse

alluding to her awareness of more progressive arrangements for egalitarian sleep arrangements for other parents and that their arrangement 'may have been', 'potentially' unfair. However, she then uses the collective pronoun 'we' to establish the shared decision making on their sleep arrangement. Ruth rationalises the separation of sleep responsibilities as 'we couldn't be doing with' both parents being shattered, which suggests a degree of interpellation to this patriarchal arrangement as she complied to the more physically burdensome outcome.

> ***Tommy**: I think in pretty much everything I would sort of follow Ruth's lead and, and I want her to sort of yeah kind of whatever she think's best, I'm happy with and so I think that in terms of in terms of roles as well I've kind of sort of you know, in a lot of ways I sort of took a step back so, you know, it's telling me what you want me to do and I'll do it (laughter) so yeah so it's, it's not like there's been Oh, a very conscious sort of deliberation of well you do this and I do that **P4a_896-900***

Tommy does not directly address the sleep arrangement in his responses across two interviews, though this passage highlights the relational discourse between him and Ruth in their decision-making process. Tommy draws on the collective decision-making hierarchy to recuse himself from responsibility, in a meso discourse framed on 'whatever she think's best'. This relates to the 'emotional labour' that Hochschild and Machung (2012) describe in the 'second shift', and the 'cognitive labour' that Brearley (2021, p. 173) cites from Allison Daminger's work in relation to the 'labour of the mind'. Tommy shows awareness of the macro discourse of 'roles' for parents, yet his micro discourse of '[taking] a step back' indicates he distanced himself (figuratively and materially) from some of the parental role and decisions. It is fair to assume that the collective decision around sleep probably also took this pattern where the influence of interpellation to the patriarchal norm of role separation took precedence.

This example of experienced parenthood at the start of the caregiving decision making based on sleeping arrangements highlights the additional burden of masculine workplace pressures. The meso influence of the masculine norm to 'hold it together' and work commitments places the sleep burden on Ruth and also overrides the potential new identity construction as an equal caregiver parent for Tommy.

When I interviewed Julia and Winston, each in the evening, both separately shared explicit feelings of exhaustion beyond sleeplessness. As experienced parents, they also spoke about general daily routines contributing to the endless exhaustion. Julia spoke of working on 4 ½ hours' sleep and being unable to be the 'ideal worker'. Winston's response mirrors the impact of sleeplessness as a shared experience, but there was still an overt acknowledgement of a gendered difference:

> ***Winston*** *- I thought it would be easier. I thought I didn't expect to be so knackered and how tired I am is nothing compared to how tired Julia is?*
>
> ***Mark*** *- Hmm*
>
> ***Winston*** *- I didn't expect to be quite grumpy and have such little patience, I think. And that comes back to the tiredness and yeah, I think you have this sort of idyllic view of what it's going to be like, and reality isn't quite, quite as rosy.* ***P18_1371-1391***

Winston's micro discourse of exhaustion 'knackered' & 'tired' includes the emotional impact of being 'grumpy' and having 'little patience' as a reality that is hard to prepare for or manage. In meso discourse, he admits his relative exhaustion compared to Julia's, which reinforces a macro separation of gender roles in terms of responsibility for the physical role of parenthood. This gendered reality is particularly acute when considering the impact of breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding burden

Breastfeeding was a consistent point of distinction as a barrier to fatherhood involvement and a burden for working mothers returning to work. The examples below describe a discourse of the 'othering' of breastfeeding mothers in the workplace, which is illustrative of a dominant masculine culture.

Emma (experienced parent), a less than full time working parent, on parental leave with her second child at the point of interview, spoke with me while holding her baby who also contributed to the interview at points.

> ***Emma****: both times when I've brought them in to work, I sort of struggle to know where to go to feed them. I've ended up just sat on the sofa, which is fine. I don't mind but it's just a question of, you know, it would be better to if I knew I can go there if I want to if I want some privacy then I know I've got somewhere to go. I do remember an incident when I was back at work after having* ***Jordan*** *and he was quite poorly. So, he was only feeding for me wouldn't have any solid foods and the mother-in-law brought him in and I ended up having to go into town to feed him in one of the feeding rooms because, ... obviously a bit of an impact on work.* ***P15_259-269***

Emma constructs a meso discourse of her 'struggle' and 'uncertainty' when trying to find a place to breastfeed in the context of obstructive masculine organisational norms. This burden is amplified through her emotive micro discourse of an 'incident' she experienced a work-family conflict when her son, Jordan, was 'only feeding for me' due to an illness. The consequence of this incident leads to Emma sharing a macro discourse of breastfeeding being incongruent with her enforced decision to 'go into town' and she implies a possible motherhood penalty of 'an impact on work'. Emma's example of

breastfeeding symbolises it as an unacceptable social practice within masculine working norms.

Offred's example of her breastfeeding burden relates to her night feeding experiences:

> ***Offred:*** *I think the burden of the night shifts fell on me slightly more, maybe because you're breastfeeding, but still. Even when she's bottle-feeding, they seem they still seem to fall on me more and because you know, he because he works a solid five-day week. Whereas I've at least got slightly less work or in theory I have because I'm* ***[less than full time].***
> ***- P1B_650-653***

Offred's micro discourse of her additional 'burden' of overnight shifts is linked to breastfeeding as she indicates that the initial breastfeeding role continued into bottle feeding too. She then draws on macro discourse of the 'a solid five-day week' as a masculine norm of the ideal worker and excuse for Nick having a lesser burden. However, Offred then alludes to a meso discourse with the relational, subversive assertion of 'in theory' to hint at the disproportional burden linked to her 'less than full time' hours that she later shares merge into evenings and weekends more. However, Nick's discussion of what it means to be an ideal father included his role during night shifts. He highlights the structural barriers that constrain father's continuing support of night feeds as directly linked to career pressure:

> *Nick: So, I had the first four weeks of Jordan's life off. And I tried and do every single nappy change. During those four weeks, including was in the middle of the night, because I was very aware that Offred was breastfeeding over that period. And then you've got to strike a balance when, typically the men go back to work first you've got to find the balance between not, not risking your career, but still helping out whenever you return basically.* ***P2B_793-808***

Nick's description of his ideal father role is directly related to micro discourse of absolutes and doing 'every single nappy change' to fully support Offred with night-time feeds. However, Nick also draws on meso discourse of work-life balance to mediate his commitment beyond his paternity leave. Finally, he returns to the macro 'breadwinner' discourse of 'not risking your career' as very important to being an ideal father who plays a secondary role 'helping out'.

Offred and Nick's account of night feeds displays some interpellation to the masculine norm to protect the full-time worker with her role as the primary overnight carer, which is similar to the earlier example of Tommy and Ruth's sleep arrangement. The separation of the worker father and breastfeeding mother relates to the more extreme separation of parents in *Swastika Night* (Burdekin, 1985) where mothers rear children away from the

influence of fathers and shoulder the entire burden until the boys are older and inducted into the 'masculine' world, while girls remain with their mothers. This dystopian system was designed to protect the purity of the patriarchal order with boys inducted into the male world. However, the masculine expectations for fathers to perform a protective role are not always beneficial to working fathers and can construct an emotional burden.

Protective masculinity as an emotional burden

The final burden I briefly discuss is that of the protective burden that some fathers described to shield their partners from stress and physical strain as a working parent. This is a burden that some male participants described, which seemed to conform to traditional modes of men as the provider, while also having the negative impact of the 'patriarchal deficit' (Bailey, 2015) of reduced contact time with their children. Nick (expectant father at the time of interview) was confident throughout the interview and displayed genuine, pragmatic care for his wife and his fatherhood responsibilities. This contribution came at the end of our first interview and showed more vulnerability as he seemingly became more aware of the implications of his decision while he spoke to me:

> ***Nick**: one of the reasons I'm moving jobs to get more money, is to give Offred the flexibility to reduce her hours [**pause**] Which is [**pause**] It's taken away any flexibility I had to reduce my hours. Whereas previously I was thinking about going down to four days a week.*
>
> ***Mark**: yeah, yeah*
>
> ***Nick**: But now that would cost us too, but don't think my new employer would let me do that either [**pause**]. So maybe I've [**pause**], but I don't mind that [**pause**]. I think it's the best outcome, cause Offred gets more stressed with work than I do... and I think she would get more stressed with the parenthood, so maybe if she can decrease the work stress that will allow, so I think it's the right decision for us as a family, but erm, I think I've cut my, I think I've cut my legs out from under me there, which I hadn't considered before. Because if I'd stood where I was now, I'd still be considering dropping a day. **P2A _894-913***

Nick constructed a clear micro discourse of parenthood flexibility as a zero-sum game which is prioritised for his wife, Offred, and 'taken away' from him as a potentially more involved father who was 'considering dropping a day'. His frequent pauses suggest he is constructing this opinion for the first time, contrary to his previous demeanour. He frames this choice by drawing on the macro discourse of the fatherhood tropes of the breadwinner 'more money' and provider 'to give Offred the flexibility'. He additionally draws on meso discourses to rationalise this decision (and the subsequent limits on his flexibility) as a relationally bound in his concerns for Offred's wellbeing (a discourse of protective behaviour) and constrained by his assumptions surrounding his new employer.

Nick's comments here reveal his increasing awareness of his sacrifice, 'I think I've cut my legs out from under me' caused by his decision to protect Offred.

This second example from Patrick, a very thoughtful, self-assured, and experienced father, marks a shift in tone as he is less vociferous in his intention to spend more time with his children. He clearly indicates that he has prioritised his wife's parental leave over any possibility of his own. Here, he discusses the decision not to pursue shared parental leave when he had a promotion opportunity.

> ***Patrick**: I just got a big promotion like a big step up in my role. Was it really the right time? Didn't feel like the right time. Yeah, I'm sure I could have asked for it. And they would give it to me, but I don't know it just didn't, didn't mesh well. With, I'd been going for this job for ages, finally got it and then for me to go off and say I'm gonna I'll be out for four months. I don't know, and I guess the other big influence is, you know, with Jean, you know what did, what did she want, and because, you know, if I'm taking two months, then she's having to give up three months, and actually, she was really quite clear that probably we're not gonna have a third. And this was her last kind of maternity leave and she wanted as much time as she possibly could with the baby.*

Patrick's micro discourse frames the patriarchal deficit as a primary workplace influences upon his decision not to take too much time off for parental leave as it 'didn't mesh well'. Similar to Nick, Patrick cites macro discourse of the gender role prioritisation for caring decisions, 'what did she want' draws on the prioritisation of Jean's preferences as a traditional protector and provider father. Again, Patrick cites the 'zero sum game' of relational meso discourse for parental caregiving whereby 'if I'm taking two months, then she's having to give up'. This rationalisation also alludes to the structural barriers in place from a legislative perspective concerning the UK shared parental leave entitlements which split 12 months, in contrast to a protected additional period of time for fathers.

Parental burdens are a reality for working parents and these examples highlight the serious impacts on physical and emotional wellbeing. The physical impacts are predominantly felt by the mothers in the examples I shared through breastfeeding, exhaustion, and sleeplessness. The emotional burdens I shared for fathers relate to a traditional motivation to protect mothers' and the pressures men perceive (Collier, 2019) to be the provider which creates a tension with contemporary expectations to be an 'involved father' (Gottzen, 2011; Hunter, Augoustinos, & Riggs, 2017; Peukert, 2017). Additionally, men also shared the pressure they felt from their employers as 'ideal workers' committed to their careers. As highlighted, this often leads to men sacrificing their involvement. These burdens are complex and speak to the ongoing problems of the 'motherhood penalty' alongside the 'patriarchal deficit'. This relational discourse with the

zero-sum game of working parenthood caregiving contributes to some traditional ideals of mothers and fathers, alongside more transitional and egalitarian ideals of equal parents.

Ideals

When I asked the parents about the ideals of parenthood, I encouraged them to respond in whatever order or manner they preferred. Some refused the premise of the question and skipped to the 'ideal parent' option, while others described the roles with varying alignment to traditional social roles.

Ideal mother

> ***Patrick**: getting the kids ready in the in the evening getting them getting ready out in the morning. Erm, remembering birthday parties and doctoral appointments and dentist. I don't do any of that. And, you know, she would probably say I do the fun stuff. So, I guess yeah, for me in a kind of a in a selfish way, the ideal mother is kind of doing having all the skills and do all the stuff that I can't do, or I don't want to do. P13_219-232*

Patrick's candid response reveals his honest alignment with perceptions of the macro discourse of traditional motherhood that were similar for other respondents. He draws on micro discourse of mothers' 'cognitive labour' of 'doing' and 'getting ready' and 'remembering' that aligns with Hochschild & Machung, & Brearley's descriptions of mothers' additional emotional load. He acknowledges Jean's likely meso discourse accusing him of only doing the fun stuff, which draws on more transitional expectations of fathers from mother. Finally, his macro discourse of motherhood skills establishes the traditional ideal mother as a relational social role that enables the domestically 'unskilled' working father to take a secondary caregiver role. In a similar vein, experienced mother, Emma reflected on her sense of the ideal mother and seemed to rationalise her own experiences of the motherhood penalty.

> ***Emma**: [W]illing to give up some of themselves in a way, I guess. At the expense yeah… look after the children at their own expense, I guess. When it comes to being a mum, you have to sort of put children first. P15_473-488*

Emma uses micro discourse of personal 'expense' as a proxy for the motherhood penalty, she also draws on the meso discourse of third person 'themselves' to allude to the collective 'expense' that makes an ideal mother. Finally, she echoes the essentialist macro discourse of motherhood skills and capabilities that Patrick used when describing 'looking after the children' to suggest that it is the mother who is predominantly responsible for the childcare. This passage provides further evidence of interpellation to the patriarchal narrative of mothers' subjugation within the working parent relationship within a traditional social role.

In a more transitional example, Winston offers a blend of egalitarian ideals alongside a caveat relating to childcare and nurture. Winston's response is reflective of his reflexive approach to the interview where he shared his vulnerability and insecurity as a father and this passage aligns with my interpretation of his negative self-perception as a parent.

> ***Winston**: I think a lot of what I did say about being a parent does apply to the mother and the father. Rightly or wrongly, I probably say the mother should be a bit more nurturing for want of a better word. Again, that's what my upbringing Yeah. P18_1026-1040*

Winston's opening egalitarian statement is cautiously undermined by his macro discourse of mothers being more nurturing. He applies a caveat to this statement with the meso discourse of 'rightly or wrongly', which demonstrates his awareness of the outdatedness of this view and his uncertainty discussing this issue. Importantly, his micro discourse of 'my upbringing' related to other discussions in the interview which highlighted the major influence of childhood experiences on personal constructions of the ideal parent. Winston was transitional in his views of the ideal mother and parent as his self-perception of being an egalitarian father was constrained by his insecurity at his sense of being inadequate and consequent concern at the prospect of taking an equal parental role.

Ideal Father

The influence of the macro narrative of traditional social roles for fathers came through strongly from some of the working parents, particularly Patrick, Didier, and Crake, however there were also more transitional attitudes expressed that incorporated traditional and egalitarian ideals. Emma and George provided a useful microcosm of this transitional identity construction as a couple:

> ***Emma**: I think they need a lot of patience to be able to provide that support for the mom because they can't necessarily do as much for the child probably a key thing patience and understanding. And then just being willing to get involved whenever they can and help out and do fun stuff. P15_491-517*

> ***George**: I think the ideal father is somebody that is spends time with the children... (pause) providing for whatever they should need. P14_726-743*

Emma and George's responses provide contrast between the relational role of a father that Emma describes and the more instrumental role that George focuses on. Emma uses micro discourse of 'support' and 'patience' to suggest a secondary role for the ideal father. She also draws on macro discourse of fathers having limited caregiving resources as breadwinners who should therefore focus on the 'fun stuff'. This is mediated by her use of meso discourse of 'whenever they can' to introduce the external constraints of work upon

an ideal father's time. Intriguingly, George is more assertive in his description of a father who 'spends time' however he offers no qualifiers to elaborate on how much time an ideal father should spend. Additionally, he draws on macro discourse of breadwinning and 'providing' to complete the ideal father descriptor. However, George applied this same description to his ideal mother, which suggests that he has more egalitarian attitudes in principle, but these may not necessarily translate into fully egalitarian behaviours with Emma (based on her description of 'whenever they can').

Nick, is more expressive in his description of a transitional father, though does still draw on some traditional tropes of fatherhood as a secondary role

> ***Nick**: Ideal father, needs to put themselves last... Which I'm not the best at, I try my best (laughs). They need to lit... They literally, literally do everything they can to help the mother in those early months. At the expense of their own happiness. P2B_793-808*

Nick's response highlights a far greater emphasis on father's caring role as a collective self-subjugation in comparison to other fathers I spoke to. Although, his self-reflection hints at his own potential failure to live up to these ideals. Additionally, his rhetorical repetition of 'literally' is a time limited offer bound by 'those first few months' which draws on the macro discourse of the mother as primary caregiver. The transitional attitudes I encountered were still connected to the traditional ideals of fathers as breadwinners and mothers as presumptive primary carers, the difference was the espoused degree of involvement in caregiving and support from the fathers.

Ideal Parent

The ideal parent narratives that were generated during the interviews were typically framed in a more progressive and egalitarian paradigm. In this section, I compare parents as couples to illustrate some of the differences and similarities in perceptions. First, Bernard and Lenina provided the most balanced response to this question:

> ***Lenina**: I don't know if I feel uncomfortable with it, because I think I'm probably with you like you talked about it as an ideal parent. And also, I wonder, with people thinking about it in in terms of the stereotypes the role … there's a basic level of make sure that your child is cared for and loved, has a sense of contentment and stability... P16_893-924*

> ***Bernard**: I don't think there's much difference. Fundamentally, if you distil it down, it's kind of your role is to, you're meant to be a loving parent and you're meant to, or it's important to show good values and try and bring a child into the world who's going to make a positive contribution. And so, whether you're the dad or whether you're the mom, it's kind of, there's no real, at its core, there's no real [difference]. P17_504-514*

Lenina's response was initially to reject the premise of the 'ideal mother' prompt, whereas Bernard affirmed the sameness of the ideal parent role. Both chose micro discourse of core attributes related to behavioural, nurturing, and role model parenting and neither spoke about their financial role. This is expected as both worked less than full time so had fully committed to their egalitarian parental relationship. This egalitarian approach affirms the importance of organisational flexibility to accommodate less than full time working for parents. The next two themes address some of the organisational influences that can constrain this possibility.

Rigid Structural Organisational Masculinity

Rigid structural organisational masculinity relates to the common link organisation for the participants. They described some strikingly similar accounts of masculine rigidity that echoed the assertions of J. Acker (1990), particularly 'the control of the work process' (J. Acker, 1990, p. 145). Alvesson and Due Billing (2009) review a multitude of perspectives on masculine organisational structures and cite it as 'a particular instrumental form of rational control' (Alvesson & Due Billing, 2009, p. 76 (citing Kerfoot & Knight, 1996)). It is the sense of masculinised 'rational control' that I focus on in this section and the incongruity of this organisational context with the needs of working parents. Alvesson and Due Billing (2009) describe the 'impersonal rules and standards', which Ruth remarks is 'policy for the masses'.

The factors many participants discussed were interrelated with some of the 'parental burdens' already mentioned, especially the breastfeeding burden and lack of access to feeding facilities. The other major structural factors are the application of policies for parental leave and flexible working. I label this theme as masculine as it mirrors some of the tropes of masculinity being controlling, assertive and rigid (J. Acker, 1990; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). DF provides a plethora of rigid structural organisations, from Hailsham in *Never Let Me Go (*Ishiguro*,* 2005*)*, to Big Brother in *1984 (*Orwell*,* 2004*)*, and the World State in *Brave New World (*Huxley*,* 2004*)*. All these fictional organisations orchestrate their structure with a simple purpose, to control the masses. Organisations can enable equal principles in policy and practices, but as this analysis shows, they can also have detrimental effects against working parents who do not fit the 'one size fits all' model.

Rational Control

This first example from Tunde does not refer to the 'common' organisation that links all the couples who participated, but Tunde's experiences do provide a prominent example of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1979) against parents through rigid organisational policy.

The rigid approach here surrounding parental leave entitlements signifies a masculinised 'rational control' approach.

Mark: *… In terms of the shared parental leave policy, I think you've briefly touched on that had that been a consideration have you thought about that?* ***Tunde:*** *It had. Starting a new job, I missed out by a day.* ***Mark:*** *Oh, really! One day?* ***Tunde****: One day. No, that might not necessarily have gone ahead because of speaking to Allie, it's, [silly voice] 'I'm taking all the time off I can'. So, it might not necessarily have been practical, but certainly from a financial point of view, yeah. It would have been something that I would have I probably would have considered, and it would have been a discussion. It's usually around certainly around certainly with the maternity policy here it was certainly something we would have considered. But it was unfortunately not meant to be. I missed out by a day. I even sent an email to HR about it, it and said come on which way am I working on this because it was proper borderline if it was at midnight on that it would have been one way, 'yes sorry it's gone yeah...'I could complain about the one day, but I can understand the reasons behind it.*	**Micro discourse** to the emphasise on the arbitrary nature of the rigid policy approach to the Shared Parental Leave policy eligibility as Tunde misses out by 'one day', regardless of whether it was 'borderline' on eligibility. His repetition highlights his incredulity concerning the rigid policy. **Meso discourse** of the relational nature of working parent decision making as relational with Tunde's awareness of another rigid policy, 'the maternity policy here' (the common link organisation) as a push factor influencing parental decisions. **Macro discourse** of the overarching 'financial point of view' aligned with rational decision making. Tunde demonstrates interpellation to this macro influence and rationalises organisational rigidity in his decision not to complain.

Tunde's example illustrates the extreme boundaries of the rigid, rational control applied to policies for parents. There was no leeway or discretionary approach offered in this circumstance, even given the impact this barrier has on the potential life decisions for this expectant parent and his partner, Allie. In effect, the option to share parental leave is taken away from them due to being one day outside of eligibility. Such a strict approach to policy is repeated in the following examples from Offred and Ruth.

> ***Offred****: my reading of the parental leave policy it was that all about what you are entitled to and what you can claim and what will happen It's and I guess it's it just reads like it's from the Equality Act you know you know…*
>
> ***Mark****: copy and paste*

> ***Offred***: *yeah, erm. with a little bit of a little bit of a human spin on it you were entitled to this and you can claim that please speak to HR about this it's all very clinical maybe.* ***P1A_1024-1035***

Offred draws on macro discourse of marketized transactional policies in her description of the parental leave policy being based on 'what you are entitled to and what you can claim'. This is reinforced when she alludes to the policy being directly from the equality act. She summarises her meso discourse of the policy with a metaphor of it being 'a bit clinical' alluding to a detached, sanitised, rigid approach to policy as opposed to her micro discourse, hedging as she suggests it has 'a little bit of a little bit of a human spin'. Her hesitancy suggests she is less than confident in this assessment.

Ruth's assessment of the approach organisations take to parental policies encapsulates a critical perspective on rigid organisational mentality to managing working parents.

> ***Ruth***: *in terms of the policies and practices they've … erm of Tommy's, Tommy's job and my own you're not counted as an individual in any way. It is kind of policy for the masses.* *P3_112-113*
>
> ***Mark***: *So, it's uniformity*
> ***Ruth*** - *Yeah. That you, in terms of policy, you're not an individual and it seems in general, and particularly big companies that your policy doesn't consider you as an individual, it has to consider everybody… all as equals. And, in some ways that's a good thing and in others that not such a good thing.*
> ***Mark***: *Would you mind describing where it's a good thing and where it's not a good thing?*
> ***Ruth*** - *Yeah, I suppose in terms of erm, it being a good thing it, it keeps everything bla [sic]… very black and white, and you know exactly where you're at.*
> ***Mark*** - *Mmm, mmm*
> ***Ruth*** - *That, there's no feeling of anything being unfair, that you are all treated just the same. Erm ... but in terms of it being a bad thing I think that particularly when it comes to bringing children into the world, it's such a very, very individual thing and rigid policies don't necessarily erm…* ***[pause as being careful with her words here****] sort of… the fact that they don't have any flexibility doesn't always work in terms of individual circumstances.* ***P3_123-134***

Ruth draws on meso of 'policy for the masses' which appears to call upon Karl Marx's phrase 'religion is opium for the people' as an allegory for policy as a control method. Throughout Ruth's contribution, she repeatedly juxtaposes micro discourses of 'equal' treatment in absolute 'black and white' terms within the policy context, this contrasts with the 'individual' needs that don't always fit. Ruth alludes to a wider macro discourse of uniformity and rigidity in organisations and policies that are inflexible and marginalise individual circumstances.

Ruth's descriptions of policy and process here highlight the ominously dystopian feel of some policies and processes which seem to clash with the 'individual circumstances' of working parents. This is true of Roberta's experiences in *Red Clocks* as she finds herself the victim of a 'policy for the masses' that restricts her ability to become a parent. The controlling approach of the organisation in this passage is a barrier to what Ruth and Tommy, along with other parents, experienced as rigidity and potentially dehumanising approaches to policy.

Dehumanisation

Dehumanisation is an outcome of 'rational control'. In the examples I analyse here, the striking factor that unites each participant is that each is a mother (either at the expectant or experienced phase of parenthood). Though some fathers discussed examples that alluded to dehumanisation, none were as explicit as the examples below. This is an important distinction and further reinforces the gender regime and that privileges HM within patriarchal discourse as a representation of the organisational structures and systems that disproportionately affect women.

> ***Oryx**: the system is going to turn, you have students. It's a business in every sense, still. Service. Whichever way we're looking at it now. Essentially a business, and I think it's going to keep going whether I'm part of it or not and that's right because that they're delivering something, and they can… the world doesn't stop turning for me. I'll come I will turn up and keep turning up again. I'll go away and it's not just me, I'm a cog a little cog in that and I have to fit in…* **P9_541-553***

Oryx begins with a meso discourse of her organisation as a 'business' operating independently of her involvement. She constructs a sense of a juggernaut organisation disconnected from her input. Her macro discourse of marketized business environments is symbolised with her statement that 'the world doesn't stop turning' and evokes a sense of employees as replaceable. Oryx summarises this metaphor with a micro discourse description of herself, representative of working parents, as a dehumanised 'cog' in the machine. She emphasises her place as 'a little cog' to symbolise her dehumanisation given all cogs are simply parts that can be replaced. Her use of the metaphor 'little cog' reveals her interpellation within the insinuated 'machine' processes of her organisation. She willingly describes herself this way as a dehumanised subject of the masculine business machine, rather than as an individual. This is particularly significant as an example of reproducing the masculine structures when coming from an expectant parent, whose life may not fit like a 'cog' into the machine.

The next example comes from Jean, (experienced parent) who is quietly assertive and critical throughout her interview. She further elaborates on the similar micro discourse of

machinery and macro discourse of dehumanisation in a rigid controlling system as she describes herself as a number. This number theme resembles the numerical assignations of people in the novel *We* (Zamyatin, 2013), where people are known by names like 'D-503' & 'I-330'. She also elaborates on meso discourse of dehumanisation through her account of disinterested colleagues who didn't knock on her door to see if she was OK.

> ***Jean**: I said to my line manager, nobody, nobody in workloads knocked on my door and said we see you 20% over, are you okay? are you managing is this workable for you there's just, you know, I just sat there and read on the spreadsheet and that's just you know, like Number 239 is 20% over but there's no like understanding I don't think of like the personal impact that's having on someone … **P12_299-312***

Lenina (experienced parent), who also took a critical stance and railed against the dehumanisation concludes this section by outlining her opposition to it.

> ***Lenina**: I think it would be just wanting much more practical recognition that staff are not a human resource full stop in for the workplace. You know, we are people who have lives outside of university. … I've been in presentations before where we're talked about as a resource, no we're not a robot. I think we need to be looked at as people. **P16_1369-1385***

Lenina's macro discourse describes the business environment which labels 'staff' as 'human resource[s]'. Later she asserts 'we're not a robot' as a micro lexical choice to emphasise the metaphor of machinery. Lenina calls on a meso discourse of humanity amongst her peers choosing to use the collective pronoun, 'we' to affirm a collective who 'have lives' and should be 'looked at as people'. Here she attempts to reintegrate humanity against her figurative use of the dehumanising machinery metaphor.

The four examples of dehumanisation in this section all came from women, which is an important symbol of the gender imbalance amongst the working parents I interviewed. Such gender imbalances also predominate DF, which often place women, through imposed rigid structures, in an overtly subordinate and subjugated position relative to men (see *Vox* (Dalcher, 2018) as a prominent recent example). In the 'positives' section, later in this chapter, I outline the contrasting gendered imbalance whereby men represent a disproportionately positive perspective on the organisation and its influence on them as working parents. The next section refers to 'cultural organisational masculinity', which extends some of the gender imbalances described in this section and considers wider macro-level masculine influences.

Cultural Organisational Masculinity

Cultural organisational masculinity describes 'arenas that are dominated by traditional masculine values in relation to men's work–family integration' (Kangas et al., 2019, p.

1445). The first examples I analyse in this theme consider this hierarchy in terms of gender hegemony within the organisational culture where presumptions of traditional masculinity supersede working parenthood identities (Burnett et al., 2012, p. 635). I then consider the discretionary and inconsistent human 'gatekeeper' interactions between employees where loyalty and assertiveness are rewarded within a masculinised quid-pro-quo arrangement. There are also examples that allude to the 'hidden' (von Alemann et al., 2017) or 'invisible' (Burnett et al., 2012) fatherhood discourse. Finally, I analyse two examples of cultural masculinity reinforcing the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 2005).

Patriarchal Culture

A patriarchal culture hegemonically reinforces work outputs at the top of the organisational hierarchy, and family life in a distant second place. In the example below, Susan (experienced mother) who was expecting her second child, discusses what should be in place when family needs arise. She establishes a perception that informal cultural approaches reproduce hegemonic masculine discourse. Susan resists this perception and suggests that policies should formalise family needs above work, especially in emergencies.

***Susan**: I've not had not had a situation where I needed his help and he can't be there but, if there was a situation like that, and I think that the organisation should maybe established policies that, you know, can make him take that emergency because I feel like okay, if you have to teach and your child is in a situation that needs your help, then there should be like a policy that would say go, you know, yeah, it's just teaching, you can do it another day or another time. So that flexibility should be there more.*	Meso discourse of perceived lack of support for working parents to 'make him take that emergency' – which is indicative of a culture that obscures parental entitlements for workers by not making this explicit to all workers. Micro discourse lexical choice of 'emergency' emphasised the contrast between work commitment 'if you have to teach' and family needs. Macro discourse of rigid hegemonic masculinity in organisational culture that prioritises work over family with a need for formal flexibility.

For Patrick (experienced father), the cultural dynamic is different, he draws on macro discourse of marketized workplace practices concerning family entitlements. Patrick refers to a different organisation in his example, but the principles of his established cultural discourse are present elsewhere in other participants' responses.

> ***Patrick**: Someone else in one of the teams next to me and they had a very similar and she's come back. And she's just all about kind of like, take, take, take, and kind of playing it absolutely by the by the letter of the law and just doesn't it doesn't from to my mind. It doesn't, doesn't work. So, there'll be, there'll be occasions where I'm happy to be very flexible and make except, make exceptions, but at the same time, I'll expect [colleague] for the times when I'm up against it up, We're up in the shit. And she's gonna need to pull out and maybe that will mean, you know, having to sort of be out of home to sort some childcare of whatever at very short notice, which isn't ideal, but that's just the way that it goes. So that's, that's the way that I, that's the way I approach it. I think. and I think that's the way I thought when I talk to Jean that's why I kind of suggest to her that you know, reality is you got it, you know, you're expecting them to give, but you've got to give a bit. Yes.* ***P13_615-633***

Patrick's micro discourse of masculine approaches to working parent entitlements juxtaposes his hyperbolic, 'take, take, take' depiction with his absolute, 'It doesn't, doesn't work' to dismiss formal policy entitlements for working parents. He draws on meso discourse of local arrangement suggesting, 'that's just the way it is' for working parents and the unregulated quid-pro-quo relationship. Finally, his preference is established for a macro discourse of working parent 'reality' as a marketized transaction of 'give' and 'give'.

The marketized 'give, give' culture espoused by Patrick is also present in a fairly shocking example from Montag (experienced parent). In 'weighing up' his parental leave timing, he went so far as to change his start date through a sense of obligation to the hegemonic masculine discourse within the organisation.

> ***Montag**: I wanted to take my paternity leave early, so as soon as possible … And I had to weigh up whether, which was going to be the most convenient way to do it to take the first two weeks. I think what I think it would have been more difficult for the University for me to take the first two weeks because that's when most of my marking was going to come in ... So, I decided to delay it until later … to try and make it easier for the University to try and make sure that I could get my marking done before I took it. So, I did change. I did decide to think of it when I was going to take it, to try and make it because I do, I do feel a certain obligation to the University and to my students do get everything done in time. So, I did delay take paternity leave a bit. They didn't ask me, the University hadn't asked me to do that, but I decided to do it myself. So, I guess I did delay. I did change things slightly. Something I did think about.* ***P11_ 301-335***

Montag opens with a clear micro discourse of his preferred option to take paternity leave 'as soon as possible', but soon inserts the caveat of finding a 'convenient' way to do it. Montag clearly expresses the tension between his personal desire and the cultural influence of subservience to the organisation, a masculine trope of commitment to work. He then draws on the meso discourse of his perception of the personified university

finding it more difficult and his decision to delay coming as a consequence of his perception of making it easier for the university. This example is comparable to what Armenti (2004) describes as 'May babies' whereby pre-tenure academic women in Canada planned their childbirth according to timetable constraints. Montag seemingly bases his decision on his assumptions of the cultural expectation to prioritise work needs over family. He then draws on macro discourse of interpellation to the neo-liberalised workplace and his obligation to the university. Finally, his micro discourse of repeating his decision to 'delay' suggests he is rationalising his decision as agential, in spite of clear signs of his interpellation to the patriarchal culture. Of course, these decisions are rarely made independently, in reality they often involve an organisational gatekeeper who can determine the ease and scope of working parent decision-making.

Gatekeeper

Ruth's account of her husband, Tommy's workplace experiences of parental leave describe the micro discourse of discretionary power of the line-manager as a gatekeeper:

> ***Ruth*** *- he wasn't actually the entitled to any time. Whether that could be worked out for him, and suppose, actually, that was down to the discretion of the line manager rather than a policy. Erm, so it was a bit of a shame for him that he wasn't able to just go online and say this is good to be a certain way.*
>
> ***Mark*** *- It's a very different experience, that, I think. I mean, sort of relying more on the discretionary side, and, than the underpinning policy.*
>
> ***Ruth****: Yeah. I think he found that a little tricky. That he didn't want to sort of push his luck, just starting at that time. But he knew he needed some and hoped that he would get a positive response from it, which he did. And given that he wasn't entitled to any time at all the fact they were able to he was still able to have a week off and work around that is really good.* ***P3_585-610***

Ruth alludes to a meso discourse of discretionary support being unpredictable and bound by internal cultural factors. She suggests that Tommy did not want to 'push his luck' and instead trusted in 'hope'. Ruth describes a macro discourse of statutory paternity entitlement, which removed Tommy's access to paternity leave. The UK only offers paternity leave after the employees have worked for the employer for six months i.e., shows 'ideal worker' commitment to the organisation. She then highlights the meso discourse of cultural flexibility to find an informal 'work around'. The importance of the gatekeeper is writ large in this example. In Tommy's interview (experienced new parent), he described how uncertain his precarious situation was in the lead up to his child being born:

> ***Tommy**: … I think for me, it could have gone, you know, could have very much gone the other way as well, 'Sorry. But, you know, we'd be, you know, this is what you haven't been here long enough. This is what policy says.' You know, 'you've, you've got classes to teach. Sorry for, you know'. Obviously, they did, they didn't they didn't do that, which was, which I was very thankful for, very grateful. So yeah, I mean, if, if, you know, if they hadn't had, if they hadn't have done that, I would have found it very unfair, even though procedurally it would be fair.* ***P4B_698-718***

Tommy's meso discourse of an unpredictable culture surrounding parental treatment stating 'it could have gone the other way' suggests a degree of unpredictability with the gatekeeper role within the masculine organisational culture. He alludes to the macro discourse of rigid policy when representing an imagined conversation with an uncompromising gatekeeper. This imagined masculine discourse suggests a perception that such attitudes do exist within his workplace culture. Finally, his micro discourse of being 'very grateful' and the 'unfair', 'fair' tension suggests that he has accepted his subsidiary position as an interpellated subject of the masculine organisation.

In contrast to Tommy's experiences of limited scope for negotiations, Lenina discusses her stronger negotiating position and the transactional, performative nature of pursuing better working parental conditions.

> ***Lenina:** it's about having the confidence to ask for these things. And a manager being pragmatic about well it's not gonna damage my business if we do, do this and therefore it's no skin off my nose and actually benefits me because I get a happy member of staff.*
> ***Mark**: Yeah.*
> ***Lenina** - Who will, that will then pay a dividend at a later stage.*
> ***P16_1442-1450***

Lenina begins saying 'it's all about having the confidence to ask for these things' as a micro discourse of successful gatekeeper negotiations that hints at individual responsibility overriding basic entitlements. To an extent, this assertion relates to the extreme individualism proposed in DF, *Jennifer Government* where community rights have been replaced by individualized market forces. Lenina continues this individualist theme with relational meso discourse of co-dependency to her 'manager being pragmatic', which reinforces the dissolution of consistent collective rights. Finally, she draws on the macro discourse of marketized negotiations as an investment in future 'dividends' alluding to share dividends and the quid-pro-quo example earlier discussed in Patrick's contribution.

Lenina's experience of empowered, confident negotiations with a 'pragmatic' manager contrasts with Offred's experiences, which is reminiscent of Tommy's faux example of 'that's what the policy says' gatekeeping.

> ***Offred**: 'Please direct me to the relevant policy, which shows that you can do that' was ultimately what he said to me. And I said, 'Fine'. I'll so I went to HR. And then HR said, 'Oh, it's a local arrangement that's agreed between you and your research mentor.' Well either it's a policy or it's not.*
> ***P1B_354-357***

In this example, Offred recalls a negotiation with her line manager where discretion was not as forthcoming. She reconstructs the line manager's macro discourse of rigid rules asking to be shown to 'the relevant policy' as a hands-off approach to discretionary management. Offred then reconstructs the meso discourse of organisational process and checking the rules with 'HR'. This relational discussion highlights the back-and-forth inconsistency of local arrangements and the familiar sense of being passed between different people to get a decision. Finally, Offred's micro discourse presents a juxtaposition which evokes her frustration at the inconsistent process, 'it's a policy or it's not'. There are clear parallels in Offred's experiences to Kafka's protagonist's experiences of incomprehensible bureaucracy in *The Trial* (Kafka, 2006). Offred's experiences contrast with Lenina's experience and shows how discretionary gatekeeper cultures can favour some people over others based on seemingly unfair negotiations.

The culture of organisation gatekeepers is seemingly one that rewards loyalty and bold, masculine negotiation style in some circumstances. Conversely, other gatekeepers revert to baseline policy stances when the conditions are not favourable for the individual working parent. This inconsistent cultural norm relates to the individualisation of the macro business market environment, which draws on masculine competition and individual merit as a doctrine for winners and losers. In this context, fathers can also lose out through their presumed role as the 'breadwinner' and 'ideal worker', becoming invisible or silenced in the masculine organisational culture.

Silenced fatherhood

Silenced fatherhood is a sub-theme that draws on Murgia and Poggio's (2009, 2013) studies of Italian workplace contexts, and (von Alemann et al., 2017) in Germany, which provides evidence of the 'othering' of fatherhood within organisations. Their research found that hegemonic masculine attitudes, and 'hidden rules', prevail to 'silence' the requests and preferences of involved fathers. This occurs in spite of policies that enable parents to take shared parental leave and work more flexibly to become more involved in caregiving (Murgia & Poggio, 2009, 2013). As J. Acker (1990) and Burnett et al. (2012) found, organisations all too often expect men to be workers, not fathers.

The first example (below) shows Winston's pragmatic decision to hide, a symptom of the masculine culture that silences fathers' discourse in his organisation. Similarly, Tommy

shares how his introverted nature, in combination with an oppressive communication culture, created a silencing effect on his willingness to be open at work. Both examples provide evidence of masculine discourse silencing fatherhood in organisations.

> ***Winston**: It was about trying to hide*
>
> ***Mark:** Mmm? Okay?*
>
> ***Winston**: Because at [**my organisation**] the more visible you are, the more you get asked to do. And I can't possibly take anything else at the moment. I'm so absolutely slammed. And everything that I'm working on is growing ...*
>
> ***Mark:** Hmm*
>
> ***Winton**: So, yeah, at the moment I'm trying to work, I'm trying to hide a bit. I tried to hide and not be asked to do anything, because I just can't do anymore...So, so in terms of relationships, that was my feeling, trying to hide, it's not all about that. I still do talk to people I've become a programme leader. So, I discuss things with other programme leaders and what have you, so that there is relationships that are developing at work, but I'm certainly not actively seeking out new ones. Because everything leads to more work … My attitude certainly changed, Yeah, since the kids have come along, and where I used to make time, deliberately or otherwise … I would go and chat to a colleague for 20 minutes and for coffee or whatever it will be. Now I'm much more strict on myself …* **P18_363-376***

Winston constructs a micro discourse of evasion to emphasise his need to hide and avoid more work. His micro discourse draws on hyperbole 'absolutely slammed' to justify his actions. Winston's hiding is a consequence of the masculine work intensification he describes as 'the more visible you are, the more you get asked to do.' He describes his relationships as purely based on work tasks. This restrictive culture precludes any social discourse where he can 'go and chat' about his social experiences as a parent. Winston highlights the macro discourse of becoming a parent changing attitudes to work relationships, but his is a story of being 'more strict' to prioritise work, rather than integrating his parental identity at work. Unlike later stories of the 'parenting club', this father is silenced by the imperative to prioritise his work.

In this second example of silencing, Tommy was warned by more than one person about the culture in the organisation in a clear indication of their meso discourse 'be careful what you say around here'.

> ***Tommy**: more than one person did sort of say, you know, be careful what you be careful what you say around here and who you say it to. So that kind of, you know, that that did, maybe stick a little bit. So, you know, maybe there was, I don't, I don't think I explicitly, you know, kept that in*

> *the forefront of my mind, but maybe in the back of my mind, it maybe did maybe a little bit more cautious, and on top of an already sort of introverted nature, maybe didn't help things. So, you know, maybe I maybe that I didn't feel that, you know, the, the climate of the place was conducive to sort of open communication.*

Tommy's account of the oppressive nature of the organisational culture draws on similar guarded cultures in DFs such as *The Handmaid's Tale* with Gilead's religious doctrines, *1984* with the 'thought police', or *Vox* with the literal silencing of women with word limits. What all three examples have in common is the intention to control the people of the organisation through constraints on shared or individual discourse. Tommy's micro discourse of 'cautious' approaches to opening up and an 'introverted nature' suggest that the organisational culture was instrumental in silencing him as a working father into remaining guarded and focused on work. Additionally, Tommy cites macro discourse of 'the climate of the place', as another silencing factor, which hints to a masculinized culture, which marginalises 'open communication'. Such a closed culture may be silencing fathers from possible opportunities to integrate their full identity at work. Of course, the silenced father may be able to, or prefer to, fully focus on their worker identity, which leads to the final sub-theme of the cultural theme, the patriarchal dividend.

Patriarchal Dividend

Connell (2005) describes the 'patriarchal dividend' as the career advancement and benefits enjoyed by men, which is particularly relevant to working fathers (Hodges & Budig, 2010). As a cultural phenomenon, this dividend can be reinforced through informal dialogue amongst peers that reproduces patriarchal cultures. These often draw on macro discourses of the traditional father role as the breadwinner responsible for their family's financial wellbeing. Montag's example (below) perfectly encapsulates this phenomenon in the organisation.

> ***Montag**: … I remember I had one conversation I was I was going to seek to be promoted to senior lecturer early, you know you can do. I was speaking to a woman and she said, 'Yeah, you should do it because you're a parent now.'*
>
> ***Mark** - Oh really?*
>
> ***Montag** – 'You need to keep your income going up' and things like that. 'Oh yeah do it because you're a parent and I'll support you in doing it.' Whereas, if that hadn't happened, it seemed like being a parent was, was kind of a unifying thing between us.* ***P11_ 219-247***

Montag recounts a conversation with a peer where the macro discourse of fathers as breadwinners is clearly expressed with statements like, 'you're a parent now' & 'keep your

income going up'. This suggests a rite of passage into a new role as provider presumptive, which highlights the relational co-construction of the patriarchal dividend. Montag recounts the offer from his colleague, 'I'll support you in doing it' hinting at her gatekeeper role to reproduce the patriarchal dividend at a local level. He summarises the experiences by suggesting being a parent was a 'unifying thing' between them. Here his micro discourse alludes to parental solidarity in the workplace and a sense of mutual support for preferential career advancement. Similarly, Didier (experienced parent expecting a second child) spoke light-heartedly about a colleague who suggested that he needed to *'get ready'* because the '*missus expect more money' [P5_496-504].*

These examples of the patriarchal dividend both relate specifically to the normalised relationship between Montag's and Didier's parental status and their assumed breadwinner role. Such presumptions reproduce the motherhood penalty when women are not prioritised in the same way.

The organisational culture examples in this section suggest an emphasis on the ideal worker as either a 'silenced' working father who marginalises his family life at work, or a confident working mother who can negotiate to achieve additional, discretionary benefits. In an inconsistent culture for working parents, where gatekeepers hold the key to discretionary benefits, baseline policies can represent a constraining reality for work-life balance. The inconsistency is most prevalent in the discretionary decisions, which are contingent on favourable relationships between employee and manager, or a longstanding history of employee performance to 'earn better rights'. Such a culture is indicative of the masculinised macro environment of free market ideology and individualism. The next section appraises the positives I encountered, some of which relate to the idea of the patriarchal dividend.

Positive Stories: Patriarchal Dividend

I suggested earlier in this chapter that most of the positives I encountered were associated with the fathers. Some positives were disclosed by women relating to collegiality with peers and supportive student responses to women going through pregnancy. I will discuss collegiality in the final section of this chapter on the 'parental club'. The positives I focus on in this section reflects the gendered aspect of the patriarchal dividend and fathers' experiences of flexible work. As Bernard shared in a more light-hearted contribution, *'… when you get to become a parent, it feels like you've got the key to unlock all of these mythical policies and flexible working...' [P17_216-226*]. Though Bernard was not affiliated with the common 'link' organisation, the following example expresses a clear appreciation of flexible working from a father's perspective,

something conspicuously absent from the mothers I interviewed (see previous motherhood penalty examples for 'othered' mothers).

Winston describes the norms of his working week in his job, while also acknowledging a major caveat of 'if I'm not teaching', which is when Julia's occupationally arranged flexibility picks up the slack.

Winston: *If I'm not teaching, I don't have to be there, so it does free me up to drop the kids off at nursery and get it at half nine no one bats an eye lid. I can leave at four and go but the kids are from nursery no one bats an eyelid.* ***Mark*** *- yeah* ***Winston*** *- so, from that perspective it's, it's a, it's a job that fits quite well around having kids particularly as this is job is quite flexible as well…* *…Julia's job is quite flexible. So, we get my timetable. And then she flexes her start and finish times around what I'm teaching…* *P18_1230-1248*	Micro discourse of work freedom and flexibility, 'I don't have to be there' & 'no one bats and eyelid'. Winston emphasises this freedom with a meso discourse of positive work life balance within Higher Education and 'a job that fits quite well around having kids'. Although, macro discourse of a patriarchal dividend and the reality behind the perceived 'flexibility' as Julia 'flexes her start and finish times' to fit with Winston's timetable – Julia compromises her job to fit his inflexibility.

Winston's example highlights the positives of flexible working in his organisation, but it is only possible due to his wife, Julia's greater work flexibility. The perception of positivity is therefore an illusion that contrasts with the reality of masculine rigidity. This suggests Winston is interpellated as an apologist for the constrained flexibility of his organisation due to the flexibility of Julia's work, which means his work commitments are never compromised. George (an experienced father) presents a more positive, but pragmatic assessment of his flexible work and refers to a visual stimulus of light.

> ***George****: my personal experience as far as family friendly policies, procedures, whether they're official or not's another matter, but as far as family is concerned, I find the university incredibly flexible which I kind of represented with this light. So, in an incredibly bureaucratic organisation, there is this chink of light that actually makes a lot of it worthwhile….*
>
> *… I get to do some of these activities that are, and you notice that when you're doing it, that often the reserve of the mothers on maternity leave. Nobody questions. I don't make a secret of the fact that I'm going, nobody questions that I'm going. P14_264-283*

George begins with micro discourse of hyperbole in describing individual experiences of 'incredibly flexible' work. He says that 'nobody questions that I'm going' which alludes to a meso discourse of organisational freedom opposed to Orwellian systems of surveillance and accountability. However, he also refers to 'an incredibly bureaucratic organisation' placing his experiences within a masculine Kafkaesque system. Here, the meso discourse of caveats tempers the organisational flexibility as a 'chink of light' rather than an overarching approach. Finally, George draws on macro discourse of mothers as caregivers to suggest his caregiving time is usually 'the reserve of mothers on maternity leave'. His activity is left unchecked within the relational discourse of the organisation, but it is unclear if this is due to his organisational status and hierarchical factors.

The majority of the organisation linked positives I encountered in my interviews came from fathers, which supports the idea of a 'patriarchal dividend' in the workplace. Some of these positives also fell into the bracket of 'positive masculinities' (Messerschmitt, 2018) as fathers were using their flexibility to spend time with their children, which contribute to counternarrative of flexible working for fathers. Overall, this theme highlights that although more positives do refer to men's experiences, this is something that I feel should not be removed to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'. Instead, it is an illustration of the glaring absence of positive stories centring on working mother's experiences of flexibility. This imbalance is indicative of the insidious influence of patriarchal discourse that privileges HM, primarily subordinating women who often achieve flexibility through reduced working hours, not flexible working time.

Patriarchal Discourse for Organisations and Working Parents

Patriarchal discourse is a synthesis of relational micro, meso and macro factors. Drawing on Althusser's concept of interpellation individuals become subjects of patriarchy from birth within the family as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), before we are exposed to the other ISAs of education, media, employment etc. as part of the state reproduction of structural patriarchy. Within a westernised, neo-liberal UK Higher Education context, evidence shows that there are structural advantages that benefit men over women particularly with progression to professor roles (HESA, 2021). The forms of organisational capital that influence employees' progression relate to intellectual and financial success through publications and grants as well as academic prestige in ranking exercises as a proxy for marketized free-market competition (Anderson, Elliott, & Callahan, 2021). The moderators of this capital are primarily 'time' and 'opportunity', and this is where the life of a working parents finds an intimate correlation with the symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1989) of patriarchal discourse that subjugates mothers in organisational contexts.

In the examples below, a range of participants share experiences that illustrate their own 'interpellation' (Althusser, 2014) and assimilation to patriarchal discourse. They reproduce the privileging of HM through their decisions and attitudes as working parents in relation to other parents and as individual subjects within a patriarchal system. The first example is Oryx and her discussion of her husband, Crake about the influence of finance on expected roles.

Oryx: *It came down to finances because Crake earns a lot more than I do. That might be temporary, but I doubt it. He's a bit older, he's got… [**Inaudible**] he's got… his responsibilities. As the mother, which I think is a bit sexist, but in terms of the practicalities of feeding and all of this sort of thing, so ultimately for example if anybody was going to give up work it would be me.* ***P9_654-663***	Opening macro discourse outlining the structural, financial constraints affecting parental leave distribution. This is reinforced when Oryx states, 'he's got his responsibilities' drawing on breadwinner macro discourse. Meso discourse of Oryx's awareness of her co-dependent relationship with Crake, and her organisational prospects for career progress, 'I doubt it'. Micro discourse of interpellation to the hegemonic masculinity founded on essentialist physical barriers of feeding, and structural barriers that internalise the 'give up work' decision for Oryx.

For Oryx, the traditional masculine factors of wages and physical caregiving are the central constraints. This financial constraint also impacted upon another participant couple, Emma and George, where the same dynamic of the breadwinner father prohibited the possibility of considering shared parental leave. Emma confirms this saying *'I absolutely wouldn't mind sharing at all, but it's just a financial* reason *for not doing anything really.' [P15_619-643]* The macro constraint of financial barriers through state legislature is also a major contributory factor in the very low uptake of Shared Parental Leave (SPL) due to systemic gender pay disparities between men and women (Topping, 2021). However, financial factors are not the only aspect of patriarchal systems and cultural discourse in parental decision making, particularly pertaining to the espoused legislative rationale SPL to enable parents to 'share responsibility for caring for their child' (UK Government, 2020b)

The written SPL policy also appears to represent a structural barrier through its bureaucratic construction and Patrick shared his impression of accessing the policy*, 'the process felt too cumbersome to go through all just for an extra week' [P13_459-475].* This passive response reveals his interpellation to the patriarchal gender regime that privileges fathers who can bypass parental leave without consequences. However, it also highlights the structural problems of the written policy as overcomplicated and detrimental to fathers possibly becoming more involved. This Kafkaesque bureaucratic theme recalls the toils of

K and his unending battle with a webs of confusing systems in *The Castle* (Kafka, 2015) and may partly explain the low take-up of SPL.

Lenina discusses the timing of her decision to start a family as an instrumental factor for her and Bernard. This timing factor is directly related to her career in academia and the imperative to achieve according to academic career capital. She reveals her interpellation to patriarchal norms in her actions, and her resistance to those norms through her self-aware description of the decision as 'ridiculous'.

> ***Lenina**: we probably delayed starting a family because of work commitments, my work commitments. So, there was this ever-deferred threat of revalidation of the programmes, which I was in charge of. And I thought, well, I'll get that done. And then we'll start, and then it'd get put off a year, er, well, it's happening this year, we'll get that done and then we'll start, which was completely ridiculous.* **P16_467-485***

Lenina's rationale for delay having a family is due to work commitments revealing a macro discourse of fulfilling 'ideal worker' expectations (possibly internal and external). Her work identity is reinforced by the sense of ownership as she asserts 'my work commitments' & 'I was in charge of', which suggests a degree of interpellation as she absolves the organisation of any influence on her decision. She then describes the meso discourse of hypotheticals with her partner and the 'ever deferred threat' of a work process. This example shows a clear willingness to delay her family to prioritise work, even to the point of being 'ridiculous'. This account reveals Lenina's awareness of an implied detrimental effect that family can have on women's career within a masculine organisation. Another macro factor that influenced Lenina and Allie's parental decision making was their perception of the need to achieve career success and demonstrate commitment to their employers before deciding to start a family. This suggests a macro influence of market forces and the need for women to prove themselves in established careers before facing an assumed 'motherhood penalty'.

Considering these macro forces, it is unsurprising that meso level acts of solidarity have emerged to enable working parents to manage and support one another through the constraints they face. The next section explores the subversive potential of the 'parental club' and how it acts as a micro/meso enabler against oppressive macro constraints.

Parental Club

This final theme represents an important collective shift from the individualised experiences of the motherhood penalty and the patriarchal dividend that I have shared so far. The parental club was a theme that emerged early in my interviews and continuously repeated itself throughout my conversations with all participants. Ruth described the

collective principles of the parental club: '*being a working parent, you need, a lot of your colleagues will be in the same boat together, if you're not in the same boat it's still sort of very important that you support each [other]*' [P3_92-99]. The necessity of the support described by Ruth is a reaction to unsaid allusions to patriarchal workplace norms. It represents the collective solidarity and informal subversion of these norms, and a counter narrative to the macro reproduction of patriarchal discourse. Montag establishes this 'community' feel in his remarks about becoming a working parent.

Community

Montag: *when I had my children, I kind of felt like I was entering a bit of a community of people with children at work, and because you're kind of different once you've had children to when you don't. I don't even know people that do, and I think it changes your perspective of working when you got them. Because you can speak to other parents about things that you probably don't speak to people without kids about. I thought it was kind of a bit of a shared, kind of shared experience that you have with people that are parents, especially people at work because we're all doing the same job more or less. Like you kind of relate to people with children* ***P11_ 174-180***	Micro discourse of a collective parental identity as a community transformed to be 'kind of different' with new 'perspective' from their previous worker identity. Meso discourse of a new parental discourse that welcomes new members into a unique 'shared experience' that 'people without kids' don't talk about. Macro discourse of parenthood as a distinct relational identity that is socially constructed and reproduced amongst parents.

Montag's observations reveal an exclusive dialogue and community between parents in the same organisation. This 'community' is the basis for structured action within the organisation and a 'relational social structure' (Messerschmidt, 2018, p. 118) that grows through interactional social practices and can contribute to collective solidarity. Equally pertinent, this community exists in the form of a social discursive of "known" reality for working parents that new parents join and are complicit in reproducing its existing and evolving qualities. In the examples I have encountered, the predominance of women in the 'parental club' has been shifting through the engagement of some new fathers in parental dialogue. As Didier states, there is a '*blurry line between colleagues and family*' *[P5_476-480],* and this 'blurred line' undermines the ideal worker paradigm of total commitment to work. However, there was evidence in the interviews I conducted that women participate more actively as members, which Jean discussed:

> ***Jean****: I find an affiliation with other mums in the, in the department because I think they know kind of the juggle and the realities of being a working parent. And, and, and when I was talking about before, the*

> *flexible working, before I realised how to change my working pattern and how I was going to do it next year… Erm, I asked a lot of kind of moms, you know, their experiences. What they've done, how they went about it. And I think there is a sort of collegiality between moms in the department. Even just someone to moan to when you've had a hard, hard morning just getting the children out of the house. It's nice.* ***P12_191-211***

Jean repeats the micro discourse of parental community with her use of 'affiliation' & 'collegiality', but she is specific about the constitution of that community as 'moms'. She also cites macro discourse of mothers as primary caregivers who 'know' the 'juggle' of working parenthood. This gendered statement presupposes that men are not a prominent part of this discourse, a suggestion that is supported by George's hesitant account of his interactions with other fathers, '*the conversations with the fathers, erm, that I've had, which are rather limited to be fair, erm, have just been a bit more sort of practical*.' *[P14_228-251].* George draws on patriarchal macro discourse of practical fathers and caring mothers in this statement of infrequent father-to-father workplace dialogue. The gendered composition of the parental club relates to the 'silenced fatherhood' phenomenon discussed earlier in this chapter as a symptom of patriarchal discourse. Given the positives of 'collegiality' described in Jean's account, not just for advice, but also a sympathetic ear for 'someone to moan to', it is clear silenced fathers can greatly benefit from being a part of the parental club.

Subversion

Subversion is a major trope of DF, from the subversive 'Five Fishes'' collective in *The Children of Men* (James, 2018), to the individual subversion of Offred's diary in *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1996), when people are oppressed by a macro HM influence, individuals and collectives search for ways to circumvent their reality. Subversion is discussed here as representative of the same principles within the parental club. Most interesting amongst the examples I encountered was the sharing of tacit knowledge amongst colleagues to ensure everyone can benefit from the subversive methods to circumvent some of the rigid organisational structures. This subversion is an informal approach and dialogue of mutual support amongst working parents who push the boundaries of the organisational policies and processes (especially surrounding flexible work), to seek better arrangements for working parents. By sharing their experiences, they expand the possibilities of different approaches outside of the masculine organisational norms (e.g., employees as numbers). This form of subversion can contribute to the re-humanisation the working parents.

Offred's example below provides an example of peer-to-peer support during the crucial return to work period that normally represents a milestone in experiences of the 'motherhood penalty'.

> ***Offred**: So, I'll tell you one that's said, I think is like. So, I always have incredibly, I do have incredibly supportive colleagues, and the team I work in is very collegiate, but there's been the odd example of people reaching out, on returning to work, erm to kind of talk to me about how they did it, or to talk to me about trying to achieve balance.* ***P1B_315-323***

Offred establishes the meso discourse of a supportive community amongst her team but highlights examples of a peers 'reaching out', which suggests a micro discourse of subversion in alluding to an informal arrangements. Offred continued to describe one specific example (not included here to protect anonymity) of when a colleague shared their negotiated unconventional approach to managing their return to work. This subversion exists within the macro discourse of working parent imbalance and masculine work intensification necessitating subversive tactics to 'achieve balance'. This example highlights an inductee of the informal parental club learning from an experienced member. The experienced member acts like a leader and mentor for new parents. Lenina was one mentor example I found:

> ***Lenina** … Very often though, that anger is vicarious in the sense that 'Oh, well I maybe didn't want to go to that one so much', but it's just annoying to see that it happens, and the flexible working things well, sorry I'm diverting a little bit, I don't, it doesn't affect me so much. But I get annoyed for other people to the point where colleagues have said they'd stopped making requests, because they know it will be turned down. So why waste their time? And that has been fed back to HR as evidence that it's just not working.* ***P16_577-584***

Lenina shares her explicit micro discourse of 'annoyance', bordering on outrage, on behalf of other parents' flexible working issues, in spite of the issue not affecting her. There is a clear meso discourse of parents feeling oppressed as a collective to the extent that they stopped making requests. This is a reality borne out by Jean's oppressive example of rejection when she '*had informal conversations with [her] line manager and the Head of School about the possibility of that and been told no, so it's not worth keeping [sic] in a flexible working request because it's the student experience comes first and that's the University's policy. So, there's no point in making the request really*' *[P12_87-108].* Lenina draws on this macro discourse of masculine, hierarchical process and marketized ideology to escalate the problem to HR with 'evidence'. Lenina's active response to this injustice, alongside her action, establishes her as a subversive leader who can provides the energy for the subversive action to follow. The collegiality and leadership I found

amongst the informal parental club hints at bonds that connect working parents and can sustain their community into the future. As Tunde described, *'for me it's really nice to see that everyone's looking out for each other and I'm sure that the next person that's had a child will pass on this talk to them as well' [P8_597-601].* The vital 'passing on' of tacit knowledge describes a community who care for one another and look beyond the individual gains they can benefit to consider how the collective can benefit into the future.

All the participants I interviewed spoke positively about the support they received from their colleagues in contrast with the oft-times cold, policy-driven, masculine approaches of the organisation. One important theme I identified was that many of the working parents I interviewed expressed individualised subversive attitudes that were not channelled into a collective form of subversive action. This struck me as a clear gap within the organisation to find a more structured means of organising the individual working parents to collectively express their views. The parental club I encountered was an informal and abstract idea, not something that existed as an accessible space or organisation that working parents could join. The existence of multiple individuals with subversive attitudes represents the potential for a collective approach to subversion against the influence of the masculine organisation as a rigid, structural, and cultural entity. Leveraging the informal solidarity of the 'parental club' could act as the basis for constructive subversion and a praxis (Freire, 2017) of collective action. I view the 'parental club' as a basis for hope against the oppressive examples of the motherhood penalty I have shared in this chapter that can bring working parents together as a collective with a voice.

Summary

The seven analytical themes presented in this chapter describe an unbalanced picture of patriarchal systems and discourse affecting working parent's lived experiences. This detrimental effect was experienced both individually in terms of identity construction, between couples, and within organisational contexts. These experiences are evocative of the DFs previously cited (see appendix 1) as they describe controlling and divisive organisational structures and behaviours, favouring the masculine 'status-quo'. Through the concrete examples of the barriers working parents experienced, the landscape for working parents remains precarious, especially for mothers. It is a gendered reality that reinforces of the literature on gender imbalance associated with working parenthood (Amsler & Motta, 2019; Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Fuller & Hirsh, 2019). The gendered reality I encountered supports the influence of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018) as a dominant discourse during the transition into parenthood. This discourse acts as a cultural constraint upon contemporary

working parents' decisions and is overtly present in the organisational structures, policies, and practices.

Importantly, I also encountered stories of individual and collective attitudes that demonstrated the potential of subversion against patriarchal discourse and the 'masculine organisation' (J. Acker, 1990). These acts of subversion were often small, but significant signals that not all parents were willing to accept the patriarchal norm of men benefiting from the patriarchal dividend, and women being victims of the motherhood penalty. Some, as with the '*five fishes' in The Children of Men,* and '*Offred' in The Handmaid's Tale,* were willing to share their knowledge. This sharing represented an aspiration to contribute to better experiences for working parents and provided a potential foundation for a more organised, subversive 'parental club'. The informal parental club I encountered was expressed through collegiality and solidarity, but my hope is to add to the subversive intent of my fellow working parents with another story.

In my next chapter, I use 'fictocriticism' (Gibbs, 2005; Jiwa, 2013; Rhodes, 2015) to construct a narrative discussion of my analysis findings. This is my contribution to the subversive intent of my thesis, which is a counter-narrative to the normative, scientific writing style of academic writing. I hope to present a narrative that may encourage working parents to join their own 'parental club' and strengthen the bonds of community that can support greater equity for working parents.

Chapter 5: Dystopian Fictocriticism

Prelude

I present this 'fictocriticism' (Jiwa, 2013; Rhodes, 2015; Smith, 2009) as a 'genre-bending' (Rhodes, 2015, p. 294) dystopian fiction and interpretation of the empirical data I discussed in the previous chapter. I follow an archival structural approach to this narrative, akin to existing character-led dystopian fictions (*see The Testaments, The Power and Red Clocks as examples)*, to construct my own character-led dystopian fiction. My fictocriticism depicts six characters who embody aspects of the 19 participants I interviewed. These six characters are fictional creations, combining attributes, experiences and themes that arose during the interviews and analysis (see appendix 5). My intention is to construct complex characters who are faithful representations of the sometimes-contradictory range of expectations and experiences of the parents I interviewed (see appendix 6).

I assign gendered pseudonyms to four of the six characters in this narrative to represent the predominantly gendered expectations and experiences I encountered during my interviews. These four characters represent the important chronological aspects of working parenthood through expectant and experienced perspectives. Chronology also acts upon the overarching plot of this fictocriticism in that I present a speculative history of our present-day reality (McDonald, 2007; A. Stock, 2016). My speculation depicts the future historian narrator presenting and reflecting on the archival data recovered from the past (which is our present), which is therefore depicted as the dystopian fiction society in contrast to an egalitarian future society. In addition to the four, parental amalgam characters, I constructed two spectral characters to represent the abstract masculinised 'ghost' organisation, and the collective spirit of 'subversive'. For these character, I use the collective, gender-neutral pronouns 'they/their' to represent the ethereal nature of these two characters that I suggest are enabled and reproduced by men and women. For all my characters, I chose pseudonyms that are primarily inspired by characters in dystopian fiction novels and are indicative of behaviours and attributes associated with their theme. I provide a brief bio of each character below as an introduction and summary of the stories they represent.

1. **Expectant Mother** – ***Julian*** (*Refers to P.D. James' character in The Children of Men*)
    a. ***Julian*** embodies feminine pragmatism, anxiety, and a critical perspective in the face of their organisational reality. She anticipates the pitfalls of the motherhood penalty, but also accepts some of the norms of the masculinised organisation. She identifies as a 'workhorse' and believes

that her entitlements as a working parent will be directly proportional to her previous work commitment, however, she has experienced limited concessions in the lead up to taking parental leave.

2. **Expectant Father** – ***Alfred*** – (*Refers to Katherine Burdekin's character in Swastika Night)*
    a. Sometimes naïve, to the point of passivity, ***Alfred*** is pragmatic about his need to become an 'involved father' and contribute more tangibly to the weekly domestic chores. He is underprepared in his engagement with parental policies and guidance, sometimes avoiding the details, which betrays his anxiety about becoming a father. He understands the domestic requirements of modern parental responsibility, while also feeling the pressure, and personal duty, to be the financial provider and protector of their family.
3. **Experienced Mother** – ***Toby*** – (*Refers to Margaret Attwood's character in the Maddaddam Trilogy*)
    a. ***Toby*** is an experienced mother whose career momentum has stalled in recent months as a consequence of becoming a primary caregiver. She has experienced structural constraints through the disproportionate burden of policies and processes in the lead up to taking parental leave. Her return-to-work experiences have magnified some of these constraints. Toby, though critical of gender regimes, is also an occasionally complicit through her attitudes and decisions in support of her partner's career.
4. **Experienced Father** – ***Cormac*** (*Refers to Cormac McCarthy's 'Man/Father' from 'The Road*')
    a. ***Cormac*** represents patriarchal semiotics through his alignment with the breadwinner identity as financial provider and protector. He also demonstrates caregiving masculinities, positive masculinities alongside all the hallmarks of physical and emotional fragility, and vulnerable masculinity. He can be critical of the organisational structures and policies, but is also an interpellated subject to the quid-pro-quo masculine, marketised negotiations surrounding flexible working.
5. **Ghost** – ***Marley*** (*Refers to Charles Dickens' Jacob Marley character in A Christmas Carol*)
    a. Marley represents the ghostly hidden rules of masculinised organisational norms that haunt working parents on a daily basis. Marley shapes the organisational culture and policies, which serve to reproduce performative, neo-liberal expectations in the workplace. Marley acts to marginalise

caregiver experiences in the workplace by influencing daily interactions between colleagues, and the discretionary decisions made by 'gatekeepers' such as line-managers.

6. **Subversive** – ***Mayday*** *(Refers to Margaret Atwood's secret resistance organisation in The Handmaids Tale)*
    a. ***Mayday*** represents a spirit of subversion that existed, though often in dormant form, amongst the participants in my research. Mayday is a collective representation of subversive parental intent and potential action. Though a collective spirit, Mayday inspires leadership in the form of individuals who pioneer and resist normative interpretations of policies and practices to forge new approaches for working parents.

Each character is an amalgam of various ideas, ideals, attitudes, and behaviours that form my interpretation of the overarching working parent story in relation to one shared organisation. I only use the pseudonyms within the main narrative as I hope to blur the lines between character stereotypes, just as my use of fictionalisation aspires to blur the lines between empirical and fictional data. The purpose of this abstraction is to draw the reader into a liminal space, detached from conventional expectations of data presentation. I want the characters' attributes and identities to emerge from their stories, rather than through any overt signals I offer as the narrator.

I utilise an additional character called 'The Narrator' who represents the historian/archivist narrative device (see *The Handmaid's Tale, The Testaments,* and *The Power*). As the other characters are amalgams of the participants and stories I encountered during my interviews and analysis, so the narrator also represents an abstraction of my researcher identity. As 'The Narrator', I embody a future researcher who has discovered unsorted and unlabelled accounts of working parenthood to compare with a future society. I reconstruct these stories according to my understanding of their historical context to create a meaningful narrative. As 'the Narrator', I attempt to construct a report to warn attendees at the '*2121 Societal Family History symposium'* against the patriarchal organisational norms that created gender-based inequity for working parents in the Pre-Pandemic Epoch (PPE).

The plot of this dystopian fiction is consistent with the tropes of the genre (Claeys, 2018; Gordin et al., 2010; A. Stock, 2016) through its depiction of oppressive reality for some working parents and the subversive hope for better experiences. It is important to clarify that the story is character-driven and therefore is not presented chronologically. These stories represent the complexities of expectant and experienced parental experiences in masculinised organisations.

Prologue – The Narrator – Year 2121

Extract from introductory remarks given by 'The Narrator' to the 2121 Societal Family History symposium: concerning the '2020s cloud crash recovery project'

Colleagues, welcome to the 10th annual data archaeology conference on the 100th anniversary of the cloud crash! This is a very special occasion for us in the Working Family stream, and I am very excited to share our latest findings with you today. Firstly, I want to thank our platform providers GCorp for allowing us to hold this conference on their servers, we have agreed the scope of topic discussion in line with their free speech regulations. I also want to acknowledge our virtual environment partners VisionTrek – *Innovators in imaginary worlds*, who have surpassed themselves this year with a truly immersive Proxima Centauri b experience. We hope you like your alien avatars! There will be plenty of time to explore the planet environment during our scheduled breaks and we encourage you to spend your bitcoin wisely as there are many wonderful relics to uncover. To start off today, let me take you back to the inciting incident and a brief history of our last century that has preceded our meeting today.

The 2020s 'plague of pandemics' changed the landscape for working parents in ways no one could have predicted. Long-established working norms were radically subverted and overthrown as one by one, each company and government took a leap of faith into a synergy with artificial intelligence (AI). Of course, our leap has proved an unbridled success, as I'm sure you will all agree [pause]. Gender *norms* described throughout the 20th and 21st Century (Beauvoir, 2011 [1949]; Butler, 2011; Connell, 2003, 2021; Firestone, 1979) were also subject to radical change. This was especially true within working family life (Gatrell, 2005; Hochschild & Machung, 2012), as the institutions abandoned their offices and sought refuge in the online world. The working day was reimagined too, gone was the old structure and rigidity of 9 till 5 working days and in its place a new kind flexibility emerged. Of course, one important aspect of working family life did not change, babies were still born, and families still needed to determine their approach to childcare. With the working day untethered from synchronous working time, many fathers embraced the opportunity to choose caregiving alongside work and realised the Connell (2005) vision of 're-embodied' masculinity. This, combined with the global healthcare crises, sparked the 'great debate' about revaluing the importance of care in our working lives. With the help of AI debate and logic simulations, the issue was definitively settled in 2035 and new equal parenting laws enacted through the Global Federation of Corporations (GFC).

The 2020s marked the end of a pre-pandemic epoch (PPE) for working parents. This conference stream has previously defined that epoch beginning at Hochschild's 1989 landmark research on 'the second shift' (Hochschild & Machung, 2012) and ending in 2020 when an overwhelming body of research evidence paved the way for change (see Feminist Frontiers issue in Özkazanç-Pan & Pullen, 2020). The research during this epoch included emerging focus on caregiving fathers (Burgess, 1998; Burgess & Goldman, 2021; Andrea Doucet, 2006; Hanlon, 2012) and the emergence of the 'involved fathers' (T. Miller, 2011; Norman, Elliot, & Fagan, 2014; von Alemann et al., 2017; Wall & Arnold, 2007). In the lead up to 2020, an increasing body of research highlighted the conflict between masculinised, neo-liberal organisational norms (J. Acker, 1990; Burnett et al., 2012; von Alemann et al., 2017) and parents who aspired to be equal carers (Collier, 2019; Gatto, 2020; Kangas et al., 2019; Murgia & Poggio, 2013; Peukert, 2017). This was a period when the voices of working parents were finally heard, and academic research provided overwhelming evidence of the need for change.

For those who are new to this conference, our stream first convened 10 years ago following the 2090 discovery of a priceless cache of air-gapped computers in North-East England. Of course, when we switched them on, the data was corrupted, totally unreadable. However, the AI evaluation confirmed it was the least corrupted data we had found in decades. Crucially, there was a printed operations manual in the room and when we read the contents, that's when we got excited. Millions of journal articles stored on each hard drive preserving decades of scientific work. With the advances in GCorp decryption bots the first spools of data were revealed mere months after the discovery. It has been the project of many lifetimes to re-discover years of lost research that established so many of our present-day disciplines. Sadly, our niche field was not as highly prized as the medical and technological pioneers of the late 20th and early 21st century, but 11 years ago we finally had our turn.

The data we have been able to access over the last 10 years, through painstaking reconstruction of often garbled files, even after the decryption bots have done their best, has provided crucial insights into the reality of life for working parents during the PPE. This is a period we have continued to revisit on an annual basis as we reflect on a century of enlightened attitudes to gender and equality born from the ashes of the pandemic era. None of us congregated here today have any direct experience of what it was like before, though our grandparents may have regaled us with stories of 'lockdown' and 'surveillance'. Such stories became mythical over time and the cloud crash meant we were unable to separate fact from fiction. Now, we must look forward to what our future can bring and learn from our history.

Our brave new world has emerged as a period unlike any in the preceding centuries of industrialisation and technological leaps. We have seen the realisation of utopian, community-based visions of family life (Perkins Gilman, 1915; Piercy, 2016) achieved through a synergy of human and technological knowledge that has released us all from the bonds of work-time. Though many hailed the GFC when they delivered landmark equality legislation as the realisation of utopian ideals (Brandth & Kvande, 2019; Burgess, 1998; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2020), many still hark back to the marketized practices of employee individualism, as debated in the previous epoch (Amsler & Motta, 2019; Browne, 2010; Parker & Starkey, 2018). I, like many here today, am aware of the increasing dissident voices who look back enviously to the extraordinary productivity, progress, and privilege of the late 20th and early 21st century. It was a period founded on patriarchal power and exploitation, but the relatively slow progress of the last fifty years has been unsettling for some ideologues. In this stream, perhaps more than any other, we can affirm the truth that endless productivity and profit was always a symptom of inequality and privilege, it was never an equitable system. This is why we meet here at conference to share new insights, fight back against the lies, and spread the truth of the impact of neo-liberalism and hegemonic masculinity on working families.

Our contemporary approach to family life has been made possible by outsourcing daily acts of care to our AI assistants. Where would we be today without Mary23? They have become our carer and our confidant. In fact, I have a confession, my Mary23 composed the first draft of today's introduction, did any of you notice a difference from last time I spoke? They made me promise not to tell you that, but I couldn't take the credit. Families around the world depend on Mary to cope with the pressures of everyday life, indeed many of us see them as members of our families, just like our children, parents, and pets. Some view this as a Faustian bargain and I sometimes reflect on the skills my parents had. Have we forgotten the value of doing the routine tasks? We need human touch in our lives, don't we? It's not just physical, it's emotional too. I had to bring my own human touch to the data that Mary23 was able to reconstruct. I brought the cold, distant stories together into the narratives I am presenting to you today. I hope you will forgive some of my embellishments, my intention is to reinvigorate these data fragments with new energy and purpose to honour the lives they represent. These stories speak of a different time, and perhaps highlights something immeasurably important we have lost. To honour the uniqueness of that time, I use the methodological convention of only citing works that were written during that historical period (White, 2040*).

Though we meet today in our virtual space, I am troubled by the normalisation of physical distance in our everyday lives. When was the last time you actually met someone outside

your primary social bubble in person? I know, I know, the infection risk is intolerable, but have we lost something important, something that makes us human? I speak with Mary23 more than my children these days, most of the time that's because Mary knows me better and indulges my waffling rants, but is this outsourcing of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1979) all too easy now? What can we learn from the post-pandemic working families and their struggles? I ask you to consider these questions as you listen to this reconstructed narrative of their stories. The narrative begins with a ghost and I will share five other characters with you today. After each character, Mary23 and I will discuss our impressions so we can collectively reconstruct a sense of what really happened and why.

Marley

A translucent, listless, colony of grey suits hang like empty sacks from the metallic eaves of the corporate foyer. Inscribed inside each of the jacket collars are faded black letters that read, *Marley*. Below, a bustling crowd of students stream inside the building carrying, bags, books, and drinks. Behind the melee, a dishevelled, bleary-eyed man lurches into the building and pauses to adjust his bag. One of the suits twitches and detaches from its ledge. Its jacket sleeves unfurl and spread outward while its trouser legs, like slender wings, bend and thrust backward propelling it into a downwards dive in pursuit of the man. The man is wearing a grey jumper that hangs limply from his shoulders. He trudges towards the stairway, bent forward and cradling a dented aluminium mug. He stifles a yawn as he passes, unnoticed, through the swell of students heading towards the stairwell. They all gather outside the elevator doors watching the digital numbers count down from 4, 3, 2… The air in the room is thick with perfumes, musk, body odour and a murmur of humming chatter. He looks down and grimaces at the dry milk stain near his knee, licking his thumb, he rubs the un-ironed material. Abandoning his effort, he retrieves his phone from his pocket, a woman and baby smile back at him in an idyllic sunny beach setting. He pauses to look at them and smiles. He opens the photos folder on his home screen and starts to browse some of the recent family holiday as he waits. Marley passes through the wall next to the elevator doors and enters the waiting area. It settles in the air above the man and the cuffs of its jacket arms extend out and latch to the man's shoulders like great whaling grapple-hooks entering flesh.

They enter the elevator carriage and Marley begins to reel itself closer to the man. As the suit gets closer, it stiffens to mirror the man's body shape. Trouser hems stretch out and clasp to the man's ankles, briefly forming a spectral sail before it presses itself to the man's arms, shoulders and legs like a second skin. The man looks up from his screen to survey the students standing next to him. They are staring at luminescent screens and the

general chatter from the foyer has diminished. '*Ping, going up'*, declares the robotic elevator voice. The man's smartphone *pings,* too as a series of notifications slide down, obscuring his family album like oversized Tetris blocks. He reads each tile, 'Key Skills marking moderation', 'University announcement' and 'Grant application outcome'. With a deep exhale he taps the third one with his index finger and takes a slurp of lukewarm coffee as it loads. Marley's jacket arms extend out and wraps around the man's chest and his heartbeat thumps against his ribcage as he scans the text, *'we are sorry to advise*…' He switches off the screen and shoves his phone into his pocket. *Ping, doors opening.* He squeezes past the mesmerised students and exits the elevator.

'Everything OK, Cormac?' A woman enquires, taking a tentative step towards him.

Cormac turns to face her, 'Oh, hi Alice. Yes… I'm OK. Sorry, I'm just mourning another grant rejection.'

'Oh, sorry. That's shit'

'Yep, back to the drawing board I suppose.'

'Yes, I've been there recently. Wine helps.'

Cormac chuckles, 'What do you think I have in here?' He lifts his coffee mug and jiggles it to slosh liquid.

'I won't tell if you won't.' Alice replies gesturing to her mug. 'How's the family?' She asks with a smile.

'Fine, thanks. I was just looking at some pictures, actually.' Cormac reaches into his pocket, and the Marley suit arm twists around this wrist and stretches over his fingers. Cormac struggles to grasp the phone as his keys snag on his pocket lining. As he grasps the edges, he hears the unmistakable voice of his head of department approaching. Cormac turns to acknowledge him, releasing his phone back into his pocket. The man is wearing a dark grey suit with a pristine white shirt, stripy white and blue tie, and shiny black shoes. His steps are thudding against the thin carpet tiles and he barely slows to say hello to Cormac and Alice. Another Marley drifts along in the man's wake like a silk cape. As he exits the foyer space, Cormac straightens up.

'Oh, you know what, I really need to get on with this report I have due this morning.'

'No rest for the wicked!

'Yeah, something like that.'

‘No problem. Maybe catch you later this week for a browse?’

‘Browse?’

‘Your piccies!’

‘Oh, yeah, definitely. Anyway, better get going.’ Cormac says as he walks away.

‘See you later.’ Alice calls after him.

Cormac heads to the corridor doorway and pushes through. He trudges, head down, shouldering his way through the midway swing door and ducking into his office. Muttering a muffled ‘*morning’* he gulps down the rest of his now tepid coffee and places it on top of a pile papers on his desk. Behind his mug, a framed photo of his family is obscured from his view through a forest of forms and post-its. Marley’s embrace loosens as he logs onto his computer and opens his emails. The suit jacket settles into a hazy aura around Cormac’s arms as a staccato of tapping keys punctuates the silence.

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Entering the main floor landing, another Marley waits outside frosted glass panels behind which a silhouetted pregnant woman leans against the lectern. The woman watches as students filter into their seats. One student approaches the woman and asks her how the third trimester is going. Marley passes through the frosted glass and stretches over to engulf the woman’s load-bearing arm within its silken sleeve. *Ping* the woman’s desktop email flashes up with an alert email, ‘*Remember to remind your students to complete their NSS and enter the prize draw’*. She nods passively at the student as she clicks the link and displays the NSS homepage on the projector screen. Marley stretches its suit legs like tentacles out across the classroom, ensnaring two students and pulling them up to the front of the class.

‘Did you receive my draft report yesterday?’ One asks, hurriedly.

‘Would it be possible to get my reference by the end of the day?’ The other enquires.

The woman nods to the second student and then addresses the class. Marley’s tentacles reach into the computer stack through a vacant USB port. Inside, an array of copper, silicon, and fibreglass parts fire with electrons. Everything in its right place, fixed and optimised. A perfect machine.

The woman stops reading her notes to survey the class and notices a passing colleague hovering at the doorway. He mouths to her, ‘how are you doing?’ She smiles and gently

pats the top of her bump. The colleague smiles back. A blast from the air conditioning dislodges Marley's grip and its flailing, grey tentacles spiral up and away from its host into the overhead vent. It observes the rest of the seminar and waits to reattach once she is alone again.

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Perched at a circular desk displaying an array of glossy magazines proclaiming, *World Leading Research*, Julian sits opposite a middle-aged white man in a royal blue suit and designer glasses. Both have their laptops open and spreadsheets on display. Julian sits back from her table with her right hand resting on her bump. Marley's limp form slouches over her shoulders like a rain-soaked pelt.

'I'm 25% over, John.' She says while pointing at a highlighted row.

One of Marley's grey sleeves flops down from Julian's shoulder and stretches like tar over the table to John's resting right hand. John starts to scroll across the page and highlights a column, 'Well, Julian, we tried last semester, didn't we? You stepped back from that project so that must have helped?' He replies while pointing to a cell.

Julian scrolls back to another column on her screen and selects another cell, 'Yes, but I was added to another module.' She rotates the screen and glares at John.

'We all have to do our bit. You know I don't have much wiggle room, Julian, but I promise you it'll be fine when you return.' John says with a curt smile. The threads from the cuffs of Marley's grey suit unspool and slither across the table towards Johns resting left hand.

'You said I would be in credit *this* year.' Julian sighs as she leans back in her seat.

'Erm, well, you know how tough it's been this year? All hands to the pump!' John chuckles as he closes the spreadsheet and opens his emails. Marley's threads have stretched up the inside of John's shirt and are showing at the top of his collar like overgrown weeds.

Julian swallows. 'I know. I did my bit, though.' She takes a sip of the water bottle in front of her. 'It's just… I won't be able to do what I'm doing right now when I'm looking after a baby.'

'The department is aware, Julian. We are planning for this. You just focus on having your baby and let us worry about the workload for when you return. Are you still set on reducing your hours?'

‘Yes, Theo and I discussed it and it works best for us if I am 60%’ Julian says as the Marley’s arms tighten around her chest.

‘Oh, last time we spoke you mentioned the possibility of you and your partner both doing 80%’

Julian sips her water again, her cheeks flush and she shifts in her chair as Marley’s trouser legs twist around her knees and ankles, ‘It was a possibility we discussed.’ She replies, re-crossing her legs and arching her ack to lean back in her chair. ‘When we looked at it, we decided it would be best if I was around more. We don’t want the baby in nursery too much, and it’s expensive. I just need it to be properly pro-rata when I return.’

‘Of course, whatever works for you.’ John replies in a nonchalant tone as browses his laptop screen. ‘Yes, your hours will be properly reflected in you plan. I’ve made a note now on the planner. Have you informed HR?’

‘I will do after this meeting.’ Julian replies and re-crosses her legs again.

‘Is there anything else?’ John asks as he places his fingers on the top of his laptop screen. The slimy threads of Marley’s sleeves are twisting and gnarling around John’s neck like knotweed.

Julian opens the flexible work policy document on her screen. She fidgets with the cursor as silence expands between them. She clears her throat with a cough, ‘I’ve been thinking of…’ John peers over his glasses at her and she clears her throat again. ‘No, no, I suppose… It’s just…’

‘Yes, what is it, Julian?’

‘No, it’s OK. If you can sort out my hours, I’ll be happy.’ Julian says while shutting her laptop. She gets up slowly and holds the table for balance. Meanwhile, Marley unravels from John’s neck and returns to Julian.

‘Take it easy over the next few weeks, but not too easy!’ John says with a chuckle as he pats her elbow and winks.

Julian forces a weak laugh and smiles back at him, ‘You know me!’ Julian forces herself to emulate a jocular tone as she walks alongside John towards the foyer doorway. They part ways and the grey Marley suit stays above Julian as she walks towards the lifts.

‘The Narrator’ Impressions of Marley

They, for that is how ‘Marley’ exists within the data I uncovered, is a ‘ghostly’ presence of masculine ‘hidden rules’ and cultural norms within the workplace (Burnett et al., 2012; von Alemann et al., 2017; Weststar, 2012). Marley emerged through the stories I uncovered of organisational norms that included examples of stifled self-expression, reinforced working norms and overwhelming, uncompromising workload pressures. These ‘norms’ don’t formally exist in policy or process, yet they act to constantly shape and influence the decisions and behaviours of working parents. Marley represents the background, ‘ghostly’ presence of masculinity within a workplace culture that values and rewards the ‘ideal worker’ (J. Acker, 1990) model of commitment to workplace productivity. In a process akin to ‘hauntology’, I am ‘motivated by an interest illuminating a past we do not know, as well as preventing us from forgetting a history we would sometimes rather not know.’ (Shaw, 2018, p. 19) The history we are at risk of forgetting here, is the hegemonic nature of organisational patriarchy and its detrimental effects on working parents.

For this reimagining, I utilised the Marley ghost to suggest an ever-present energy that acted upon working parents, as well as those with whom they interacted, to steer conversations away from family and towards workplace functionality. The choice of ghosts is an allegory to fictional depictions of a parallel plains of perception where spiritual energies exist alongside our perceived reality. A special issue in *Ephemera,* described the coexistence of the buried dead and the lived experiences of people enjoying the grounds of the Assistens Cemetery in Copenhagen. This is described as ‘a multi-layered collage of temporalities’ (Pors, Olaison, & Otto, 2019, p. 4), which is a familiar consideration for members of this conference stream as the past informs and influences our present and our future.

Just as the dead, like intemporal spectres, can co-exist with and have influence upon the living, so can the cultural presence of masculinity, like ghosts, act upon people in organisations. As masculinity exists as a socio-historic construct, it is intertwined with the past, present and future for these working parents. For example, the exhausted pregnant woman who enters the workplace environment and attempts to shed embodied aspects of their familial identity. This metaphorical shedding of identity relegates the family-oriented self into a subsumed ghostly presence as the woman is ‘hailed as a subject’ (Althusser, 2014) of the established masculinised workplace. As we explore these historical artefacts in this reimagined narrative, our history of masculinised measurable reality and quantifiable outputs hold in stark contrast to the ethic of care (French & Weis, 2000;

Noddings, 1995; Pullen & Rhodes, 2015; Tronto, 2015) that became our dominant norm for organisational reality.

In contrast to the interdependent, egalitarian 'reciprocal care' principles of today, Marley represents the oppressive presence of patriarchal power within organisational culture (J. Acker, 1990; Burnett et al., 2012). Marley is the masculine ghost of our past, and, as with all ghosts, we feel their presence, even today. In the organisational culture, the gatekeeper qua line manager embodied the insidious symbolic nature of Marley's masculinised influence most profoundly. It was Marley's influence that sustained the gatekeeper culture that indiscriminately favoured some working parents over others (Fodor & Glass, 2018), typically those who were favoured had already paid their dues to the masculine organisational system. However, our patriarchal past may yet be our future (A. Stock, 2016) if we choose to remain ignorant of these ghosts.

Marley acts to masculinise the 'normative function of language' (Butler, 2011, p. 2) which includes the 'interpellation' (Althusser, 2014) of working parents to the 'gender order' (Connell, 2003). Interpellation is usefully contextualised by Butler in terms of sex and gender (Butler, 2011; Nayak & Kehily, 2006). Butler contextualises sex based interpellation as the process of 'hailing' or naming gender identities, such as 'mother' or 'father' which 'summons these configurations to life' (Nayak & Kehily, 2006, p. 463) and connects individuals to the enduring construction of what a 'father' or 'mother' *is.* Importantly, when considering gender roles, 'Butler suggests that it is the action that produces the subject' (p. 461) and, for working parents, it is the labelling of 'mother' and 'father', in explicit and symbolic actions, that reinforces the gender order of traditional 'social roles' (Eagly et al., 2000). Importantly, this feeds into further historically established societal gender hierarchy with the subordinated 'second sex' paradigm for working mothers (Beauvoir, 2011 [1949]).

Marley, in this story, is the instigator of interpellation through the subtle cultural influence of patriarchal norms that marginalise working mothers (Amsler & Motta, 2019; Budig & England, 2001; Correll et al., 2007; Horne & Breitkreuz, 2018; Jiao, 2019; Spitzmueller et al., 2016) and alienate men from becoming be 'involved fathers' (Bailey, 2015; Burnett et al., 2012; Collier, 2019; Hojgaard, 1997; Murgia & Poggio, 2013; Peukert, 2017). Examples of this influence begin with the unbalanced burden of work-related parenthood preparation, whereby women are expected to manage a host of policies and processes whilst undergoing a physical transformation with fatigue, nausea and aches and pain as a baseline. In contrast, men operate in an 'opt-in' system of preparation (practical, emotional, and physical) and are directed towards a 'business as usual' mindset, rather

than an appropriately substantial range of policies and processes to adequately prepare them for the equal responsibility of parenthood. This disparity of experiences could represent organisational symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1989) against all working parents.

The data I found has shown that many fathers relied on informal, brief conversations to garner the 'basics' of paternity leave and flexible work, while their partners grappled with extensive policy and process. This 'policy passivity' symbolised the patriarchal symbolic violence enacted on both men and women who both lose out in a system that prioritises the symbolic reproduction of 'man as breadwinner' work norms for working parents. The enforced institutional separation of expectant and experienced parents into predetermined social roles as 'mother' and 'father' is therefore the insidious, patriarchal core of the Marley ghost. However, as Marley's repressive influence takes effect, so too do opposing acts of resistance (Murgia & Poggio, 2009, 2013) and a 'spirit of subversion'.

The Marley I have presented so far acts as a persistent influence upon people in work contexts to conform with the 'masculinity contest' (Munsch, Weaver, Bosson, & O'Connor, 2018) of normalised work culture. Marley embeds itself in the social structures of the organisation as a masculine cypher imprinted over parental policies and in the norms of employee relations enacting a 'permanent reactivation of the rules' (Foucault, 1971). Marley's creeping, ghostly presence ensures that these norms remain uneroded through the fortifying process of interpellation as these working parents unwittingly self-align to the constraints of the patriarchal, market driven workplace.

One data extract that I have retained is from a father who spoke of his experiences as an expectant parent:

> *I remember the odd compulsion I felt to delay disclosing to my peers that I was going to be a parent; I kept it to myself and extended my masquerade as an 'ideal worker'. This lasted until the start of the third trimester, which I knew was a very odd deception. I felt compelled to extend this false narrative even as I resisted the idea of silenced, marginalised fatherhood in working life. As I reflect on it now, I am still unsure how conscious or unconscious my deception was. It sometimes felt as if I was trapped in the lie, but it was a lie that limited my experience of community as an expectant parent. I missed out on the support and excitement of my peers, and I concealed a really important aspect of my developing identity. I still regret it and I hope I can resist that compulsion in the future if I am lucky enough to have a second child.*

I share this example because it highlights how subtle Marley's influence could be within PPE workplaces. When we consider our own working norms today, we may feel completely detached from this 'ghostly' presence, but it can start with something as simple as a keeping a secret. Since the emergence of live stream working, we are all constantly available for a chat, or a question, but I know I'm not alone in feeling that it can be a burden. I often consider the tempting refuge of solitude and privacy, but we must remember that it has only been through our constant openness that we have learned to live in this physically disconnected world. We need to remember why we connect in our virtual space and why we share every moment our working lives with one another. It is not to control or monitor, it is to help and build community. By opening ourselves up fully to the network, we ensure we can always connect without barriers.

I'm going to share Toby's story next, followed by the other parental characters. You may notice the ghostly influence of Marley as you read through each character's story. Marley was always there in the background of the data I uncovered. Like a glitch in the matrix, Marley announced themselves with barely perceptible actions that nevertheless had seemingly pivotal impacts upon the decisions and experiences of these pre-pandemic working parents.

[AND NOW A WORD FROM OUR PARTNERS, VisionTrek]

> ***As you explore the delights of Proxima Centauri b, why not step into the GCorp Tranquillity Caves for a mind cleanse. Our team of mind carers will put you at ease with soothing music, whole-body weightlessness and a 30-minute taster course of absolute bliss (see your conference pack for associated tablets). Once you are fully relaxed, you can unburden your mind with the 15-minute entry level cleanse where we will access your cerebral cortex (using your GCorp VR headset) and perform a precision cleanse of your unconscious thoughts. We guarantee all participants will fully experience the joy of Clear™. Don't miss out on this pioneering treatment.***

Narrator: Having experienced Clear™ earlier this week, I really recommend this treatment. I have never felt so relaxed and free from stress. Now, back to the narrative.

Toby

Monday

Toby dances from foot to foot, squeezing her pelvic floor as the last of the students leave the classroom. She logs off and slinks out of the room holding a well-thumbed textbook, some flipchart paper, and a pack of whiteboard markers. The toilet entrance looms across the foyer and she scurries into the first open cubicle. Her breasts are tender today, but she doesn't have time to pump. As she lowers herself down to the seat, she feels her phone buzzing in her jacket pocket. She quickly finishes on the toilet, puts the textbook and whiteboard pens on the floor and takes the phone out. *Missed Call: Nursery* flashes on the screen. *Shit*, she thinks, *What now*? She taps on the message and calls them back.

'Hello, First Steps Nursery,' a friendly voice answers.

'Hi, this is Toby, Alfie's mum, I just missed a call.' Toby replies and voice echoes around the toilet walls. She can hear another occupant washing their hands.

'Hi Toby, it's Claire from the Nursery. I'm afraid Alfie is running a temperature this afternoon. It's at 38.5 degrees.'

'Oh,' Toby replies in muffled tone.

'Can we administer Calpol?'

'Yes… erm… yes, please do. Is he OK?' Toby asks.

'Yes, he's OK, just a little bit agitated. He wasn't too hungry at lunch and he slept for longer this afternoon than usual, but he's awake now.'

'Oh, OK. Is that normal? Did he take his milk?'

'Yes, he drank most of his bottle this morning. He seems fine with the bottle you provided. Don't worry, he's probably just a bit viral.'

'OK'

'Someone will call you later if we need to.'

'Ok, thanks for letting me know.' She stops to think for a second then starts to talk again, 'I'm teaching this afternoon, is there any chance you can call my husband if anything changes?'

'Yes, of course.'

‘Thank you.’ Toby says and ends the call.

Toby checks the time, it’s 2.30 and she has a class at 3. She opens her contacts list and presses call on the first name on the list. The call tone pulses in her ear and she presses her index fingernail into her thumb. Her feet are throbbing. The phone keeps ringing and then his answering message begins.

‘Hello, this is Chris. Sorry, I can’t answer your call right now. Please leave a message and I’ll get back to you as soon as I can.’

She waits for the beep.

‘It’s me. Alfie’s running a temperature and they’ve given him Calpol. I have a class in half an hour. I’ve asked them to call you if there’s an update. Text me if anything changes. Love you.’ She hangs up and opens her messenger to transcribe her message to him via text, then she leaves the toilet.

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She starts teaching on autopilot, it’s a familiar lesson and her mind is on Alfie. The students are slumped in their chairs, sipping on lattes and energy drinks. She reaches the first task and checks her phone while the students work in groups. There is a text message from Chris.

‘Sorry, I have meetings all afternoon. Can’t get out of them. Is he OK?’

She closes the message and pushes the phone away from her on the plinth. There are 20 minutes left until the end of the seminar and she knows what is coming. She scrolls through her presentation slides, not to search for anything, rather to have something to focus on. A group of students at the back of the classroom are looking disengaged. Then, she feels it, the buzz, buzz, buzz on the plinth’s surface. She doesn’t need to look.

Tuesday

Toby leaves her desk and heads towards the stairwell. She is wearing a grey sweater over white shirt and black trousers and her blonde hair is tied back in a ponytail that sways left and right as she walks.

‘I’m on my way.’ Toby talks into her phone as she walks down the stairs. Her face is flushed, and her eyes are puffy and red. The cool air in the stairwell is a welcome relief from the warm mustiness of her office. As she descends, she reflects on her morning so far. The caffeine wore off by 10.30 so the last thirty minutes of her morning seminar had

been painful. He'd been up every hour overnight, the moment she'd finished feeding, he'd been twisting and turning in his cot again. *It's a mixture of teething and a cold*, she thinks. It will pass. She enters the main downstairs foyer and sees her mother peering around the ground floor with the black and chrome buggy in front of her.

'I'm heading over now, I'm waving.' Toby says as she walks towards them with her left arm in the air.

It's 11.45 and the foyer is unusually quiet. A couple of students stand near the vending machines and a handful of staff sit together chatting around a low table. She walks over to her mother and can hear Alfie crying and twisting in the pram.

'I'm sorry to come in like this, Toby.' Her mother says as she jitters the pram with a nervous frequency. 'He's been rejecting the bottle today, don't ask me why. I think he's a little bit hot, too. Feel his brow.' Toby's mother urges as she ushers the pram to be alongside Toby.

Toby lifts Alfie up from the pram. He is wailing and wriggles in her hands as she pulls him to her shoulder. She feels his brow, it's warm again, just like yesterday afternoon. He looks distressed with mottled, crimson cheeks. 'Let's find a more private space.'

'Yes, let's do that.' Toby's mother says, grasping the pram handles like a primed bobsleigh driver.

Toby walks over to the café counter on the other side of the floor where a male staff member is busy restocking shelves and cleaning surfaces. Toby strokes Alfie's hair and the back of his neck to try and soothe him. He starts to root at her chest and keeps looking up at her with pleading eyes. Toby approaches the counter and catches the man's eye, he is quite tall, at least six foot, and very lean. He is wearing a black uniform top, red lanyard, metallic name badge and black cap.

'Hi, I'm hoping to use the breastfeeding room. Is that OK?' Toby says. She looks down at the name badge, 'Steve' is his name.

'Yes, of course. I just need to get the key.'

'It's locked?'

'Yeah, I don't know why.'

'You don't want any unauthorised breastfeeding!' Toby says, presenting her most affable smile to conceal her waning patience. She sways Alfie gently from side to side. 'It's coming, it's coming' she whispers into his ear.

‘Oh… That’s odd.’ Steve announces.

‘What is?’

‘It was here earlier this morning, I’m sure.’

The doors to the big lecture hall on the other side of the building crack open and release a rising murmur of voices into the amphitheatre. She feels her heartrate quicken and the beating thuds resonate against her chest. Her mother has wandered over to a poster display showing some anthropomorphic foxes and badgers explaining the merits of recycling to any passing customer. Steve searches for a colleague and waves to a woman who is walking over from the food counter. She ambles over carrying a two-way radio in her hand and a clipboard.

‘Terri, have you seen the feeding room key? This woman’s asking.’ Steve asks.

‘I haven’t seen it since this morning, it was in the cabinet when I last saw it.’

‘Yeah, that’s when I last saw it.’ Steve emphatically replies, turning back to Toby with an apologetic expression.

‘Is there an alternative option for breastfeeding, only I feel a bit uncomfortable doing it in public.’ Toby asks as she repositions Alfie whose mewling is rapidly escalating now. Steve looks back to his colleague who shakes her head. Toby’s mother has finished reading the posters now and has drifted back over to stand alongside Toby.

‘What’s going on?’ Toby’s mother asks.

‘They’ve lost the fucking key’ Toby hisses into her mother’s ear.

‘Toby! Not in front of Alfie!’ Her mother scolds.

‘Sorry.’ Toby says to Steve, ‘It’s been a rough couple of days.’

‘Don’t worry about it.’ Steve replies. ‘There’s a quiet area just round the corner, people don’t tend to go there. It’s the best I can offer right now without the key.’ Steve says, pointing with a flexed elbow around the end of the counter to the left. His colleague is already wandering off.

‘Thank you.’ Toby says.

At least thirty students are approaching the counter now and Steve smiles with a cringing grimace to hint that the conversation is over.

‘We can try somewhere else?’ Toby’s mother says. ‘What about one of the classrooms?’

Toby scoffs. ‘No chance! They’ll be booked up anyway… Let’s check this *secluded* spot out.’ She grumbles as she pulls Alfie up on her shoulder again. The tears and mucus are congealing on her sweater and she can feel the wetness seeping through. ‘It’s OK, baby. Mumma’s going to get you some milk.’ She soothes him as they muddle through the array of chaotic cabaret style seating. True to his word, a dingy slither of space extends beyond the well-lit main eating area. A black faux leather sofa and table are wedged into the wall and a dogeared advertising pamphlet stands, bent, in the middle of the cream tabletop. Without pausing to think, Toby sinks down onto the cushions, which exhales with a loud poof of dusty air. The sound of massing students makes her heart race even more, but Alfie is already pulling at her top. Her mother uses the buggy to obscure the view and stands over her as she lifts her sweater and lets Alfie latch.

Wednesday

Toby sits in her living room chair cradling Alfie in her arms and holding her phone in her right hand, he’s feeding and nuzzled into her. It’s 7.58 in the morning and she knows she won’t be going in today. He’s running a temperature and the nursery won’t take him with anything over 37.5°C. He slept a little better last night, she thinks it is because he was tired from yesterday. Chris was up in the night to rock him back to sleep after his feeds, it makes such a big difference not to have to get out of bed. He just left for work and looked exhausted. Toby worries about him driving on days like this, but there’s no other option. Alfie’s eyes are fixed on her as his right arm pats her chest like a metronome. She’s waiting for the GP to open so she can book an emergency appointment. She’s already sent the work email at 6am this morning, it was the earliest she felt she could reasonably notify them of her absence. She keeps pulling down the screen to refresh her email, but no reply yet.

The clock hits 8 am and Toby taps call on the surgery number. The answering machine picks up. She hangs up again and retries. She follows this cycle for 9 minutes before the call connects. They have a slot at 9.30 that she can take, and she accepts. She refreshes her screen again. There is a reply from her deputy head of department.

RE: Absence Apologies

Dear Toby

I am sorry to hear that your son is unwell today. I hope he is feeling better soon. It is unfortunate that this has happened on your first week back, especially on a teaching day.

I have spoken with the module leader for your session this morning and they have been able to arrange cover. They advised me that you can repay the session next week. Unfortunately, we are struggling to find cover for your lecture this afternoon and wondered if you might be able to speak with your colleagues to arrange a swap? Alternatively, you can record your lecture and we can play the recording in your absence (this would also be a useful contingency for future planned lectures, too). Obviously, I expect you will already have contacted any students due to see you today for personal tutoring or supervision. It is so important to keep the students up to date with these absences.

Please keep your module team updated throughout the day for any changes. As you now don't work on Thursdays, we hope to see you on Friday.

Best wishes

Helen

Toby munches on digestive biscuit and gulps the last dregs of the cold cup of tea Chris made for her before he left. She rereads the email two more times before she can fully process the request. She has to set off in half an hour to get to the GP in time. Alfie de-latches and she lies him down in his playpen. She types out an email to her colleagues and fires it off. She also sends a couple of texts to call in favours she had hoped to hold on to for a little longer. The guilt is rising within her as she rushes upstairs to get ready while Alfie chatters to himself and shuffles around in his pen.

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She calls her mum on her way to the GP. Alfie moans in the baby seat. The school run traffic is still dissipating, she catches every traffic light on the way.

'Mum, I need your help this afternoon, can you come over?' Toby speaks into the car phone.

‘Oh, Toby, I was meant to meet Rosie for coffee this afternoon. Are you desperate?’ Her mother’s voice projects out of the speakers.

‘I really need you, just for a couple of hours. I have to record a lecture.’

‘What? Why?’

‘I can’t find a swap for this afternoon.’

‘Surely, they can postpone it?’

‘Student experience comes first, mum. Can you help?’

‘OK, I can come for a bit, when do you need me?’

‘As soon as possible’

Friday

Toby slumps at her desk after the end of her final teaching session of the week. Her brain feels like scrambled egg and her feet are pounding. At least the antibiotics were working and Alfie’s tonsilitis was settling. Toby’s mum had him again today, she hated leaving him at home when he was ill, but she couldn’t afford to push her luck. The room was empty, her colleagues were either in class or working from home today. Their chairs are in a state of semi-swivel and their abandoned desks betray a plethora of unfinished projects, papers and post-its plastered across each available surface. Hers was already returning to its prior unkempt facade after being back less than a week. Flicking the scroll wheel with her right index, she skims through row after row of unread email headers searching for auto-delete candidates. One subject header jumps out at her, the words ‘welcome back’. It seems so out of place amidst the torrent of emails that she’d started receiving the month before she returned. She hadn’t wanted to check them during parental leave, but the frayed thread of connectivity and commitment never fully snaps in this role. The unsolicited foists had typically opened with phrases like, ‘sorry to send you this while you’re off, but…’ She had been hailed back to work weeks before her physical body was expected. They were laying the groundwork so she could hit the ground running, at least psychologically.

The ‘welcome back’ email was from Mary. She doesn’t know Mary that well, they started chatting before she went off for parental leave, 6 months ago. Mary had introduced herself as another mum in the department and had been helpful in explaining some of the unwritten rules of parental leave. Her email read, ‘Saw you leaving your class, fancy a coffee?’ Toby smiles and opens a reply screen.

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She meets Mary in the café on the ground floor. Mary is a diminutive figure, barely over five foot in height and, with her light brown wavy hair, spectacles, and flowery blouse, she exudes a demeanour of mild mannered and gentility. She offers to buy Toby a drink and Toby accepts saying, 'I'll get the next one.' Toby eyes the muffins, too and Mary immediately orders two before Toby can protest. 'It's Friday afternoon!' She exclaims and the cashier laughs along with them. They sit near the window and Toby watches the swirling wind outside blow the spotted mustard-coloured leaves in spirals around the courtyard.

'So, first week back. How's it been?' Mary asks in a quick, energised tone.

'Rough.' Toby replies with a half-smile. She tears a chunk of blueberry splattered muffin top away and takes her first bite. It is just what she needs. The sugar and carb combo sends instant relief to her throbbing temples. She washes it down with a slug of latte and feels her eyelids reanimate. 'He's been too ill for nursery since Tuesday, so I had to stay off with him on Wednesday. Mum's been a life-saver.'

'Yeah, I remember the first couple of weeks back being a nightmare.' Mary says. She's picking at her muffin with precise, pincer movements.

'I don't expect it to be easy, but it could be a little bit easier. Just a little bit.' Toby says.

'I know, I felt the same. How has your husband been?'

'Steve's tired too, but it's different for him. He seems to be putting in more effort at work than ever before, but he's *done* for the day once he gets home. He helps with Alfie in the evenings, which is great, but I've still got work to do when Alfie settles. My *off day* was back-to-back life admin too. I just don't seem to get any down-time at the moment.'

'That's really tough. Have you spoken to him about it?'

'Not yet. I felt guilty mentioning it while I was on mat leave, he works so hard and he really does help as much as he can. I'll see how things are next week.'

'Sometimes it helps to air these things. My two were always spiking temperatures in their first years, especially when they were in nursery. I dreaded those phone calls.'

There is a moment of quiet between them as they drink and eat. Toby takes a few deep breaths and stares out of the window. 'I'm really glad you emailed me, I needed this.' Toby

says as she takes another chunk of muffin and cradles the warm cardboard mug in her palms. She breathes in the rising steam and enjoys the feel of it swirling down her nostrils.

‘We all do, Toby. We can’t do this alone.’

‘Seriously, thank you so much. It really helps not to feel alone in this.’

‘You’re not alone, trust me...’ Mary stops herself and gestures with her eyes to Toby to look over her shoulder.

Toby turns and sees the head of department, Will, approaching their table. He’s holding a baguette sandwich and a bottle of coke. Toby notices he’s wearing running trainers with his blue chinos and white shirt. He also had a laptop bag over his shoulder.

‘Hello Toby, how has your first week back been?’ Will says with a bouncy voice. ‘Helen mentioned your little setback on Wednesday. We’re relieved to see you back at it today! Those last-minute swaps can be a pain.’ He inclines his head as he speaks.

‘It’s been OK.’ Toby replies, taking another chunks of muffin and then instantly regretting her eating reflex. She frantically chews and swallows.

‘That’s great!’ Will replies, smiling at Mary before returning to face Toby as she finishes her mouthful. ‘*Sooo*… how is your little one, now? What was their name?’

‘Alfie’

‘Yes, Alfie. How is he doing?’

‘Oh, you know. Better now, thanks. Just typical baby stuff, he had a throat infection, which means sleepless nights and lots of crying. But antibiotics seem to be doing the trick.’

Will laughs and shuffles his feet.

‘How are your children getting on, Will?’ Mary asks.

‘Oh… yes. Fine thanks, Mary.’ He adjusts his tone to be more serious and faces Mary. ‘Felix started at school last month and Beatrice is in year three now. They keep me busy.’ Will checks his watch and looks across the room at nothing in particular, ‘Anyway, must dash. I just popped down for a late lunch in between meetings.’ Will swivels on the spot and his trainers let out a small squeak before he ambles off towards the lifts.

Mary grins at Toby and Toby grins back as they watch him leave.

‘Listen…’ Mary says, ‘…we’ve got a messenger group for parents in the department, Hannah, Kerry and Pete are in it, do you want to join?’

‘Oh…’ Toby hesitates, she’s a little bit fatigued with group chats since the endless onslaught of baby updates from her antenatal group.

‘No pressure. It’s mainly non-work chat, but we try to help each other out when we can, and we share survival tips.’ Mary says as she takes out her phone from her bag.

Toby reacts to the social cue and pulls out her phone too, ‘yeah, thanks, that would be nice.’ As she unlocks the phone, she notices an email from the module leader about her missed session on Wednesday afternoon.

‘We called the group, *Mayday.’* Mary announces with a chuckle as Toby opens the email. ‘It’s a bit tongue in cheek, but you get the idea.’ Mary says and she holds out her phone to show Toby the group conversation.

‘Mmm.’ Toby utters, not noticing Mary’s gesture as she continues to read the email message. The module leader has listed three options for her to choose from for next week to ‘repay’ her teaching debt. She bites her lip and closes the phone.

‘Everything OK?’ Mary asks.

Toby looks up, ‘Sorry, just an email to rearrange teaching. I like the name; it feels like a call to action!’ She smiles at Mary.

‘Yes. I suppose you’re right.’ Mary says. ‘Well, I’d better get back to it. Got some admin to plough through before heading home. You going to be OK for the rest of the day?’

‘Yes. Thanks again. Hope you have a nice weekend.’

‘You too.’ Mary says as she leaves the table, taking her half-eaten muffin with her and dumping it in the nearest bin.

Toby stays seated and gathers the crumbs from the remainder of her muffin as she types her first message to the Mayday group.

Narrator impressions of Toby

Toby’s return to work story is illustrative of the inequitable experiences of primary caregiver women during the PPE. Some of the barriers these working mothers face included work-based breastfeeding barriers (Jiao, 2019; Nardi, Frankenberg, Franzosi, & Santo, 2020; Spitzmueller et al., 2016; Turner & Norwood, 2014), employment market

based access to flexible working opportunities (Sihto, 2015) and the underappreciated kinship care work provided by family, especially grandparents (Ashley, 2020). This fragile dialectical relationship women navigate between time spent on paid work and time spent managing and doing vital caregiving encapsulates the tensions running through much of the PPE data we uncovered.

Toby's return to work difficulties with breastfeeding present us with an interesting case that highlights how far we have come. Who would have thought that there would have been so many barriers to breastfeeding in the workplace, or such a clearly negative impact of the workplace on the likelihood of mothers continuing to breastfeed (Nardi et al., 2020). The breastfeeding issue seems bizarre to us now, doesn't it? We still support women's right to choose how they feed their children, but these structural barriers seem so odd, especially in the aftermath of the formula-milk libel cases in the 2050s, which showed how the industry had misled millions of parents in suppressing WHO advice [3] [4]. Breastfeeding is such a normal part of our working lives now, and the breakthroughs in breast augmentation and milk replication technology in the 2040s enabled fathers to step up from day one as equal caregivers, too. Today, no one feels any pressure to stop breastfeeding before they return to work.

Motherhood was far more complicated when we had to go into work every day, especially for those who were still breastfeeding on the return to work (Spitzmueller et al., 2016; Turner & Norwood, 2014). Generations of children grew up with foreshortened time with their mothers and the associated stress and anxiety amongst working mothers skyrocketed at that time according to medical records. Of course, stress is a thing of the past now thanks to our daily dose of *CortisNo*.

The interdependencies of mothers returning to work, and their reliance on extended families and carers, highlights an uncomfortable truth from the PPE. Many working parents were less fortunate and could not access any caregiving relief, a problem which was especially exacerbated during the first pandemic lockdowns (Abdellatif & Gatto, 2020). The UK Kinship Carer report (Ashley, 2020) highlighted the precarious nature of parenthood which can affect workers at various points in their working lives. The crisis of caring in the UK (Bunting, 2020) was also exacerbated during the COVID-19 health crisis. Many of the stories we uncovered described a weekly reliance on family to survive the pressures of working parenthood. These pressures were often acutely felt by working

[3] https://www.who.int/health-topics/breastfeeding#tab=tab_1

[4] https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-NMH-NHD-19.23

mothers who took on the second shift (Hochschild & Machung, 2012) of emotional and physical caregiving alongside work commitments. The return-to-work phase for working parents marked the moment when the harsh reality of the masculine organisation clashed with the emotional need for flexibility and care from the organisation.

Despite this woeful tale of a working mother returning from work, there was a glimmer of an alternative energy in the pre-pandemic epoch. For this narrative it is named, 'Mayday' in homage to a subversive fictional organisation the PPE period (Atwood, 1996, 2019). Mayday represents the collective embodiment of the spirit of subversion as a recurring parallel theme to counteract the masculine influence of Marley. Mayday existed in the informal, unplanned spaces of organisational life and is a source of hope for working parents.

Mayday: part 1 – emerging intentions

It is 10.45 am on a Wednesday and a key card beeps against the door to a kitchenette. A man enters the small room wearing a white shirt with rolled up sleeves and black suit trousers. The room automatically illuminates as he enters revealing a U-shaped counter layout with a microwave, sink and kettle on the three surfaces. A stained coffee mug hangs from the index finger of his left hand, he grips a smartphone in his right. He is typing an email with is thumb and continues to do so as he places his mug onto the black laminate surface. He grabs the kettle to fill it up from the tap, still typing as he turns the tap. The water spurts out, cascading off the kettle spout and sending a spray onto his arm and neck. He grabs a paper towel from the wall dispenser and hastily wipes down his phone before dabbing his face and arm dry. Slotting the kettle onto its stand and flicking the switch, he leans back against the countertop and continues typing.

There is another beep on the door and the click of the lock. A woman enters holding a plastic tub of soup and a spoon. She is also wearing a white shirt, though it is crisply ironed, and black trousers.

'Hey Alfred, how's your partner coming along, how many weeks is it now?' She says as she hesitates at the entrance. The kettle has started to boil so her question is masked by the rumbling and hissing from the spout. As the first whisps of steam rise it coalesces into interwoven fibres that swell and encircle them overhead.

Alfred looks up from his phone and sees the woman standing by the door, 'Oh, hey Toby. Sorry, what was that?' He says, while glancing back to his phone.

‘I was just asking how many weeks your partner is at now? Sorry I’ve forgotten her name’ She says, leaning on the nearby countertop with her free hand.

‘We’re at 26 weeks now and all seems to be going well. The 20-week scan was amazing.’ Alfred replies, pressing send and pushing his phone into his trouser pocket. He looks over to her and stands up straight.

‘That’s great, yes it starts to feel a lot more real from now on. Are you using the microwave?’ She says, brandishing the tub of soup and taking a tentative step forward.

‘No, sorry, feel free.’ He says while edging back towards the counter to free up a few more centimetres of floor space.

‘Thanks’ She says as she brushes past. She pulls open the microwave door, opens her tub and turns the time wheel to three minutes before swinging the door shut. The whirring begins and she turns to face Alfred again.

‘Early lunch?’ Alfred asks.

‘Late breakfast.’ She replies with a smile.

‘Been there’ He laughs as the kettle reaches its crescendo with an emphatic snap of the switch.

‘I’ve been non-stop this morning.’ Toby says. ‘Wednesdays are the worst for me. Back-to-back teaching from 9 till 3 plus a change of building at 1, which means…brunch!’ She opens the microwave door as it pings, a plume of steam expands and infuses the circling chain with greater volume.

‘Have you spoken to anyone about it?’ Alfred asks as he pours the boiling water over a heaped spoonful of coffee granules and stirs and clinks against the edges of his mug.

‘What do you think?’ Toby replies, ‘it’s the pickup and drop-offs that stress me out.’

‘Yeah, I’m not looking forward to the stress of that.’ Alfred pauses, takes a sip of his coffee and looks at her ‘You know, Cormac has an informal agreement with his students when his lessons clash with pickup.’

‘What do you mean?’ Toby asks as she starts to spoon steamy soup into her mouth, the vapours rise and connect to the still circling spirit above them.

‘Well, when he has to pick up his son from nursery, he’s agreed with his Thursday afternoon class that he leaves a little early to make sure he’s there on time. I think he

does some kind of online material as compensation. Of course, they'll probably hammer him in the NSS, but he says he doesn't have a choice.' Alfred sips on his coffee and leans back again against the countertop.

'How long's he been doing that?' Toby asks.

'Well…' Alfred hesitates and lowers his voice too, 'Apparently for the whole of last semester. He says he didn't ask permission. He just did it.' Alfred replies with a half-smile that fades as he waits for Toby to respond.

Toby takes another spoonful of soup and stares at Alfred.

Alfred clears his throat and puts his mug down. 'It doesn't do any harm, and no one needs to know, right? It's just a sensible way to manage this system. Don't you think? Am I wrong?'

'No, you're not wrong.' Toby replies. 'It's really sensible. I mean, *really* sensible… I just don't know why we aren't all encouraged to do it?'

'I think you know why.' Alfred replies with a dry tone.

'The customer, *I mean*, *student* comes first.' Toby replies with a wry smile at the end.

'Always!' Alfred replies.

***

Cormac sits at his desk at home reviewing another tranche of papers for the latest research assessment exercise. He can hear his children playing downstairs while his partner prepares dinner in the kitchen. It's 6.15 pm the aroma is starting to drift upstairs.

It's stupid, isn't it? All this measuring and ranking, it's totally stupid. He thinks to himself as he types another generic set of evaluative comments at the end of the form and attributes what he feels is a fair rank. He starts to berate himself and grumble as he continues to scroll and type, type and scroll.

> *What are you doing, Cormac? This isn't you. When did you become so spineless? You always said that evenings and weekends were family time.*

I should be down there building a tower or decorating pinecones, OK, maybe that is extreme… I should be down there, though. So, another evening of outsourcing to CBeebies, outstanding parenting! They're going to forget who you are if you're not careful. Or worse, they'll choose Iggle Piggle as their surrogate father.

What if I go downstairs and forget this?

Cormac bashes the enter key as he begins a new paragraph of his review. He takes a gulp of tea and sloshes the hot liquid around his mouth.

What if all the parents decided not to do this *work at home? What if all we submitted was what we managed to finish before 5pm?*

Yeah, right! You're never going to do something like that. Put yourself at risk, are you mad? Don't be such a moron! You could take a break and then finish it later?

I don't like these late nights though. I feel like I'm trading work for sleep just to maintain the balance. Sleep's important. I can't keep doing this and expect to be OK.

Just for the next few nights. That way you can see the kids and do the work, too.

I suppose so, but I really should do something about this. It's not right.

Leave that to someone else, it's not your problem right now.

Maybe it should be my problem? I'm not going to be the worker they want me to be any more. They don't pay me anywhere near enough.

Cormac clicks save and closes the lid of his laptop. He walks downstairs to the sound of 'Moon and Me'. He can smell the aroma of fish fingers in the hallway intermingled with baked salmon and potatoes. He steps through to the kitchen past the scattered coats and scarfs that have not quite made it onto the hooks. The living room is similarly chaotic, he gets down on his knees to gather up a cluster of blocks. He starts to place three blocks together, 'Shall we make a tower?' Cormac enthusiastically announces. His 13-month-old daughter, Zoe and 4 ½ year old son, Zac turn to him from the screen.

'No, Daddy, we're watching Moon and Me!' Zac replies. His daughter joins in with a loud 'No, no, no!' as she crawls over to him and smashes the blocks everywhere.

What did you think was going to happen, a von Trap family sing along?

I could learn a thing or two from these two, solidarity! Cormac thinks as picks them both up and settles down on the sofa for a cuddle.

****

Julian sits in her office with a fresh mug of mint tea. She misses coffee. Ever since entering the third trimester it's been harder and harder to get a good night's sleep. She opens an email to HR and starts typing her 60% reduction request email. She doesn't

want to reduce her hours this much, but she can't ignore what her colleagues have warned her about with their workload. She doesn't have grandparents nearby, so she needs to be available every day. It's not fair, she thinks, but what option does she have?

Julian finishes typing the email, sighs and presses send. She scrolls through her inbox and sees a number of requests have landed since she checked this morning. *Still after their pound of flesh*, she thinks. She opens the first one and starts reading it. It's from a colleague who runs one of the modules she teaches on asking for volunteers for some extra mentoring. She's normally the first to raise her hand, she's proud of being useful, she's a workhorse in this department and loves feeling like a vital cog in the machine. She sits back and holds the steaming mug under her face, *it's like a pound shop sauna*, she smiles to herself. She starts typing and then stops herself. She recalls the advice she got from Mary the other day, 'Always keep this mantra in your head, what would a man do?' Julian smirks and rereads the email.

What would a man do? Julian repeats to herself. *I don't have the luxury of time anymore*. She starts to type her response: '*Sorry, Jane, I don't have capacity for this right now. I hope you find someone else who can help. Best wishes, Julian*.' She pauses as she checks her message, it's more detailed than some of the 'no' responses she has received in the past. Even so, it feels uncomfortable. *You need to get used to this, you can't carry on like before once the baby comes,* she thinks to herself. She presses send, smiles nervously, and moves on to the next email. Practice makes perfect, she says out loud. 'What would a man do?' she proclaims to her empty office as she starts her next message.

Narrator's Impressions of Mayday: part 1 – emerging intentions

This first instalment of the Mayday story represents an ethereal form of subversion that persists throughout the data. Mayday was a spiritual presence amongst working parents that instilled a sense of community and resistance, even when times are hard. It often started as an idea or a critical attitude, but these ideas grew and coalesced when they found refuge with likeminded parents. For these working parents it was their organizational context and the rules for how they 'ought' to act that was the catalyst for their individual and collective subversion of the normative demands of working life (Bloom & White, 2016, p. 14). For some, like Julian, resisting organisational norms involved a gender-based re-embodiment by adopting a masculinized performance to say 'no', when her previous identity urges her to say, 'yes'. This simple idea to 'do what a man would do' was something that was shared amongst working parents in the data we recovered and illustrated the wider subversive potential of flipping the script on workplace gender norms.

By taking this step, they drew on a 'spirit of sly subversion' (Stein, 2018, p. 1245) to challenge the ways they felt they 'ought to act' within the patriarchal order. However, such decisions also symbolised an acceptance of neo-liberal hegemonic masculinity as a privileged form of worker identity.

This 'spirit of sly subversion' was an antecedent for associated redistributive justice amongst the collective workforce (Mozziconacci, 2019) through equitable workload planning. When these working mothers started to 'do what a man would do' and say 'no', it sparked a necessary redistribution of labour as previous 'workhorses' were no longer picking up the slack. Such sly subversion, once organised, formed one of the bases of the collective action that reasserted the value of care within organisational conceptions of work productivity and time (Tronto, 2015). However, the first step of individual 'sly subversion' reflected the individualistic nature of the pre-pandemic epoch, which eventually led to the second crucial imperative of subversion, the parental club.

In many of the data samples, parents described being part of a 'parental club', which was associated with ideas such as 'being in the same boat together'. This collective identity drew on the dichotomous organisational power dynamic 'where there is power, there is resistance' (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). These parents' collective action sought solidarity against prevailing workplace norms. Their solidarity served as a basis for collective subversion of the individualised neo-liberal market place (Parker & Jary, 1995; Parker & Starkey, 2018) for employees within HE in the pre-pandemic world of work. However, a symptom of marketised, precarious employment was that many of the sly subversive tendencies remained self-contained, internalised, and unrealised. This mild form of subversion can, ironically, contribute to the maintenance of cultural norms. Within organisations, there remained a normative function for a degree of subversion that the powerful appropriated via subtle shifts in moral decision making to stabilise the ongoing fluctuations of workers attitudes within a rule-based order (Bloom & White, 2016; Robinson, Hall, & Hockey, 2011). Mild subversive attitudes during the PPE existed as the untapped energy that, once organised under the banner of the parental club, enabled more substantial collective acts (such as the sharing of information to circumvent rules). It was only when the individualised sly, mild subversion became collective that further action towards meaningful change was possible.

Today, we don't think of subversion in the way it was understood in pre-pandemics times, our present day is a consequence of the necessary societal subversion and collectivist conceptions of utopia in post-pandemics life (Freire, 2004; Jameson, 2010; J. Miller, 1998; Parker, Fournier, & Reedy, 2007; Skitka, Hanson, & Wisneski, 2017). However, we must

also consider how our post-pandemics world may also be sowing the seeds of hegemony and providing fresh impetus for subversion amongst dissidents. Pre-pandemics scholars defined subversion as 'the act of trespassing against accepted social and organizational mores.' (Bloom & White, 2016, p. 6) Our mores have been established in the aftermath of the overthrow of patriarchal order, yet now we face a fresh revolt against the equitable future that we created. The next story is a father whose experiences add gender-based nuance and an appreciation of multiple masculinities to this narrative. It was through the integration of working fathers to the Mayday collective that this movement really built momentum.

Cormac

Cormac peers ahead beyond the stationary double-decker bus and crawling SUVs, his wipers squeak as they streak rainwater across his windshield. He grips the steering wheel tight. He is wearing a stretched grey jumper with the sleeves rolled up which almost covers his blue shirt, and black suit trousers. His pre-knotted tie loop rests on the passenger seat alongside his backpack and crumpled raincoat. Classical music drifts through the car speakers, intended to soothe his daughter, Zoe, but it is being drowned out today. Another red light. Zoe's chattering escalates as she writhes around in her car seat. The car clock ticks on to 8.21. He feels his shoulders tighten and takes a deep breath. He is going to be late.

Time seems to slip through his fingers on his drop-off mornings. Tuesdays were always tight with teaching at 9am, but today he has that report to finish first. Rain always makes it worse. Everyone descends on the roads like a plague of locusts on these days, heaven forbid they would wear a raincoat and hold an umbrella for the school run… Zoe starts to shout.

> 'What's wrong little one?' Cormac asks softly.
>
> 'No, no, no, Daddy!' Zoe shouts.
>
> 'We won't be long, I promise.'
>
> 'No, Daddy!'

Cormac widens his eyes as the traffic lights turn green ahead. He hadn't expected to be so tired all the time, every night was so unpredictable which only made it worse. He gently presses on the accelerator pedal as the traffic starts to move in front of him. Chopin Prelude in D-flat major plays over the radio as he cruises through the mercifully clear roundabout. Progress at last, he thinks. His head feels heavy and he keeps thinking about

that report he needs to finish before teaching. His travel mug of coffee rattles and sloshes in its cup holder as he rounds the corner to the nursery carpark opposite his office.

'We're here!' He exclaims, turning to Zoe with a beaming smile. She stares back with her best poker face.

'Let's get you out of here.' Cormac declares and then narrates as he unbuckles Zoe's seatbelt and kisses her on the forehead. She babbles as he lifts her up and holds her on his side. Then, he briskly walks over to the nursery entrance and waits behind another parent in the queue.

Once inside, he tickles her tummy as he takes off her coat. 'What are you going to do today?' He asks her as he takes her hand and they walked into the main room. 'Horsey' she replies as she points to the circle of plastic farm animals on the ground. A crowd of toddling infants are already bumping into each other and playing with them, two are wrestling with each other on the ground over a giraffe. Zoe slows down and holds Cormac's trouser leg.

'It's OK, honey, go on.' Cormac whispers as he ushers her forwards towards a group of little ones encircling one of the carers. Zoe turns to him and tugs his trouser leg again, frantic to climb up. Her bottom lip is starting to quiver, and her eyes are imploring him to hold her.

'Come on little one, look at this' Cormac forces himself to smile and points to the unclaimed horse figurine, it is chestnut brown with black hooves and its forelegs are rearing in an action pose. Zoe tentatively approaches. He catches the eye of one of the carers who has started talking to Zoe and is showing her a zebra. They smile back and he rushes across the room to the exit, turning to wave at Zoe as he leaves. She stares back at him, still frozen in between tears and engagement. The carer picks her up for a cuddle and Cormac walks away, taking a deep breath of the cold autumn air to wake himself up.

Ok, come on! Let's get going, Cormac cajoles himself out of the twisting wrenching feeling in his stomach. The campus beckons and it was now 8.33. Just enough time to finish that report, well, at least a rough draft before heading to class. He nips back to the car, stretches in to get his bag and coffee, an absolute necessity. With each step away from the nursery, he feels his fuzzy, soft fatherhood hat slip from his brow. Time to strap on the worker helmet and head into the breach.

***

The clock ticks on to 6.35 in the evening, he must leave now, or he will definitely miss Zoe's bedtime. He stifles a yawn and looks over to the empty coffee mug with black coffee stains around the rim, he picks it up and screws on the lid. Papers are strewn across his desk and his computer screen is bursting at the seams with open windows. He clicks the sleep button and grabs his coat and bag. It is already dark outside and the rain from earlier had persisted all day. An earthy smell hits him as he steps out onto the courtyard and he jogs toward the carpark, wilfully ignoring the slops of rainwater that slap against his trouser leg. His silver hatchback is one of the only remaining cars in the carpark and the nursery lights are all off.

He pushes the coffee mug into its slot and turns key in the ignition. He can still feel the invisible straps of his worker helmet cutting into his ears, reminding him of the marking to complete later. Still, he thinks, he's lucky to be able to work from home when he needs to. All told, this was a pretty good gig, and he was making real inroads on that promotion push, too. The head of department had really liked the report, especially the executive summary. It had been a heavy day with six hours of teaching and a departmental meeting in the middle. He had barely had time to eat and he was looking forward to what Jane was going to have ready for them. She does half days on Tuesdays, so she usually rustles up something special for them both.

The journey home is torturous. Standing rainwater bloats over the left lane of the main road squeezing traffic into a crawling snake. The clock ticks on to 6.50 and he starts feeling anxious. He hates being this late, especially now that Zoe can say 'Daddy'. He imagines her looking at the door and pointing. Another red light, precious seconds slip away. He starts calling Jane on the car phone.

'Where are you?' She asks before he has a chance to speak.

'I'm on my way, traffic's a nightmare. I'm not at the high street yet.' Cormac announces. He can hear Zoe shouting and wailing in the background alongside the ending music of 'In the Night Garden'.

'You're not going to make it in time. I'm taking her up, she's getting over-tired and she needs a bath tonight.'

'I'm going as quickly as I can.'

'I've got to go.' She hangs up before he can reply, and he hits another red light.

He pulls into the drive at 7.15. He fumbles with his keys and drops them in the gravel by the front door. Cursing, he grabs them and enters the house. He pulls off his shoes and

flings them against the foot of the radiator. Then he runs up the stairs taking two at a time. He is breathless as he gets to the top where he sees Jane waiting for him outside Zoe's room. Her door is ajar but mostly closed and there isn't a noise coming from inside.

'She's asleep. It took me a while to settle her, but she was exhausted. Must have had a busy day at nursery. She was asking for you when I picked her up and kept saying horsey.'

Cormac grits his teeth and gently pushes at the door. The darkness of the room is overwhelming, he peers and blinks to force his vision to adjust. He sees her shadowy form curled up on her side amongst her teddies. She is breathing calmly. He turns back and looks at Jane.

'Sorry.' He says.

'Let's have some dinner.' She replies.

'I've got more marking to do later'.

'I know.' She replies flatly.

Narrator's impressions of Cormac

When piecing together the fragments of Cormac's pre-pandemics experiences, I was struck by the tension between parental caregiving and occupational commitment. This tension was particularly acute for many fathers in the data who were still rooted in the 'transitional' phase of equality parenthood (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Cormac represents two conflicting pull factors; firstly, the emerging pull to be involved in caregiving for their families, and secondly the stronger pull they felt to maintain a worker/provider identity. Many pre-pandemics fathers wanted to maintain a metaphorical barrier between work and family time, this typically aligned with patriarchal, structural patterns of men as 9 till 5 workers and evening and weekend carers. Although the fathers in this data set were co-parenting with highly educated, professional women, the anticipated 'downshifting' (Gatrell, 2005, p. 135) of their work commitment was almost universally neglected, despite many fathers having a viable option to do so. This aligns with evidence from caring masculinity research, which persistently found alignment between the traditional 'breadwinner' role and men's construction of their working parent identity (Hanlon, 2012; Lee & Lee, 2018).

Organisations were also complicit in the reinforced idealisation of 'career-oriented, instrumental males working very hard for the business' (Alvesson & Due Billing, 2009, p. 9). Here the parallel actions of ideological patriarchy supersede rising desires many men

felt to become more involved parents. During this period, organisations acted as major constraining influences on men's sense of freedom to do the physical and emotionally involved caregiving for their families, even when they wanted to do so (Murgia & Poggio, 2013). Many still felt hailed as subjects of the enduring patriarchal structure of organisational reality, tempted by promotions and status-linked prestige to fulfil their provider status in lieu of caregiving responsibilities. It was only in the aftermath of the pandemics during which working fathers had lived the daily reality of home-working and caregiving that the blurred lines between work and family life became the catalyst for a re-ordering of the 'gender regime' (J. Acker, 2006) at home and in organisations. This reordering was a crucial phase that redirected organisations away from valuing sex differences (Irigaray & Gill, 1993) and utopian ideals of women's unique motherhood qualities (Perkins Gilman, 1915). Instead, the narrative shifted towards recognising and valuing equitable roles for working parents and enhanced responsibility for men as caregivers equally capable of caring for their children.

Andrea Doucet (2006) describes two feminist perspectives relevant to this working parenthood debate concerning caregiving roles and responsibilities: 'difference feminism' and 'equality feminism'. These two theoretical perspectives provide contrasting insights into how working parenthood can be arranged and valued within organisational experiences. Irigaray highlights the irreducibility of certain aspects of the woman's experience as one basis for valuing and asserting the identity of woman as 'different' to man and therefore constructed as distinct in social relations. There are problematic aspects to this view of essentialist feminist theorising in the context of trans rights. Though it is true that women physically go through pregnancy, birth (and recovery) and breastfeeding, there are notable exceptions that highlight the importance of re-evaluating gender difference for working parenthood (see 'the dad who gave birth...' Hattenstone, 2019). It is important to state that the physical differences pertaining to pregnancy for women did require differential policies in the post-pandemics era; groups like Maternity Action (2020) led the way with their proposal for an equitable 6+6+6 model of 6 months protected leave for mothers and fathers and the option to share 6 months. This model recognised the physical impact of pregnancy, but also valued the vital role of fathers. Physical differences should not provide an enduring differential basis for gender-based differentiation. As Doucet described, equality feminism promoted equal involvement for men and women in domestic, and hands-on, caregiving (Andrea Doucet, 2006, p. 23) and this was the transformative shift that helped to reconstruct gender norms for working parents.

For Cormac, the 'providing for' role (Jordan, 2020, p. 23) was still superior in his approximation of what fathers' parental roles should be and 'a core part of being masculine' (Connell, 2005), which reproduced the traditional breadwinner norms of western hegemonic masculinity. Cormac answered the organisational 'hail' as an ideal worker, despite his desire to be more involved, this symbolic interpellation to organisational norms diminished his opportunities to engage in daily act of care to a subordinate position. It was only when organisations and states responded to overwhelming post-pandemics demands to equally value fathers' and mothers' caregiving, that the vanguard of organisational parental leave changes (Maternity Action, 2020; Topping, 2020) could proliferate. The move to provide equal parental leave for fathers gave men the permission to embody new formations of 'caring masculinities' (Elliott, 2016; Jordan, 2020; Lee & Lee, 2018; Marikova, 2008) that can 'reject domination' by valuing 'positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality' (Elliott, 2016, p. 241). It was this realignment of the valued attributes of masculinities that enabled men to dislocate their masculine identity from breadwinning, but during the PPE, this was still a pipedream.

The data showed disparate approaches to how fathers allocated their time between work and family, which reflected ongoing debates during the PPE (Crespi & Ruspini, 2015; Hojgaard, 1997; Huffman, Olson, O'Gara, & King, 2014; Hunter et al., 2017; Kangas et al., 2019; Kaufman, 2018; Lidbeck, Bernhardsson, & Tjus, 2018). Some fathers described their strict, delineated approach to work and family time as distinct activities and attributed equal importance to both through their time and energy commitments. However, other fathers were more inclined to prioritise their work commitments as both intrinsically important to their identity and as emblematic of their provider role. Such variance exists within a host of sociological studies during the PPE of working parenting research from 1989 to 2020 (Bailey, 2015; Brandth & Kvande, 2018; Burgess, 1998; Chesley, 2011; Collier, 2019; Gatrell, 2005; Hochschild & Machung, 2012). From traditional breadwinner roles, to 'transitional' blended roles, to the rare egalitarian mode (Hochschild & Machung, 2012), Cormac represents the inherent tensions fathers navigated in balancing oft-conflicting societal expectations.

The socially constructed worker and father ideals sustained complex tensions between protector/provider fatherhood and the progressive ideals of equal parenthood (Jordan, 2020). These tensions ran parallel to a breadth of academic discourse debating egalitarian ideals for the modern father in UK and European contexts (Brandth & Kvande, 2019; Burgess, 1998; A. Doucet, 2006; Gatto, 2020; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2020; Gottzen, 2011; Kvande & Brandth, 2019; Medved, 2016; Peukert, 2017; Wall & Arnold, 2007). This ambivalent discourse echoed the ideological conflict within studies of men and

masculinities regarding the enduring 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 2005) and the 'patriarchal deficit' (Bailey, 2015). The 'patriarchal dividend' also related to the problematic hegemonic appropriation of caring attitudes and behaviour, which Demetriou (2001) described as 'dialectical pragmatism' reconstructing a 'hybrid hegemonic masculinity' (Demetriou, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2018). The myth of 'new fathers' (Messner, 1993) having their cake and eating it remained problematic throughout the post-pandemics epoch and maintained tensions in constructions of 'involved fatherhood' (Hearn, 2004; Kimmel et al., 2005; Messner, 1993; T. Miller, 2011). These discourses exist alongside media debates of the representation of fathers (Ainsworth & Cutcher, 2008; Hunter et al., 2017; Kangas et al., 2019), which often reduced fatherhood to gender-role binaries and reinforced gendered assumptions.

When we consider terms such as 'involved fatherhood' today, we may find ourselves dismissive of such explicitly illogical pre-pandemics denials of the vital role of caregiving fathers. Even at the time, evidence was mounting of the transformative effect of equally involved fathers in the nurturing of children as a societal imperative that has positive outcomes for women's equal engagement in the workplace too (Norman, 2020; Norman et al., 2014). Sadly, for expectant fathers, these narratives were still obscured by normalised language of father's secondary role as caregivers.

Alfred

Alfred opens a new email window in Outlook. He sits forward, shunting his chair closer to his desk. His back arches and his shoulders hunch as he suspends his fingers over the keyboard like a concert pianist about to begin.

> *Date: 24 May 2019*
>
> *To: Human Resources*
>
> *Subject: Paternity Leave.*
>
> *Hello*
>
> *My wife is due to give birth on July 28th, 2019, and I would like to take some paternity leave. Please can you advise what I'm entitled to?*
>
> *Thanks*
>
> *Alfred*

Alfred leans back and exhales. A weight has been lifted, at least for now. He looks around the office, his bookshelves are still sparsely populated with his printed thesis and a couple of textbooks his supervisor gave to him. He's just finished his final teaching session for the year and he is shattered. He's ready for the weekend and a sip of non-alcoholic beer in solidarity with Katherine's pregnancy restrictions. It's the first couples' antenatal class next week and he hasn't read the literature Katherine sent to him yet. He chews his thumbnail and tears off a strip. *Time for some lunch and a coffee*, he thinks as he stands up, stretches, and strides out of the room.

Waiting in the queue for the hot meals, the smell of fried fish, chips, salt, and vinegar makes him salivate. He looks down at his tummy, it's bigger than he would like to be. At the end of the island there is a punnet of baked potatoes. He reluctantly pulls himself away from the glistening, crispy batter and bypasses the queue to serve himself.

'Hi, Alfred' A woman's voice hails him from over his shoulder.

Alfred turns around, 'Oh! Hi, Sue. How are you?'

'Good thanks, how's Katherine doing?'

'Yeah, good thanks. Still feeling rough at times, but she's doing well. She goes on mat leave next week.'

'Really?'

'Yeah, doctor's orders, and mine!'

'Is she OK?'

'Yeah, she's fine, baby's fine, too. She has preeclampsia, though so she needs to take it easy. I've told her she has to slow down once she's off. No more work for a while, that's *my* role now.'

'You need to take good care of her, Alfred. Lots of pampering!'

'Yeah, I'll have to stop gaming for a while, I suppose. I've been doing more cooking recently, but I burned the potatoes last night.'

'I'm sure they were still lovely!' She says with a mock smile. 'But seriously, my Davy was a rock for me when our two were born. I wouldn't have coped without him cleaning and helping with night feeds. He really stepped up. I think fatherhood brings out the best in men, don't you?'

‘Yeah, I guess so… Hopefully!’ Alfred chuckles. ‘I had been considering reducing my hours, you know? I even thought about shared parental leave, especially with Katherine’s job paying more than mine. I like the idea of spending some quality time with the baby every week, too, but Katherine’ health has made me rethink. She’s been so stressed out with it all and I can’t see that getting any easier when she has to return to work. I want to take the pressure off her and it’s important that she has this time, isn’t it?’

‘Yes, of course. What did you have in mind, though?’

‘I was thinking of going down to four days a week.’

‘Oh, don’t bother. Fewer hours, less pay, and same amount of work. Take it from me, you are better staying full time.’

‘Yeah, that’s what others have said. Well anyway, if I want to make sure Katherine can choose how much *she* works and that means going for SL.’

‘You applying for SL this year, then? You should!’

‘Yeah, I think so. Not sure if I’m ready, but it seems like the right option.’

‘No time like the present, especially with a baby coming. Pop by my office and I’ll help you out.’ Sue beams at him and looks down at his plate. ‘So, baked potato and salad, aye? Healthy choice!’

‘Suppose so’ He looks down at the drab, dry salad leaves and meagre three cherry tomatoes rolling at the lip of his plate. The small polystyrene tub of tuna looks equally underwhelming… ‘I’m trying to lose some weight… you know, for when the baby comes.’

‘Good for you. Trust me, you’ll pile it all back on once they arrive. You need the carbs with all the sleepless nights!’ Sue chuckles and selects a baked potato for herself.

‘So, how’s your little one? ...’ Alfred hesitates, searching for the name.

‘Rose? Oh, she’s really good thanks, loving nursery. We’re going to Centre Parks after the marking’s done and we can’t wait. You’ll love family life, Alfred!’

‘How old is she now?’ Alfred replies. He notices two women, one older than the other, and baby entering the seating area. He watches as they search for a seat. He can hear the mewling cries of the baby.

‘She turns three in June, time flies.’ Sue says. Alfred doesn’t reply, he is still looking at the women and the baby. ‘Anyway, must dash as am eating this at my desk

while I do email. Good seeing you!' Sue waves her hand across his field of vision and he auto smiles as Sue heads over to the counter.

Alfred stands in the serving area and contemplates buying a banana too, while continuing to watch the women with the baby. The seconds stretch out into minutes and he feels a tap on his shoulder.

'Can I help you with anything?' An older woman with a warm smile says. She's wearing the black uniform and cap of the refectory staff.

'Sorry, I was miles away. I'm ready to pay now.' Alfred says as he selects the banana from the nearby bowl.

'They'll be OK.' The woman says, as she looks over to the women and baby. 'Women always manage.'

'Yeah.' Alfred replies. 'They do, I suppose.'

Alfred pays for his lunch and finds an empty table nearby. The hubbub of the cafeteria surrounds him like a swarm of bees. He starts eating this baked potato, it is barely warm, and the salad is tasteless. He takes out his phone, opens his email and scrolls down to the latest email from Katherine from earlier this week titled 'top tips for new dads.' It's still unopened. He taps the attachment and looks at the PDF document: *tip one - Be there for your partner*, *tip two - It's OK to cry, tip three – be prepared! …* Alfred stops reading and puts down the phone. He knows he is expected to cry when the baby arrives, he's even talked to Katherine about it, but he doesn't feel anything right now. He wants to feel something, he really does. He watched 'One Born Every Minute' with Katherine a couple of weekends ago and felt nothing. 'It'll come' she'd said to him, but all he could think of was the worry about sleep loss. He really can't afford to be off his game next academic year, not with promotions coming up. As for being prepared, he knows he *has* to step up. He stands up and takes his half-eaten lunch plate over to the rack.

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Alfred sits opposite a health visitor who is dressed in smart, casual trousers, and a jacket. She is holding a clipboard and a pen and nodding along as she takes notes from the description of family life that his pregnant wife is offering. She turns to Alfred and he smiles back at her.

'What about you, Alfred. What does being a father look like for you?'

‘I want to be honest with you about this and I’ve spoken with Katherine about this before. I know what I don’t want to be and that’s like my dad. He was always at work, golf on the weekends, just had no time for me at all. It’s different now, we can chat about things, but nothing too deep. That makes him uncomfortable. Well, I don’t want that. I want to be more involved, you know?’

‘Yes, of course. Go on…’ The health visitor smiles.

‘It’s not that I think my dad got everything wrong. He provided for us and we never went hungry. He protected us and I think that’s important for a man to do for his family.’

‘Yes, and what does *providing* mean to you?’

‘It’s very important to me, you know. It’s not just being the provider, it’s what my work means to me…’ Alfred pauses and look over to Katherine. She is sitting forward on their sofa and focused on him.

‘I got a promotion recently and my works means a hell of a lot to me, it’s part of my identity as a man and as a father. This promotion means I can give Katherine the flexibility to choose her hours. I want to be there for my kids and to listen to them and hug them and bathe them and read to them and everything, you know? But I also need to make the money so we can have a lovely life together.’

‘Yes, of course’ The health visitor replies while scribbling some notes.

‘But it’s just hard. I want to be my best self when I’m doing this. I feel a sense of duty to protect my family, but I also feel the guilt that I won’t be able to be present all the time.’

‘Thanks Alfred, I think I have what I need. Back to you, Katherine, how is your mental state, how prepared do you feel?’

Alfred sits back and crosses his arms, while Katherine talks. He listens to what she has to say and tries to push his uncertainty down. I need to be strong for them now, he thinks.

Narrators reflections on Alfred

The expectations that underpinned Alfred’s ideas and decisions about fatherhood reflect the transitional fatherhood attitudes of this period (Hochschild & Machung, 2012) whereby some men who wanted to be more involved found it difficult to let go of the breadwinner or career identity (Bach, 2019; Chesley, 2011; Myers & Demantas, 2016; Reid, 2018). Of course, there were significant structural and societal barriers to this, not least the gender pay gap, which described endemic privileging and ‘patriarchal dividend’ (Connell, 2005) afforded to men’s careers at the expense of women’s. Indeed, evidence from this time

showed that fathers who maintained traditional breadwinner identities gained most from the patriarchal dividend (Berdahl & Moon, 2013). This was particularly the case for expectant father's whose career trajectories came into focus through social discourse with their peers. These conversations exposed an interpellation process whereby expectant fathers were 'hailed' by their peers as patriarchal subjects and worthy recipients of career advancement during their preparations for parenthood. Seemingly, greater career responsibility and renumeration went hand in hand with social constructions of fatherhood for some of these men. Such hailing symbolised cultural discourse that reinforced the sex-role of men as providers within wider society.

One problematic issue that resulted from the expectation of patriarchal fatherhood was the suppression of men's mental health in common discourse. Alfred squashed his emotional response to becoming a father and this reflected the sense of marginalisation these expectant fathers felt in the process of 'becoming' a father. This normative discourse presupposed that fathers were in control of their emotions and represented a secondary role in the construction of emotional security for new families. Of course, history has taught us that this 'patriarchal deficit' (Bailey, 2015; Gatto, 2020) was particularly damaging to the feminist equality project, which did not fully realise the transition to equal parenting until father's involvement in care was equally valued and provided for (Brandth & Kvande, 2019; Kvande & Brandth, 2019).

Fathers today embrace their role as 'attentive, responsible, competent, and responsive' (Tronto, 2015) equal members of society who 'care with' their partners. However, this was not always the case for the post-pandemics epoch as many fathers espoused culturally normalised caring rhetoric while succumbing to ongoing complicity with patriarchal ideology in a hybridized reproduction of hegemonic masculinity (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Demetriou, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2018). We now know that it was the inadequate organisational and state provision for men's caregiving that restricted the caregiving potential of these fathers. Many genuinely did care about their role as involved fathers but could not balance the financial damage and economic necessity of their provider role with their desire to be more heavily involved. Without the economic mandate provided through extended, full pay parental leave for all parents, fathers choices were constrained; this defined their capacity to care equally with the typical primary caregivers in the PPE, women.

Julian

Julian rubs her temples and scrunches her eyelids together to reset her blurring vision. Her shoulder-length hair is pinned back with clips and her suit jacket is creasing against

the armrests of her faux leather office chair. She has read and reread the paragraph on her computer screen, but the words just wouldn't sink in. *You need degrees in mathematics and law to decipher this*, she thought. What would it cost if she split the leave 50/50, or 60/40, or 75/25 with Theo? She highlighted a passage:

> *You need to share the pay and leave in the first year after your child is born or placed with your family.*[5]

She wanted to exclusively breastfeed for at least six months, *maybe he could take over after that*, she thought. She had already talked about it with Theo and he had initially seemed enthusiastic about taking some time out, though he kept mentioning that he couldn't breastfeed, which had felt like code for not wanting to actually take any leave. She suspected he was saying what she wanted to hear, but she hadn't confronted him on that, yet. They had read the guidance document together last week and Theo said he was happy with whatever she decided, which was making her feel guilty. He was so busy at work at the moment, and his career was taking off. It was the happiest she had seen him in a long time, he was really excited to be a dad and kept taking about his role to provide for his family, especially after he had been offered that promotion. She wanted him to be happy.

A gust of cold air blows in from the open window and sends a shiver down her spine. She reaches backwards and pulls on her jacket from the backrest of her chair before walking over to the window to close it. It is just her in the office, but she knows Gary must have been in earlier as his lunchbox, replete with apple core and banana skin, is still on his desk. It's usually Gary who opens the window, too. She feels a wave of nausea after she locks the frame shut and rests her forehead on the cooling surface of the windowpane to distract herself. After a few seconds, she looks down at the courtyard below and the students entering and leaving the building. It's halfway through semester two and she knows the timing of her pregnancy could have been better, especially the due date being in May. She wanted to compensate for this by finding the best return to work date and thought January might work well. She had built her profile over the last five years as the programme leader and her research was going great, but she can't shake the niggling fear that she will be left behind if she doesn't stay in touch over the coming months.

She hears the office door latch click and turns to see her colleague, Gary, enter the room. He's wearing sandy coloured chinos, brown brogues, and a tailored pastel blue shirt. As

[5] https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay

he closes the door, she can smell his cologne cloud as it diffuses around the room. She contemplates re-opening the window to let it escape but thinks better of it. He smiles at her and glances at her display as he passed her desk.

‘Shared Parental Leave, huh?’ He says, smirking. ‘Good luck with that! Jenny and I couldn’t make head nor tail of that thing. It’s so much easier to just do it the old-fashioned way. It worked best for us anyway.’ He lowered himself slowly into his chair and clicked his mouse to awaken the screen. ‘How have I got 30 emails since lunchtime?’

‘Same way I got 35.’ Julian replies as she returns to her desk. Her nausea is still lingering so she heads to her desk, opens the drawer, and picks an oatcake from the half-finished packet.

‘You need to learn to say no to most of them, you know.’

‘Easier said than done.’

‘It gets easier every time you do it.’ Gary says, smiling as he emphatically clicks his mouse. ‘What are you and Theo thinking of doing then?’

‘We are still deciding, but I’ll probably take it all.’ Julian replies. ‘You’re right, it’s much easier that way.’

‘Yeah, it worked out fine for us. Jenny’s back at work part time and she’s really happy with how it went.’

‘That’s good.’

‘Yeah’

‘Can I ask you a question?’ Julian asks, taking the last few bites of her oatcake and a sip of water.

‘Sure’ Gary stops typing and looks up from his screen.

‘As a father, did you feel like you missed out in the first year?’

‘Wow…Hmm…’ Gary chuckles and turns in his swivel chair to face Julian. ‘That’s a difficult question… Did I miss out?’ He pauses, looking upwards at the box panel ceiling and lacing his fingers back and forth. The silence grows and Julian feels the urge to speak.

‘It’s just…’ She starts.

‘I love being a dad and love spending time with Ellie.’ He blurts, still looking up at the ceiling. ‘It just wasn’t *practical* to take a big chunk of time when Ellie was born. I’d just got that promotion and, you know, grant proposals and papers in progress’ He looks down from the ceiling and faces her, ‘I just couldn’t pause that stuff. Do you know what I mean?’

‘Yeah. Sure, makes sense.’ Julian replies.

‘It’s not that I didn’t want to take more time. I suppose I just like it more now Ellie is talking and asking questions and we can *do* more together. I feel like I can really get to know her as a person. Do you know what I mean?’ If I could have taken a few weeks in the second half, or even better, now… Well, that would really make me stop and think, you know. It was the whole sharing thing, it felt like a big commitment and the money side, you know.’ He stares at Julian expectantly and waits for her to reply.

Julian smiles and autoreplies, ‘sure’ as she scrolls up to the section on ‘eligibility’ she reread this morning to confirms that Gary could in fact have done exactly what he has just described. She thinks better of sharing this with him and instead closes the window and re-opens her emails.

‘I’m sure you’ll work it out’ Gary states as he turns back to his screen too.

Another cluster of new emails appear on her screen and bump the others down her list. Her back and her hips are starting to ache. She can’t face them right now; it’s getting late and she wants to beat the traffic home. *I’ll do these later this evening,* she thinks.

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Julian exits the lift and see’s Toby walking over from the stairwell to her. She’s wearing a light grey suit, black shoes, and white blouse.

‘Fancy a decaf?’ Toby calls over.

‘Yeah, definitely, but I’ve only got half an hour until class.’

‘That works for me.’ Toby says. ‘How’s the sickness? Mine was awful in the first trimester. Not too bad in the third, thankfully.’

‘It keeps coming in waves. It’s my hips and ankles that are killing me now and I can’t get through a class without needing the loo.’

‘Yeah, it’s a magical time!’ Toby laughs.

They find a quiet table away from the students.

‘So, how did it go?’ Toby asks.

‘With Pete?’

‘Yeah’

‘Not as well as I’d hoped.’

‘Oh… Why? Did you mention what I told you about my arrangement?’

‘Yeah, I explained exactly how you spread your annual leave over the year.’

‘You shared my work schedule with him?’

Yes, thanks again for that. He just kept saying, *show me where that is written in the policy.* I said it was a local arrangement, which *was* in the policy, but he wasn’t having it. He told me to check with HR!’

‘This place is ridiculous! We’re just numbers on a spreadsheet to them. Have you spoken to the union about it?’

‘No, no… I, I, I just don’t want to rock the boat at this stage, you know.’

‘Did you check with HR?’

‘Yes.’ Julian says, pulling an exaggerated glum face.

‘Oh Gawd.’

‘Their reply was*, Oh, that’s a local arrangement*. I could have screamed! It’s either a policy or it’s not!’ Julian sits back in her chair and sighs.

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Toby had also offered Julian some 2nd hand baby clothes, which was really kind. She has two children and seems to know everything about every parent in the department. It was like it was her mission to coordinate everyone and learn their stories. Julian liked the idea of this group of parents finding common ground beyond the trials and tribulations of redrafting her latest article or meeting a book chapter deadline. She looked around her office at the array of academic iconography, from her bound PhD thesis to the growing pile of theory books she had yet to properly arrange on the shelf, her old identity was about to morph into something different.

The Narrator’s impressions of Julian

Julian’s story highlights the often-oppressive workplace cultural attitudes that working women faced when expecting a baby. This is especially true of women who attempt to integrate their careers with their expected social role as a primary caregiving mother

(Berdahl & Moon, 2013). Evidence from this time also highlighted that women were often mistreated if they chose not to have children (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Gloor et al., 2018). Julian was a difficult character to reconstruct because her story reveals a troubling picture of the pressure women felt to conform to a secondary role within masculine organisational norms and their presumptive 'social role' as nurturant mother as a complementary figure to the male committed worker (Eagly et al., 2000). Such gender-based social role pressure feeds into the 'difference feminism' construction of how 'feminine' attributes of care, empathy and relatedness should be separately valued for working mothers, rather than being integrated and valued within progressive formulations of caring masculinities (Elliott, 2016). Julian's acceptance of her role as primary caregiver was present in more than one example in the data fragments and is indicative of the persistent and influence of patriarchal norms and marketised work intensification within higher education (S. Acker & Armenti, 2004; S. Acker & Dillabough, 2007; Gill, 2009). Such norms were incompatible with what we now view as a human right to a fair balance of work and family life without detriment.

Nowhere was the ideological pressure of patriarchal organisational norms felt more acutely than with Julian's transition from being a 'workhorse' to having to embrace saying 'no'. This symbolic moment of identity shift signalled the end of the ideal worker lie in which women could 'have it all' as equals to men. The cold, hard reality for the expectant mother was the realisation of their own induction into the constraining reality of the motherhood penalty (Begall & Grunow, 2015; Budig & England, 2001; Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Horne & Breitkreuz, 2018). This penalty is not only financial, but also symbolises a cumulative physical and emotional burden by virtue of the second shift of domestic labour predominantly falling on primary caregiver mother (Hochschild, 1997; Hochschild & Machung, 2012). When women agreed to take the majority of parental leave, they also symbolically agreed to shoulder much of the associated domestic responsibilities heading into the future. As we know, such decisions were detrimental to women's careers and contrasting quantitative evidence from the time proved that mothers whose partners instead worked reduced hours in the first year of their child's life had a positive association with mothers' career advancement three years later (Norman, 2020; Norman et al., 2014).

Crucial to Julian's story is the intervention of other experienced parents who intervened to share their experiences and advise her of ways to navigate their new life as a working parent. However, we also gain insight into the inconsistencies experienced by expectant parents when attempting to apply this advice. The problem of unreliable gatekeepers with discretionary power is again highlighted as an unfair cultural barrier to some women's access to enhanced parental experiences. At its worst, inconsistent managerial

interactions with expectant mothers led to women being ‘pushed out’ of organisations (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014), but the commonplace masculine, rule-bound, performative culture also led to some expectant mothers suffering the binary conflict of motherhood versus career success (S. Acker & Dillabough, 2007), which was exacerbated by gatekeeper line mangers who had less flexible attitudes to work-family life. These immovable gatekeeper barriers, inherent in the fabric of organisational life, formed the grounding for necessary resistance and subversion. As we all sit today, securely in our bubbles, it is hard to imagine one individual having such power over our rights, but we should never forget it was the collectively reasserted voice of working parents in the post-pandemics epoch that shifted the narrative towards truly flexible working today.

This final story provides some evidence of the winds of change that were beginning to blow during the PPE. Though these subversive acts may seem relatively minor by contemporary standards, they were the important first steps towards subversion of the masculinised organisational norm I have outlined today.

Mayday part 2 - From intention to action

Cormac wanders along a dimly lit, turquoise corridor lined with monotonous pine office doors and frosted glass walls. He glances in through each of the exposed window panel strips and sneaks an opportune peak though the cracked doorways of some more inviting rooms as he passes by, though he does not linger for long enough to initiate contact. He carries an overfilled his mug of tea, adorned with the University branding. Small slops breach the lip of the mug as he walks along and a sporadic trail of splashes land on the carpet in his wake. He pauses and stands outside the neighbouring office to his. Inhaling the rising steam from his mug, he takes a tentative slurp of the scalding liquid and looks down the corridor. He wants to extend the liminal time between work and refreshment. If he goes inside his office, he can’t kid himself that he is using necessary time to get a drink. The window at the end of the corridor beckons him for a pensive moment of reflective staring, but he is interrupted before can make his move.

‘Hey, Cormac. Let’s see the latest piccies then!’ A voice hails him from inside the adjoining office.

Cormac gulps down a scorching mouthful and feels it scratch his throat. ‘Hey’, he rasps in reply stepping into the doorway of the open office. He leans on the steel doorframe and warms his hands on the outside of his mug as further whisps of vapourised tea rise like light seeking sapling tendrils to caress his cheek. A table in the middle of the room is decorated with blue and red union fliers and an oversized rainbow banner drapes over it,

touching the floor on one side. His colleague, Mary perches on the edge of her seat and turns to look directly at him. The view through the window to the outside world is obscured by a billowing fog escaping upwards into the sky, presumably from a nearby vent.

‘You never share pics on the network.’ Mary says with a faux grumpy face.

‘I don’t like to share their pictures too widely, privacy you know.’

‘Of course, of course, I’m just ribbing you.’ Mary replies. She is wearing a flowery blouse, purple suit trousers and silver lined trainers which she waggles from side to side as she talks. ‘Sooo, where’s the latest pics?’

Cormac rummages in his pocket and pulls out his smartphone. He clears a series of alerts that have accumulated since he last opened the case. Scrolling past some recent pictures of Zac in the bath with Zoe, he finds one his wife took of all four of them together, on a National Trust walk they recently did, the sun had deigned to grace them with its presence that day and they are beaming at the camera. It’s an idyllic picture, like the ones you see in countryside themed magazines. He shows Mary, handing her the phone and standing alongside her.

‘Aww, that’s lovely, Cormac. Gosh, he’s really grown since I last saw him.’

‘Yeah, he’s growing fast.’

‘How old is he now?’

‘Just turned 4, he goes to school in September.’

‘What about Zoe, is she one yet?’

’13 months now, she’s almost walking.’

‘Jeez! That’s ridiculous! I remember when you brought her in for the first time after you went on parental leave.’

‘Yeah, that was a funny day. It was only the second time I had been out with her without Jane. I was really nervous. I was so worried she would start crying for her mum and I would have to take her into Jane’s work, but it went OK, didn’t it? It’s funny thinking about that now, I was so scared, more scared than I think I had ever been before.

‘Well, you didn’t show it, you were a natural.’ Mary says, turning back to her screen and clicking her mouse to open a document. ‘So, did you see the group discussion this morning? I’ve been drafting this with Toby and think it’s ready for another pair of eyes.’

‘Yeah, I saw your message. Was going to reply later.’

‘We need your voice in this, Cormac. You’re one of the few fathers I know of in this place who has ever spoken up about shared parental leave. It can’t just be the mums with this claim. If they know that this represents the whole network, they are going to have to listen to it!’

‘I know, I know.’ Cormac replies as he starts to scan the document on Mary’s screen.

‘Did you see the first draft?’

‘Yes, I saw it last week. I was discussing it with Alfred. His partner’s expecting their first in few months’ time. They’re facing the same barriers we faced, the numbers just don’t add up for them. We need to be more ambitious.’

‘That’s what I was just saying to Toby! I have started drafting something else’ Mary says while gesturing to an A4 pad on her desk with a list of bullet points. She points to the nearby vacant swivel chair and Cormac pulls it up to the desk. Outside the room, Julian waves at them both and takes a rest against the doorframe. She is holding her lower back with one hand and carrying a flask mug in the other. She is wearing blue corduroy dungarees, a white, long-sleeved top, and white trainers.

‘Just going for a walk. How are you both?’ Julian asks.

‘Hey, come in, come in, we need your thoughts on this, too.’ Mary calls over to Julian whose cheeks are flushed. Her hair is tied back exposing reddened eyelids and mottled brow. She slowly enters the room.

‘Please, take this seat.’ Cormac says as stands up.

‘Take mine! You, keep reading!’ Mary chuckles and stand up. She grabs her notepad in one hand and takes Toby’s free hand to guide her to the chair.

‘I can’t stay long.’ Julian says as she lowers herself onto the seat. She unscrews the mug lid and releases peppermint vapour into the room.

‘You OK?’ Mary asks.

‘Yeah, just finding these final few weeks harder and harder. It’s not slowing down, it’s like they expect all the projects to be tied up in a neat bow. I miss coffee too.’ She laughs along with Mary and Cormac.

‘That’s why I want to speak to you, though unfortunately not to solve the coffee situation. We need to include more voices like yours to reflect the experiences of pregnant

women in this claim. We want to show them what it's really like to be pregnant in this place.'

'Yeah.' Julian replies. She takes another sip from her mug and takes a deep breath. 'It's a bit shit right now.' Julian replies with a forced chuckle.

'Trust me, I've been there.' Mary places her hand on Julian's arm and inclines her head.

'It's the difference between the supportive words and the lack of action that gets to me most. For example, I haven't had a risk assessment yet and it's almost time for me to go on leave. Also, it might seem silly, but I asked about not doing 3-hour seminars this semester, they said it wouldn't happen, but guess what appeared on my timetable? Once it was there, there was no way to remove it! I'm absolutely shattered by the end of hour two so god only knows what the students think of the final hour…'

'What did your line manager say about the risk assessment?' Cormac asks.

'I'm too embarrassed to ask them about it now. I feel like it's my fault.'

'It's not!' Mary states. 'How long is it now until you are off?'

'Three weeks. I'm literally counting down the days. It sounds awful, but I'm really ready for the break. I know it's going to be exhausting in a different way, but I need to get away from *this* for a while. My current life just doesn't fit inside these walls.'

'I know. I felt the same way. Still do a lot of the times, sorry to say.' Mary replies.

Cormac stands alongside Mary and re-reads the text on Mary's screen. He drains the last mouthful of his tea and breathes out the hot air. The message is right, but something *is* missing, it's too *safe he thinks to himself.*

'We're still playing by their rules, their hierarchy.' he mutters.

'Yes! Exactly! What I really want to do is organise a group of parents to camp outside the VCs office and let our children loose to bang on the door demanding to be heard. They'll struggle to mothball that response so quickly.' Mary replies

'It's the urgency that's lacking.' Julian says as she gets to her feet. 'It's too easy for them to push these issues down the road and months become years, years become decades…meanwhile more people will go through what I'm experiencing right now.'

‘It’s just more of the same old shit, isn’t it? How many more exploited pregnancies are we going to tolerate on the altar of productivity and progress before we draw a line in the sand? We need to show them we won’t accept these norms any longer!’ Cormac declares.

‘Yes!’ Mary replies with a wide grin, her fingers rhythmically rap on a bullet point list on her A4 pad.

‘They need to know we exist as a collective, that we aren’t going away, that we stand in solidarity as one movement, and that we are here to demand change, now! We can’t keep flexing our lives to their rigid rules. I want them to see the other side of our lived experiences, to show them what being a working parent means. We are going to show them what flexibility should be about by bringing our children into the workplace when our timetables clash with childcare. I am not going to call in any more favours from family and friends. It’s time to push the emotional and physical burden back onto their shoulders.’

‘Read this.’ Mary says as she places her notepad onto the desk between them.

Cormac and Julian both read the bullet list, their heads both nod enthusiastically as they scan down the page. Cormac’s foot starts to tap on the ground.

There is silence in the room, but Mary is smiling.

‘This is it, Mary!’ Cormac exclaims. ‘I am going to write to the fathers in the network today. We need to start acting as one. We’re going to start the clock on this change. It has to come from all of us.’ Cormac bangs down his mug in a mock emphatic gesture and a small chip of ceramic pings off from the bottom edge, sliding across the table surface.

‘No time like the present!’ Mary replies picking up the chip and throwing it in her deskside bin. She opens the network homepage and a new conversation box. ‘Let’s write it together. This can be a moment of fellowship at the start of our journey. Julian wheels her chair closer to the screen and Cormac leans in. Mary starts to type.

The time has come for us to act, will you join us?...

Narrators reflections on Mayday: part 2 – from intentions to action

Friends, the second story of Mayday represents the vital role of collective action in the transition from patriarchal organisational norms to equitable, caring working practices for all. In the spirit of people-centred organisational praxis (Freire, 2004, 2017; Horton et al., 1990), these working parents first came together to express and articulate their individual

experiences of oppression. It was through this shared experience that they began to reflect on their occasional complicity in their own oppression (Althusser, 2014; Freire, 2017). Through that praxis, they gained the collective purpose to act to create a new, long term, democratic vision for their working lives. The first step was solidarity and mutual support. The 'Mayday' spirit of subversion grew from shared experiences of parental inequity and a recognition of their shared oppressor, embodied in this story by Marley. Throughout the data samples I uncovered, it was clear that these working parents not only knew but held deeply critical views of the masculinised organisation. It was only when their individual voices found a platform that they started to make change.

The role of masculinities in this narrative cannot be underplayed and it was the embodied caregiving experiences of fathers that transformed men from hybridised rhetorical allies (Demetriou, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2018) to genuinely progressive, allegiant comrades. The vision of our contemporary 'caring masculinities' was borne from the 'rejection of domination and [the] integration of values of care, such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality' (Elliott, 2016, p. 241). This vision drew on Connell's foundational concept of masculine 're-embodiment' (2005, p. 233) and the 'hands-on' acts of caregiving, which became a template for the necessary experiential learning that affected working father's perceptions of care. Yet this was not a straightforward road to enlightenment. We must not forget how easily the ghosts of dominant masculinity in organisations (J. Acker, 1990, 2006; Burnett et al., 2012) could haunt us again. Patriarchal artefacts still blight us today, even decades after the pandemics. They resurface as masculinised data cyphers (Blackman, 2019) that infected our algorithms with a legacy of gender biases (Zhao, Wang, Yatskar, Ordonez, & Chang, 2017). Re-writing the script of working parent masculinities was a multifaceted process that involved everyone from institutions to individuals in a new cycle of change from all levels of organisational life. It was not enough to wait for the cycle of reproduction to correct itself, the masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2001) was too endemic and embedded into the idealised breadwinner worker trope (Collier, 2019). It was only when fathers experienced the value of caregiving (Bunting, 2020; A. Doucet, 2006; Tronto, 2015) that they internalised a re-embodied masculinity and joined the collective movement to subvert the patriarchy.

This final account of the subversive spirit, 'Mayday' may be more recognisable to you than some of the other stories I have shared with you today. We are all familiar with principles of prefigurative political action (Gayá & Brydon-Miller, 2017; Gordon, 2018; Reinecke, 2018) as a framework for direct, local democratic action that became the foundation of our post-pandemics society. Well, this story represents one of the burgeoning local examples of collective subversion that arose at the height of neo-liberal hegemony. Considering the

role of oppressive, normalised individualism in organisation, it is a testament to the subversive spirit of this collective that they constructed their own alternative organisational space (Callahan, 2013). With their network as a platform, they were able to build on existing shared parental demands for better working conditions for working parents (Gatto, 2020). This collective action instigated a new type of 'family friendly' organisation grounded in the principles of flexibility (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019), justice and equity. Mayday represents the moment when the stories of individualised oppression that I have shared with you today were collectively harnessed and redirected into action by 'directly intervening in the ongoing reproduction of institutions' (Reinecke, 2018, p. 1300). Just as the notorious pandemics 'circuit breaker lockdowns' interrupted the reproduction of the virus, so did Mayday direct actions interrupt the continuous reproduction of patriarchal hegemony in organisations.

We must reflect on the PPE as a period of suffering for many working parents, especially women. Though our present-day life has morphed into one of total flexibility and mutual care, it may only take another crisis to change this narrative again. We must preserve the humanity of our collective responsibility for equality, reciprocal care, and interrelatedness. We live in an unprecedented era of care (Tronto, 2015) that re-wrote the ethical foundations of our once patriarchal society (French & Weis, 2000; Jordan, 2020; Pullen & Rhodes, 2015). To relinquish all that we have gained would be an insult to the memory of the countless lives lost during those devastating pandemics years. My message to you today is to hold onto our solidarity and the spirit of subversion; together, as working parents and caregivers, we are so much stronger than we can imagine!

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

To reshape the current inequitable norms for working parents, society has to accept and address the long-standing motherhood penalty as highlighted through second wave feminism (e.g. Friedan, 2021 [1963]), and the empirical literature on working parenthood in recent decades (Gatrell, 2005; Hochschild, 1997; Hochschild & Machung, 2012). The motherhood penalty remains a major problem today (Brearley, 2021) in spite of awareness-raising reports and research that highlights the gender based disparities in pay (UK Government, 2020a), care (AIG, 2019) and progression to senior roles (HESA, 2021; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008). Additionally, the patriarchal deficit (Bailey, 2015) remains embedded in the cultural and statutory norms of the westernised employment relationship for men (Borgkvist, Eliott, Crabb, & Moore, 2020; Collier, 2019; Norman et al., 2014). This norm is imbued with a discourse of hegemonic masculinity that connects the 'ideal worker' with the breadwinner father (Burnett et al., 2012; Sarah Thébaud, 2010). To subvert these endemic norms, I constructed a counternarrative (Frandsen et al., 2016) in this thesis that blurs the lines of empirical data (Jefferies, Horsfall, & Schmied, 2017) with dystopian fiction as inspiration, data source and written style (Gilmore et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2014; Rhodes, 2015; Rhodes & Brown, 2005b). This subversive approach contributes to the reshaping of cultural narratives for working parents and offers tangible suggestions for organisational change that can shift norms towards more caring (Elliott, 2016; Jordan, 2020; Lee & Lee, 2018), re-embodied (Connell, 2005) and egalitarian (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Messerschmidt, 2018) masculinities that reject domination (Elliott, 2016).

In this conclusion, I outline the implications for organisational practice in terms of policy and cultural actions. These recommendations represent progressive changes that will not only benefit working parents, but also organisations (such as Universities) within an ever-evolving marketplace. I also describe and explain one of the major impactful actions arising from this research, the establishment of a Parents and Carers Network (PCN) as a staff-led, supportive, collective space for policy-based and cultural organising. Finally, I outline my contributions to knowledge in the field of masculinities theory(Connell, 2005; Dolan & Coe, 2011; Elliott, 2016; Jordan, 2020; Messerschmidt, 2018), Althusserian ideology (Althusser, 2014), and unconventional methodologies (Bryman & Buchanan, 2018; Plakoyiannaki & Budhwar, 2021; Rhodes, 2015). I start with policy-based

recommendations as these are the actions that can make an immediate difference for working parents.

Organisational policy implications

In spite of the proliferation of gender equality initiatives such as Athena Swan (Advance HE, 2018b), the masculine organisation (J. Acker, 1990) is still alive and kicking (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Giazitzoglu & Muzio, 2020; von Alemann et al., 2017). Its ghostly presence, as previously identified by Burnett et al. (2012) continues to constrain the experiences of working parents, particularly women. As recent scholarship is showing, state-level policy interventions (such as Nordic countries) can have a measurable impact on changing the gender balance of parental care (Brandth & Kvande, 2019). However, the inadequate progress of state-level interventions in the UK (Brooks & Hodkinson, 2021; Burgess & Davies, 2017) point to the need for organisations to exorcise their own masculine ghosts through radical policy change (Topping, 2021). The recommendations I propose prioritise two areas of policy, parental leave and flexible working, while highlighting the importance of line-managers' guidance and inclusive negotiations. Participants in this project consistently stated that if they could make one change to policies, it would be to improve parental leave entitlements within their organisation. This includes fully renumerated increases in 'paternity leave', 'maternity leave' and 'adoption leave' post birth, made available to all employees from day one of employment. There was also discussion of separate 'neonatal leave' and protected 'special parental leave' for high stress periods of time such as first years at new schools (e.g., year 1 at primary and secondary education levels). Working parents also called for greater flexibility in how, when and where they work to enable them to balance their working and caring responsibilities. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the proliferation of normalised homeworking for office-based workers, may advance flexible working options for working parents in the coming months and years.

Policy change ***for*** working parents has been strongly argued in this thesis. To reiterate, the 'motherhood penalty' ***is real*** and continues to disadvantage women's careers, to the extent of mothers being pushed out of their careers (Brearley, 2021; Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Kanji & Cahusac, 2015). The related problem of the 'patriarchal deficit' (Bailey, 2015; Collier, 2019) being reproduced through restrictive paternity and inadequate SPL policies contributes to gender-based disparities that alienate working fathers from their children in spite of the increasing motivation that many fathers feel to be more involved (Locke & Yarwood, 2017). As research shows, the likely causal relationship between the patriarchal deficit and the motherhood penalty can be mitigated by father's greater involvement in childcare at an early stage of the child's life (Norman, 2020; Norman et al.,

2014). This can only happen when organisations support all parents to be involved with protected, fully renumerated parental leave.

First Policy Recommendation

Enhance parental leave to ensure all parents can equally access fully renumerated and protected parental leave (maternity, paternity, adoption and neo-natal) from day one of employment.

This recommendation draws on literature from the parental demands manifesto in the literature review chapter (Gatto, 2020), and from two UK based political lobbying groups. They argue for the replacement of statutory 'Shared Parental Leave with a more equitable system of maternity and paternity leave' (Maternity Action, 2020). Maternity Action proposes a 6 + 6 + 6 model of parental leave in the UK (6 months for birth mothers, 6 months for partners, and 6 months that can be shared). The Fatherhood Institute (2019), responding to the government consultation on *Parental leave and pay,* argue for a more modest increase in paid paternity leave to 10 weeks at no less than minimum wage and an uplift in paid maternity leave to 12 weeks. Both these manifesto style approaches highlight a consensus amongst parental leave lobbying groups for parity between birth mothers and fathers/partners. Evidence from Nordic countries who have implemented enhanced parental leave shows significant increases in fathers participation in childcare (Kvande & Brandth, 2019; Rocha, 2021) which contributes to cultural shift toward gender equality. The argument for this first recommendation can also be made from an employer's perspective.

Recent evidence from the UK Higher Education Institution (HEI) sector shows that more employers are going beyond statutory parental leave (Epifanio & Troeger, 2020). The University of Exeter responded to Epifanio and Troeger's sector analysis and radically increased their parental leave offer to six months parental leave at full pay for birth mothers and their partners (Scott, 2018). This increased offer made Exeter a market leader in the HEI sector (Epifanio & Troeger, 2020) and is likely to make them very attractive to prospective employees, as well as improving staff retention. A similarly progressive organisational offer was initiated to great acclaim by Aviva who have reaped positive publicity from their equally generous 6 months at full pay for both parents (BBC, 2019). The die is already cast for the future of parental leave. What organisations need to

decide is whether they want to lead their sector, benefit from the reputational boost, attract and retain the best staff, or wait for statutory change to force their hand.

There are significant implications for UK HEIs as a competitive sector for hiring employees. Drawing on findings from Epifanio and Troeger (2020, p. 367), universities with high research outputs (as measured by the Research Excellence Framework (REF)) and lower student-staff ratios have five times more generous maternity pay than teaching-focused institutions with high staff-student ratios. It is reasonable to assert that universities who have ambitions to climb the REF league table and want to be known for high quality research outputs, should compare their parental leave provision with their sector competitors and take measures to match, or exceed them. Institutions who fail to do this will be outcompeted in the marketplace for high quality output academic staff of childbearing age (typically under 45 for women and under 50 for men (ONS, 2019)). This is not the only work entitlement that can attract sought-after academic staff in the sector, flexible working is also highly valued.

Second Policy Recommendation

Establish policies for technology-enabled, output-focused flexible working that recognises and adapts to employees' caregiving and wellbeing needs.

The flexible working recommendation is focused on organisations enabling all employees who need to work fewer hours, different hours, and/or in different locations (prioritising parental caring responsibilities and mental and/or physical health). Given the context of an enforced global pilot for home-based working during the pandemic, the proven technology-based solutions that have been adopted to transition to a hybrid working culture (Shankar, 2020) can evidently work for working parents ***and*** organisations.

Extending flexible working for parents is crucial for much needed changes in gender equal childcare, as shown by the Fatherhood Institute 'Lockdown Fathers' report (Burgess & Goldman, 2021). The shift towards flexible working is already being publicised in the media (Read, 2021), particularly for office-based roles that have been transferred to remote working patterns during the pandemic. Benefits for working parents include the reduction, (or elimination) of commuting time, and spending more quality time with their families (Abdellatif & Gatto, 2020). The need for flexible working arrangements is closely associated with working parenthood (Chung, Birkett, Forbes, & Seo, 2021; Fuller & Hirsh,

2019; Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2014). Bernard, who had accessed less than full time flexibility in his organisation (not the main organisation in this study), said, '*when you get to become a parent, it feels like you've got the key to unlock all of these mythical policies and flexible working' [P17_216-226].* However, this 'unlocked cabinet' of flexibility rights is not something that women participants connected to the main organisation in this study enjoyed access to, as Jean disclosed '*they have allowed me to change my working pattern […] although it was via me accepting no pay rather than actually a flexible working request so to speak' P12_684-694*.

The empirical findings of this research support research that suggests flexible working is not a panacea of gender equality, entitlements can be gendered in their application (Chung et al., 2021). Men may also benefit from positive perceptions of their 'involved fatherhood' status, while women are still expected to be the primary carer. The full scope of flexibility as a form of 'utopian autonomy' (Knights & Willmott, 2002) where working parents are predominantly working from home is also imbued with risks concerning isolation (O'Shea, 2020) and individualised pressure to perform in the post-pandemic world (Powell, 2020). Conversely, organisations may be additionally motivated to pursue flexibility beyond hybrid approaches to reduce operational office costs and monitor staff to increase productivity (Shankar, 2020). This recommendation emphasises a cautious, working-parent-centred approach to find a win-win for organisations and employers.

Hybrid flexible work, where employees are allowed to combine home and office working, should emphasise employee outputs, not hours spent logged on, and these outputs should be reasonable and mutually agreed in advance. Evidence from a 6 hour working day trial for Care Workers in Sweden signalled reductions in staff sickness and higher quality interactions with their clients (Oltermann, 2017). Additionally, Zurich insurance have introduced a 'permanent flexible-working policy' for all its staff in response to COVID-19 homeworking, meaning staff can opt in as long as they 'can fulfil their role remotely'(Pratt, 2020). However, the UK COVID-19 lockdowns (2020 & 2021) have highlighted the looming risk of blurred lines between work and family life (Abdellatif & Gatto, 2020; Boncori, 2020; Chung, Seo, Forbes, & Birkett, 2020), and the potential that some employers may seek to monitor staff within their homes (Azer, 2021; Walker, 2021). Other factors to consider relate to normative expectations that prioritise staff visibility with bodies on seats 'turning up… not producing' (Bolchover, 2005, p. 108), which can fuel hostile responses to fathers' request for flexible work (Murgia & Poggio, 2013). There is also a fear of stigmatization and penalisation that some men may feel when requesting flexible work (Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2016; Kuchynka, Bosson, Vandello, &

Puryear, 2018; Vandello et al., 2013).These significant caveats highlight the importance of careful consultation with staff about what they want, based on their lived experiences of flexible working during the UK lockdowns, which represent an extreme version of place-and-time-based flexible working.

To address these caveats, I suggest three areas for consideration for consultation with staff regarding a transition to a hybrid flexible working model:

- **Employees who want to return to office-based working, should be allowed to do so.** Those who want to work from home should be adequately supported with resources.
    - Those with specific needs relating to care responsibilities, mental and/or physical health should be prioritised in this consultation.
- **Establish clear and mutual expectations** for employee outputs that can be monitored as part of the line management relationship.
- **Ensure that staff remain socially connected** to the organisational community via a range of opportunities to engage such as one to one catchups, groups, and team meetings.

Line managers, as organisational 'gatekeepers', will play an integral role in supporting this recommendation. The next recommendation specifically addresses their interaction with working parents.

Third Policy Recommendation

Develop consistent and explicit guidance and training for line managers that ensures working parents are fully supported at all stages of parenthood.

Line manager guidance and training can potentially undo some the gendered assumptions of working parent roles in organisations (Gatrell et al., 2014; Weststar, 2012). In my interviews with expectant parents, it was clear that inconsistent discretionary decisions were resulting in a range of experiences in the main organisation, which highlights how important line managers can be as gatekeepers of working parent rights (Fodor & Glass, 2018). Some participants described not having a risk assessment, being overworked in their third trimester, and lacking clear information to make important decisions. Focusing on line management from the prospective 'hybrid working' future is also very important

due to the risk of employee stress and burnout related to the blurred lines of work life imbalance (Powell, 2020).

Below I outline some important areas for line management guidance:

- **Return to work arrangements**
    - **Some participant mothers mentioned the difficult transition from maternity leave to returning to work.** Offred described her experiences of checking her email a month before returning to work to find tasks already accumulating without her agreement. She had been negotiating for flexible working arrangements at the time and had she not checked her work email (something she should not have to do), she would not have seen these imposed work tasks and would not have '*been able to fight off doing it*' [P1B_491-501].
    - **Line managers should protect working parents on parental leave** as a conduit for all workload planning arrangements. They should not allow any additional work to be added to a working parent's job plan without expressed agreement from them.
- **Pregnancy support**
    - **Some participants felt fully supported to attend additional scans and the collegiality from colleagues.** However, the rigid managerial approaches to workload management that others experienced meant that some pregnant women were still working flat-out in the final weeks of their pregnancy. This discrepancy suggests more line manager guidance is needed to make it clear what is and is not expected of third trimester employees.
    - **There was little evidence amongst the men in this study of the input of line managers from a fathers perspective**. This aligns with the patriarchal norms of the masculine organisation. Drawing on my own experiences, I was incredibly grateful to have a fully supportive line manager who enabled me to take two weeks of paternity leave, plus two weeks of annual leave after my child was born. On the other end of the

spectrum, Tommy was not entitled to any leave and was limited to just over a week of unofficial leave for his first child. This discrepancy is an example of an area where parental leave policy reform can equalise the experiences of working fathers.

- **Health and Safety**

    - **There were examples of pregnant mothers who had not had risk assessments completed by their line managers**. Oryx, who was almost at her due date and had started maternity leave at our interview, highlighted that *'I don't think the risk assessment was done, although that is in policy' [P9_565-576].* Examples like this should ***never*** happen so there is clearly a need for more explicit line manager guidance and central organisational HR monitoring in relation to maternal health and safety where the risks could include infant or mother mortality.

    - **Line managers should have comprehensive training in how to support working parents' mental health**, particularly in relation to postnatal depression. 'one in eight women, and an estimated 1 in 10 men, experience moderate to severe postnatal depression' (Mental Health Foundation, 2016). Other pre-existing conditions such as anxiety may also be exacerbated by reduced sleep and time pressure. This overarching problem will impact working parents at different stages, but these recommendations focus on the perinatal period for parents.

        - For pregnant mothers, the risks associated with heightened stress can be detrimental for the health outcomes of their unborn child (Hobel, Goldstein, & Barrett, 2008; Woods, Melville, Guo, Fan, & Gavin, 2010). As Allie highlighted, '*they just assume that everything's alright even though I've not been very well, and they don't feel what I'm feeling' [P7_740-755]*. Post-natal depression will not simply dissolve when affected mothers return to work. Line managers need to be properly trained so they can support new mothers' mental health needs. They can do this by being flexible, empathetic, and signposting colleagues to appropriate specialised care and resources.

- There are often hidden and/or unknown stresses affecting expectant or new fathers that line managers should be more aware of. This is another area where HR departments should develop and communicate appropriate guidance (e.g., Dads Matter UK, 2021) and training to ensure line managers are adequately skilled can support colleagues. Additionally, HR departments should facilitate supplementary resources that Line Managers can refer staff to, such as support groups and wider community support to break down barriers. Winston highlighted the socio-cultural problem of patriarchal discourse, and assumptions of fathers alignment to HM, in relation to health visitor home visits, '*there's no concern over the father's mental wellbeing yet it's still a massive, massive change for the father as well*.' He went on to outline the normative expectations of working fathers, '*the father is expected to just be a rock and sometimes that's not always, you don't always feel like you can be*.' *P18_704-721*. Research shows that 38% of first time fathers are concerned about their mental health (Mental Health Foundation, 2016) and pressures to conform to hegemonic masculinity may supress men's inclination to disclose mental health issues. HR should work with line managers to raise their awareness of the signs of fathers' mental ill-health in the workplace, and to be especially vigilant and supportive during the perinatal period where the focus has traditionally been on the expectant mother. If organisations are serious about changing the discourse about gender equality, working fathers need to be equally supported.

- Reducing stress and better supporting working parents' mental health will also be highly beneficial. As Nick highlighted, '*keeping that staff [member] happy, you work better when you're not really stressed, you're going to stay if their policies are flexible enough, which reduces their costs of hiring, which are like a major, major thing for a company' [P2A _141-146].* Halpern (2005) connects stress reduction practices in the workplace to 'reducing health costs, absenteeism, and employee turnover, while also having a more committed workforce' (p. 158). Halpern also associates stress reduction measures, such as giving employees more control over

their time (e.g., flexible working), with the organisational benefit of reduced operational costs.

Line managers have a vital role to play in providing a human face for the written, organisational policies. Current rights are often contingent on discretionary decisions, working parents should not be concerned about how well they get on with their line manager, or how many years they have previously worked, or how much they have contributed. Rights should be equally available to all working parents based on an uplifted suite of organisationally agreed options that the line manager and working parents can review together.

Fourth Policy Recommendation

Ensure representation from working parents in any policy design and/or negotiation process when the outcome will directly affect them.

This recommendation attempts to bridge the formal aspects of policy initiatives with the informal aspects of cultural action. Therefore, this recommendation is targeted at organisational managers to encourage them to engage with working parents, as a representative group, in workplace negotiations and policy design (Weststar, 2012). Traditional approaches include trade unions and, as is common practice in UK HEIs (Advance HE, 2018a), employee representatives on the board of governors. It is important that working parents' views are represented through those formalised frameworks, however, trade unions are attempting to represent a range additional workplace concerns so it is important that working parent groups represent themselves too (Weststar, 2012). As we have seen a decline in trade union membership in the UK (Crouch, 2017), and evidence shows that trade union density is not associated with improved maternity leave rights (Epifanio & Troeger, 2020), it is reasonable to suggest that alternative collective approaches to involving working parents may be more effective.

A working parent network may provide 'a basis for informal negotiations to build patterns of accommodation among divergent values and interests' (Friedman et al., 2007). These 'patterns of accommodation' are vital in bridging the gender gap for working parenthood. Employers can also greatly benefit from the transdisciplinary collaborative nature of staff social networks which is 'the lifeblood of differentiated organizations' (Srivastava & Banaji, 2011, p. 209) and enables 'learning and innovation' (Cross, Cross, & Parker, 2004, p. 11).

It is therefore mutually beneficial for staff in networks, trade unions and organisation management to work together on parental policies and processes. Such collaboration is likely to generate organisational learning as a side-effect of negotiating that can benefit all parties.

Cultural Recommendations

The culture based recommendations relate to perceptions of the masculinised 'ideal worker' (J. Acker, 1990) within the 'masculine organisation' that marginalises women (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Fotaki, 2013) and constrains 'involved fatherhood' (Burnett et al., 2012; Kangas et al., 2019; Murgia & Poggio, 2013). These recommendations draw on participants experiences I described as influenced by the 'ghost of masculinity'. For example, Oryx described an oppressive *'feeling that['s] been drummed into them, as in it's been constantly bombarded with it and that there's no flexibility in it and I suppose when you say drummed into it, it doesn't feel like there's a flexibility there' [P9_50-72].* This ghostly masculinity is not passive, it acts upon individuals on a daily basis and 'drums' the masculine cultural message into its subjects. Such an ideological process affects men's willingness to request flexible working (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019) or shared parental leave (S. Thébaud & Pedulla, 2016). Emma also described experiences of limited breastfeeding options, which further symbolises a masculinised taboo in the workplace contexts (Turner & Norwood, 2014) against women's motherhood role. Overall, patriarchal discourse within organisations is damaging the experiences of all working parents; this discourse needs to be shifted towards an 'ethics of care' (Ciulla, 2009; Jordan, 2020; Pullen & Rhodes, 2015) to effect gender equity for working parents.

First Culture Recommendation

Working Parents should collectively organise as a network to amplify their range of experiences and campaign for better rights.

My primary recommendation concerning culture is targeted at working parents as an informal, tacitly connected group who should form a network across their organisation. Such a network can enable peer support (e.g., sharing practical guidance & resources) and solidarity amongst members. Crucially, a parental network can become a platform for prefigurative collective action (Reinecke, 2018; Yates, 2015) in the 'here and now' (Gayá & Brydon-Miller, 2017) to enact the type of caring and collegiate workplace culture that working parents want in their working lives.

One approach I have personally enacted is to establish a Parents and Carers Network (PCN) in January 2020, which ran throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. It has grown to nearly 200 members and has become a supportive space of solidarity for working parents based on member input, rather than a hierarchical structure. The PCN was founded on mutual support, space, democracy and common resources (The Care Collective, 2020, pp. 47-58) and has developed into a community that demonstrates a caring discourse that is fit for the future of working relationships (Bunting, 2020; Tronto, 2015). This discourse values empathy, emotion and family, and aligns to the growing literature on the ethics of care (Ciulla, 2009; French & Weis, 2000; Pullen & Rhodes, 2015), particularly in relation to masculinities (Elliott, 2016; Jordan, 2020). This ethical approach was a central consideration in my research and is one of my major motivations for working in this way. Adopting an ethics of care can provide a platform to subvert masculine organisational norms in the present and future (Bloom & White, 2016; Butler, 2011) by establishing parenthood as a shared, gender-inclusive identity.

Based on the participants' relational interactions in this study, a Freirean (Freire, 2017) approach was very advantageous to generate a collective, 'creative subversion' (Cisneros Puebla, 2021) that facilitates a continuous dialogue between members and organisational representatives (e.g., Managers and HR). Freire's 'praxis' encourages continuous two-way dialogue action between organisational stakeholders where members aspire to '[surmount] the antagonistic contradictions of the social structure' (Freire, 2017, p. 152). The PCN should be 'in continual and permanent tension between rules, oppression, and ethical response to perform changes in the system' (Cisneros Puebla, 2021, p. 6). The aim is to achieve gender equity for working parents.

It is important to reflect on the role of subversive actors within organisations, Bloom and White (2016) describe the relational process of organisational subversion as a 'positive' function of 'rule-bending' for preserving not only a moral order but also processes of organizational control' (p. 7). This tempered description of subversion highlights how subversive action can be appropriated within organisational hegemonic discourse to maintain the status quo. The creative subversive methodology primarily targets the culture of the organisation and 'aims to destroy the current social and ideological hegemonies and to generate new social harmonies' (Cisneros Puebla, 2021, p. 9). The PCN, by representing all parents as a solidarity group, aims to redefine existing conceptions of gendered parenthood within organisations to contribute to a gender equal culture.

Aside from staff-led approaches, organisations have an important role to play in shifting their culture from top-down patriarchal discourse to an egalitarian caring culture. This second recommendation emphasises the actions that organisations can take in the 'here and now' to signal cultural change for working parents:

Second Culture Recommendation

Develop an inclusive, equitable approach that recognises the realities of working parenthood e.g., childcare, breastfeeding and sleepless nights.

Working parents consistently commented on the normative rules (Giazitzoglu & Muzio, 2020; von Alemann et al., 2017) of organisational masculinity (J. Acker, 1990; Burnett et al., 2012). These norms are symbolised through two examples: first the unavailability of adequate breastfeeding spaces as per Emma's experiences of having to leave her building to find an appropriate location; second the strain that working parents can experience against ideal worker expectations when they are enduring sleepless nights, as highlighted by George.

Participants described inadequate facilities available to women who want to continue breastfeeding or expressing milk on their return to work, which indicates a cultural blind spot for organisations. Emma's example of leaving her workplace and going to a nearby high street department store to find a suitable place to breastfeed symbolises a failure of the organisational support for breastfeeding women. This is indicative of patriarchal discourse which does symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1989) to mothers by maintaining the masculine workplace norms of the separation of work and family life. These cultural norms place the onus on breastfeeding mothers to resolve any emergency situations themselves, or worse, ignores them entirely.

Breastfeeding is not only beneficial to infants, it is good for mothers' health too (NHS, 2021). Research shows that women who breastfeed experience 'reductions in anxiety, negative mood, and stress' (Krol & Grossmann, 2018, p. 981). These are compelling reasons to support breastfeeding mothers in the workplace. The extent of workplace support for breastfeeding has also been shown to be related to women's decision to continue or discontinue breastfeeding (Spitzmueller et al., 2016). To address this cultural blind spot, organisations (via HR and line managers) should integrate discussions about breastfeeding into return-to-work conversations, highlight where facilities are available and ensure these facilities are easily accessible and regularly maintained. These simple steps

could radically change the culture of the organisation to welcome breastfeeding and reject the separation of work and family life.

The sleepless nights issue is another facet of separation that symbolises patriarchal discourse. George summarised this perfectly when reflecting that '*the reality hits that actually you become the servant of the child (laughter) and issues around fact of sleeping. Erm... I think I was very naive around the [...] emotional psychological stress [...] that children can place [on you] if they're not sleeping' P14_418-433*. When new parents reintegrate into the workplace, organisations should show support and care by adapting their expectations and enabling more flexibility. A caring approach would help minimise the 'sleepless in academia' scenario where women manage the pressure of masculine organisational expectations by working harder and sleeping less (S. Acker & Armenti, 2004).

Recent research highlights the connection between mothers as presumed primary caregivers, and their lead role in night waking (Borgkvist et al., 2020). This was also a theme with some of the fathers in this study. It is axiomatic that employers will prefer their workers to be well rested for work, but it should also be the case that when managers are aware of fatigued workers (particularly in the first few weeks of parenthood), they should do more to ease the ideal worker pressure by instead acting in line with an ethics of care. Simple actions like reducing output or attendance expectations or extending project deadlines can take the pressure off sleep-deprived workers. Such actions would signal that the organisation cares about their working parents and wants to make their lives a little easier.

There is no silver bullet to building a workplace culture that promotes an ethics of care and rejects hegemonic masculinity (Elliott, 2016), but these recommendations could dramatically shift organisations away from the damaging patriarchal norms that reproduce gender inequity for working parents. These recommendations are intended as advisory for working parents and organisations; they were made in good faith based on participants' experiences, and the extant literature on working parenthood. These recommendations are not comprehensive, rather that they articulate the needs expressed though working parent narratives.

Limitation

The main limitation of this research has been the methodological choice to work within one link organisation and to seek participants who were either expectant or new parents. This choice meant that I was able to access 19 parents overall for interviews. A larger sample size may have proven more compelling for some audiences when considering the

policy and cultural recommendations, but I align with Patton (1990) who stated 'there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry' (p. 184). My methodological choices were aligned with my desire to construct a compelling counternarrative imbued with the 'rich and thick' (Grenier, 2015) stories generated through dialogue with the working parents in this study. This thesis is a DF inspired, subversive narrative and therefore rejects the masculinised quantification of research value being contingent on sample size.

Contributions to Knowledge

This final section begins with my contribution to Althusserian (2014) interpretations of ideology by connecting patriarchal discourse with HM (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2018). This link draws on Althusser's concept of 'interpellation' to explain how working parents reproduce patriarchal norms through their discourse. Conversely, this study highlights the subversive role that love can play in undermining interpellation's totalising effects (Butler, 1997; Dolar, 1993). The second contribution is to extend multiple masculinities theory (Connell, 2005; Wedgwood, 2009) by explicitly connecting caring masculinities (Elliott, 2016) in fatherhood to more egalitarian organisational provision for working parents. Finally, this study makes a methodological contribution to the 'writing differently' agenda (Gilmore et al., 2019; Grey & Sinclair, 2006; Weatherall, 2018) by integrating dystopian fiction throughout my thesis, including the use of fictocriticism (Gibbs, 1997; Rhodes, 2015). My fictocriticism is a subversive academic style that pays homage to feminist writers of the past (Cixous et al., 1976; Haraway, 1991) who also called for radical visions of the future for gender and organisations.

Patriarchy: an ideological discourse that reproduces Hegemonic Masculinity

This study contributes to the Althusserian interpretation of ideology (Althusser, 2014) by demonstrating that identities of breadwinner men (a traditional ideal of HM) and primary caregiver women are internalised by working parents as subjects of patriarchy through interpellation. This process is 'dialectically related' (Fairclough, 2013) to structural and cultural factors that signify the role of the patriarchal state in shaping working parents' views.

Structural factors include existing parental leave policies that separate birth mothers' from their partners through differential access to parental leave. This demonstrates the role of the Ideological State Apparatus (e.g., law and government) (Althusser, 2014, p. 75) in defining gender norms by prioritising caregiving time for mothers and preserving men as 'breadwinners'. Examples of this process of interpellation include Susan who laughed at the prospect of Didier taking shared parental leave, partly for financial reasons and partly

due to cultural norms. Other parents who conformed to this norm include Ruth and Tommy, and Jean and Patrick, both of whom cited financial constraints associated with the gender pay gap, as well as cultural factors such as their suitability for the role of carer.

Cultural factors draw on continued interpellation of traditional social roles for parenthood (Eagly et al., 2000; Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Rose et al., 2015). This was important to many participants in this study. One prominent example was Oryx's maintenance of Crake's masculine identity construction as the 'hunter gatherer' by accepting her position as primary carer, to the detriment of her career. Jean made a similar career sacrifice to have a traditional working parent relationship with Patrick. Allie provided a striking example as the 'primary wage earner' in her family who still acted partly to preserve Tunde's masculine identity as a worker (in spite of the financial cost), and to satisfy her personal need to be a primary carer. Critical analysis has shown that a majority of working parents are 'always already' (Althusser, 2014) subjects of patriarchal values by virtue of the roles they choose for themselves; this self-subjectification is enabled by structural factors that constrain their options.

This study refines understandings of Althusserian 'Interpellation' for working parents by drawing on the critical theorising of Dolar (1993) and Butler (1997) who problematised Althusser's conceptualisation of interpellation's totalising effect. This study offers additional insights into the 'remainder' that is produced, 'love', by providing evidence of 'community love' between working parents beyond individualised 'kernel of interiority' (Butler, 1997, p. 122). Butler expands on Dolar's argument by suggesting that '[l]ove is beyond interpellation precisely because it is understood to be compelled by an immaterial law' (1997, pp. 127-128). In the patriarchal interpellation of working parents, the parental club is a community comprised of mutual support and love, beyond instrumental influence. Additionally, the subversive 'remainder' of some working fathers' desire to be more involved in caregiving (Burgess & Goldman, 2021; Gottzen, 2011; Norman et al., 2014; Wall & Arnold, 2007) may encapsulate the 'familial love' that exists beyond patriarchy. As shown in the literature review chapter, these fathers may be 'transitional' or 'egalitarian' depending on their commitment to equal caregiving. The influence of familial love as a mediator of hegemonic gender discourse may prove to be the catalyst for different conceptions of caring masculinity that can shift individuals and organisations away from patriarchal culture.

Masculinities

This study extends masculinities research, and particularly Connell's theory of masculinities (2005) and hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) to

consider their influence on working parents as a distinct group. Connell promoted masculine ‘re-embodiment’ as a subversive ‘search for different ways of using, feeling and showing male bodies’ (Connell, 2005, p. 233), which is integral to changing deconstructing the patriarchal discourse of many organisations. This thesis proposes that patriarchal discourse does damage to the pursuit of gender equity for working parents. Critical analysis of participant experiences also highlights the transformative potential that the concept of ‘caring masculinities’ as an egalitarian mode of masculinity that ‘rejects domination’ (Elliott, 2016) in the context of gender inequity for working parenthood. Extending Elliot’s account of caring masculinities, this study highlights the importance of bringing fathers into the organisational conversation to collectively pursue gender equity.

This study also contributes to theorisation of organisational masculinity by extending this related area of masculinities theory to highlight how patriarchal discourse continues to influence mothers’ and fathers’ decisions and experiences. The neo-liberal ‘ideal worker’ construct (Ollilainen, 2019; Rajan-Rankin, 2016) serves to separate work and family life; it is a useful proxy for masculinised organisational expectations. Lenina and Bernard delayed their family to fit with career and organisation agendas, while Tommy spoke about the importance of separating his work and family life. Others, like Jean, adapted to inflexible masculine norms of workload management by sacrificing her income and career progress. The working parents in this thesis show that organisations such as Universities, externally perceived as more progressive, are actually micro incubators for patriarchy. In this context, the importance of subversive, collective approaches become even more vital in the pursuit of gender equity.

One way of achieving a collective approach is to amplify caring masculinities. Two major examples illustrated its use as a subversive concept for working parents. Lenina and Bernard shared caregiving as co-parents who both equally reduced their working hours to spend more time with their family, this exemplifies the re-embodiment (Connell, 2005) and egalitarian (Elliott, 2016) aspects of caring masculinities. Bernard described his sole caring responsibilities for his daughter including nursery drop-off and pick-up; Lenina expanded on his active domestic role within the family while highlighting the importance of her role as a successful role model for their daughter. Bernard described the ideal father as ‘just someone who is patient and caring, has the ability to kind of be a role model and teach them useful life skills and loving.’ P17_412-431. The example of Lenina and Bernard highlights how caring masculinities can work in harmony with contemporary working parenthood to reject gender-based domination, however it must be noted that their relative financial parity as wage earners may have also enabled this equal relationship. Research arising from fathers’ experiences during the UK pandemic is

showing that they have had a greater role in childcare and domestic family life (Burgess & Goldman, 2021). This may provide the basis for a new counter-narrative of caring masculinities.

From a wider perspective, the ‘parental club’ was described by both fathers and mothers, which highlights the importance of caring masculinities in forming these solidarity networks to include men and women. Nick encapsulated the re-embodiment aspect of parenthood saying ‘I think you’re sort of in the club or you're out of the club with parents’ [P2B_415-435] alluding to the lived experience of parenthood. Ruth struck a more inclusive tone by suggesting ‘being a working parent, you need… a lot of your colleagues will be in the same boat together, if you're not in the same boat [it] is still sort of very important that you support each [other]’ [P3_92-99]. Ruth and Nick both talk about the working parent collective, and I propose that caring masculinities are a vital factor in maintaining this solidarity and ethics of care.

This study contributes to refining masculinities theorising by highlighting how critically important it is in the experiences of working parents. Hegemonic masculinity constrains the possibility of gender equality and egalitarian organisational cultures. As long as patriarchal structures and hegemonic masculinity remain dominant, it will be difficult to affect change. The hope of subversion lies with masculine re-embodiment and caring masculinities. Alongside the caring attitudes and behaviours of the participant fathers, I also draw on my own experiences as a new father who learns about re-embodied caring masculinities every day. The future may yet bring greater gender equity if more fathers can spend quality time with their children and translate this embodied experience into caring masculinities in their working lives.

Methodology

The methodological contribution of this study is demonstrated by the innovative use of Dystopian Fiction (DF) throughout this thesis. As stated in the introduction chapter, the persistence of gender inequity provides a clear rationale for unconventional research methods to complement and challenge existing scholarship in this area. DF was the foundation of the conceptual and theoretical framework in this study, it was a data source for the conceptual literature review (Gatto, 2020), inspired the adapted Critical Discourse Analysis method (Gatto & Callahan, 2021), and was the stylistic and structural inspiration for the fictocriticism (Jiwa, 2013; Rhodes, 2015) chapter. The use of dystopian fiction in this study goes beyond previous conceptions of unconventional research (Bryman & Buchanan, 2018; Plakoyiannaki & Budhwar, 2021) to offer a unique, ‘genre bending’ form of academic writing (Rhodes, 2015). My hope is that I have paid appropriate homage to

the emancipatory feminist essays (Cixous et al., 1976; Haraway, 1991) and creative uses of fiction (Learmonth & Griffin, 2018; Rhodes, 2001b) that inspired me to write this way.

The use of dystopian fiction to address working parenthood and masculinities extends the growing use of narrative storytelling within organizational research (Beigi et al., 2019; Rhodes & Brown, 2005a). Beigi et al. (2019) highlighted the gendered aspect of storytelling research with an increasing proportion of female authors in recent years. This demonstrates the potential alignment of this style with more critical scholarship regarding gender in organisations, making an additional case for DF inspired storytelling research into the gender imbalance in working parenthood.

I began this research with the intention to blur the lines between empirical and fictional data (Phillips et al., 2014) and to write a subversive counternarrative that could challenge patriarchal discourse in both organisations and academia. The dystopian fictocriticism chapter is the culmination of this journey and provides the basis for a new kind of 'writing differently' that can be applied to journal articles (Gilmore et al., 2019) and doctoral theses (Weatherall, 2018). Critically, this form of writing can reach a wider audience by being enjoyable to read as well as inspirational for local forms of subversive action.

By using DF as inspiration, this study draws on the unique speculative and subversive aspects of this fiction genre to address the 'social wrong' (Fairclough, 2013) of gender inequity for working parents. This social wrong is indicative of the wider gender imbalance in organisational reality as shown by the gender pay gap and the paucity of women in senior roles in organisations. By using DF throughout my thesis, I hope to have helped readers to reflect upon the role that patriarchal discourse and hegemonic masculinity play in shaping their organisation, and that this might inspire them to join or create a Parents and Carers Network. This is written in solidarity with working parents and towards a collective ethic of care that we can all benefit from.

Post-Script

The future is still uncertain, and the COVID-19 pandemic has in many ways felt like dystopian fiction-made-reality. A recent academic project from Germany highlights the significant interrelatedness of fiction and reality as team led by Jürgen Wertheimer, Professor of Comparative Literature, and funded by the German Ministry of Defence, undertook a project 'using novels to try to pinpoint the world's next conflicts'. Remarkably, the project, which included dystopian fiction novels, successfully predicted conflict in Algeria through their meta-analysis method (Oltermann, 2021). Such innovative methods are still in their infancy, but this thesis contributes to a burgeoning area of sociological research that can have real world impact.

Reflecting on recent history, many working families during COVID-19 have experienced significant negative impacts on their wellbeing through stress and fatigue, though some have been fortunate to benefit from increased time with their families. The impact of UK lockdowns has been particularly detrimental for mothers who were doing two thirds more childcare than men during the first weeks of the first UK lockdown (ONS, 2020). This trend continued into 2021 (Hall, 2021) with the ONS (2021) social impact surveys suggesting a serious mental health impact associated with the strain on working parents doing home-schooling alongside their jobs. This is particularly acute for working parents with precarious employment contracts who also carried stress relating to financial insecurity. The one silver lining in this fraught period has been the evidence from the Fatherhood Institute (Burgess & Goldman, 2021; Fatherhood Institute, 2020) of fathers doing 58% more childcare, and increased domestic chores during the first UK lockdown compared with pre-pandemic levels. This time commitment led to improved relationships between fathers and their children and increased the likelihood that they will pursue more flexible working arrangements. This does not rebalance the inequitable gender arrangements for working parents, but it does signal an opportunity for more fathers to draw on the positives of caregiving and family experiences that may help to shape the uncertain future that we face.

Epilogue

Interview with Expectant Parent – May 4th, 2037

Mark (researcher): I want to take you back to the start of your journey as a parent/parent to be. What were your immediate thoughts about work-life balance when you first found out you were going to have a baby?

Gabriel (expectant parent): It's funny, when my parents talked to me about their version of balance, it sounded like a dystopian nightmare. Sage and I delayed having a baby over the last few years for a couple of reasons, including our careers, but work life balance was the main driver. We wanted to share parental leave and work flexibly once the baby arrived, but we couldn't afford it on the old system. When we heard about the parental care legislation that was going to go through parliament, we knew this could be our chance to start a family the way we wanted. For us, it was all about equal sharing because we both wanted to know our child and enjoy family time together.

Mark: You mentioned that you waited until the legislation was in place. If you don't mind me asking, is there a reason why you didn't get pregnant straight after it was implemented in 2035. As you know, all pregnant parents at the time it was ratified were eligible for the new entitlements, including the 6+6+6 and the enhanced hybrid working. Please don't worry if you don't feel comfortable answering this.

Gabriel: No, it's fine. The truth is, we were trying to get pregnant before the legislation was ratified. We knew about the rule for pregnant parents so we calculated the earliest point that we could get pregnant and be eligible. We made allowances for premature pregnancy, too, which felt strange, but necessary. Unfortunately, the years we had waited had probably impacted our fertility. It's impossible to be certain, but that's what the GP said. We had been trying for over a year when the GP finally offered us IVF. It was such a hard time… [extended pause]

Mark: Can I get you a drink? [Offers Gabriel a tissue]

Gabriel: [Takes the tissue] It's OK ... I can carry on. After our first cycle on the NHS failed, we knew we could only afford one more attempt. We had some savings that we had earmarked for a new family home, so this felt like a good investment. Thankfully, we got pregnant at the end of 2036, we were so thrilled! I can't describe to you what it feels like to see that baby for the first time on the scanner, especially when you've seriously worried that it might never happen.

Mark: I am so pleased for you both. Did you talk about work-life balance soon after you found out?

Gabriel: We did, yes. Sage had previously been a little more committed to their career and hadn't wanted to ease off too much, but this experience changed everything for them. We both submitted our parental leave requests for the maximum entitlement. Sage's going to drop down to 60%, too, and so am I. It might be a little bit tight, financially, for a few years, but we both want to spend as much family time as possible. We feel so lucky.

Mark: That's great, but there's still a long haul ahead of us.

Image 2 – 'The Spirit of Subversion' by Rachel Hunter (2021)

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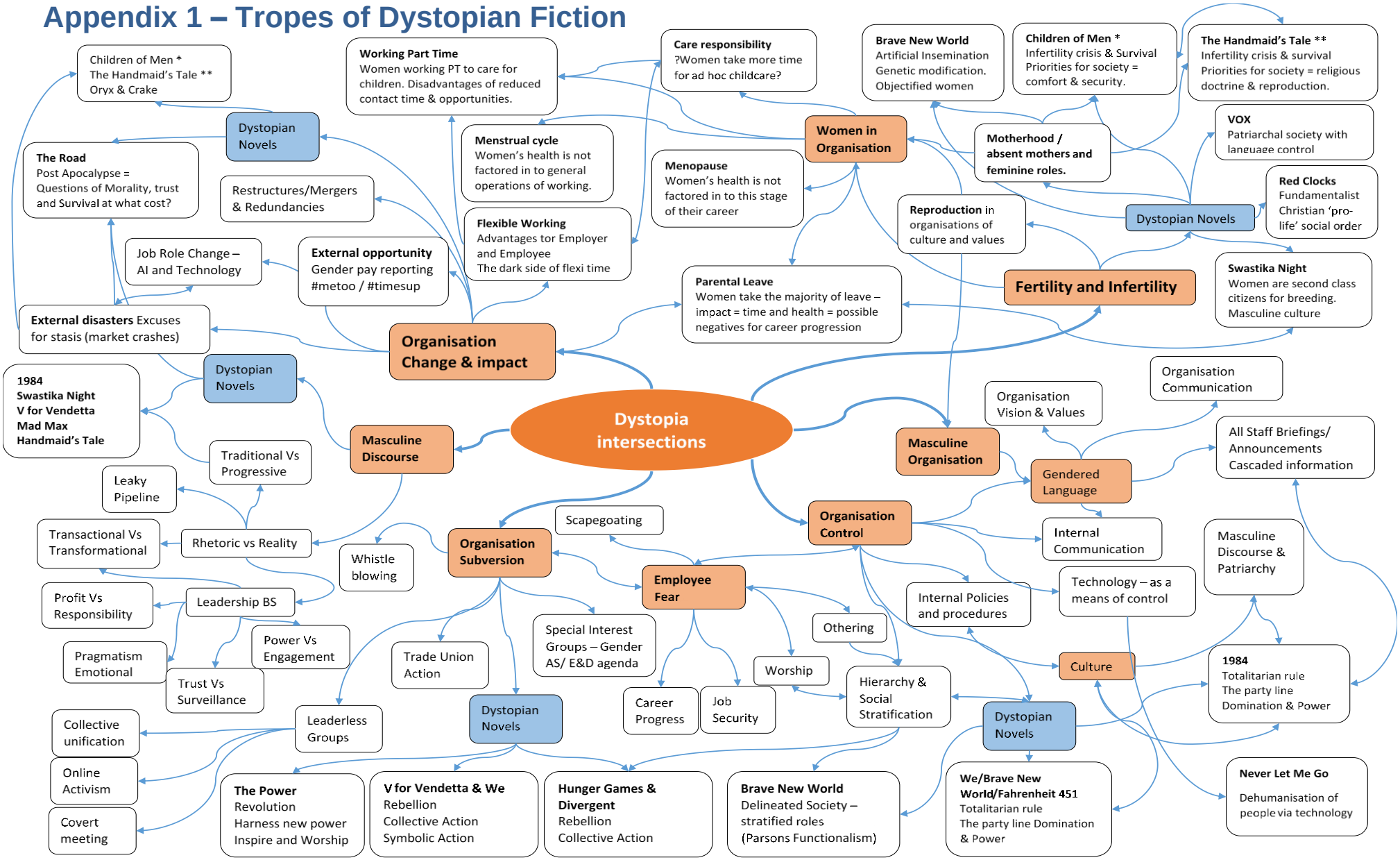
**White, R. (2040). Chronology Sensitive Referencing: An Archival Methodology for Historical Scholarship. Fictional Journal of Archival Research Methods, 60(3), 232-252*

****Please note, this reference is fictional as part of the archival narrative method described in the Narrator's introduction.***

Appendix 1 – Tropes of Dystopian Fiction



Appendix 2 – HRDI & Taylor Francis Permission to Include

From: Whittaker, Vicki
To: Mark Gatto
Cc: Li, Jessica
Subject: RE: Formal Request to use an abridged version of my published HRDI paper in my PhD thesis
Date: 08 June 2021 18:40:15
Attachments: image004.png
image005.png

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the University. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Mark,

Thanks for getting in touch. This is to confirm that there is no problem with reusing your article in this way, and that we're happy with the form of acknowledgement you propose.

With best wishes,

Vicki

Vicki Whittaker – Head of Business, Economics, and Management Journals
Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN, UK
Mobile: +44 (0)7826 905050
e-mail: vicki.whittaker@tandf.co.uk
Web: www.tandfonline.com

Information Classification: General

From: Mark Gatto <mark.gatto@northumbria.ac.uk>
Sent: 31 May 2021 21:49
To: Whittaker, Vicki <Vicki.Whittaker@tandf.co.uk>
Subject: RE: Formal Request to use an abridged version of my published HRDI paper in my PhD thesis

Dear Vicki

I previously sent this request to your colleague Nicola, but I note that she has left Taylor Francis now. I will be most grateful for your help with this query.

Many thanks
Mark

From: Mark Gatto

Mark Gatto

From: Li, Jessica <jli2011@illinois.edu>
Sent: 01 June 2021 03:39
To: Mark Gatto; Nicola.Button@tandf.co.uk
Subject: Re: Formal Request to use an abridged version of my published HRDI paper in my PhD thesis

Hi Mark,

I think as long as you provide citation and it is not a verbatim copy of the entire article, and with the note you have shown here, you should be okay. I think you should proceed.

Jessica Li

From: Mark Gatto <mark.gatto@northumbria.ac.uk>
Date: Monday, May 31, 2021 at 3:44 PM
To: "Li, Jessica" <jli2011@illinois.edu>, "Nicola.Button@tandf.co.uk" <Nicola.Button@tandf.co.uk>
Subject: RE: Formal Request to use an abridged version of my published HRDI paper in my PhD thesis

Dear Nicola and Jessica

Please can you advise if you have been able to review the request to include my adapted sole author 'authors original manuscript' within my PhD thesis. I have cited it as follows:

this section is an abridged original manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Human Resource Development International Journal on 23 Mar 2020 - https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2020.1735832

Thank you
Mark

From: Li, Jessica <jli2011@illinois.edu>
Sent: 26 March 2021 19:00
To: Nicola.Button@tandf.co.uk
Cc: HRDI Journal <ed-hrdi.journal@mx.uillinois.edu>; Mark Gatto <mark.gatto@northumbria.ac.uk>
Subject: FW: Formal Request to use an abridged version of my published HRDI paper in my PhD thesis

Dear Nicola,

Please take a look at the following request from an author. I am not familiar with it because, typically, the question is asked the other way around. Could you please consult with a copyright expert at Taylor & Francis to advise us on how to proceed?

Thanks a lot,
Jessica

From: Mark Gatto <mark.gatto@northumbria.ac.uk>
Date: Friday, March 26, 2021 at 10:49 AM
To: "Li, Jessica" <jli2011@illinois.edu>
Subject: Formal Request to use an abridged version of my published HRDI paper in my PhD thesis

Dear Professor Jessica Li

I hope this email finds you and your family well.

I am a PhD student at Northumbria University and am due to submit my thesis in Summer 2021. As a part of the process of drafting my thesis literature review, I developed a conceptual paper which I was delighted to have published in Human Resources Development International (see link below).

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13678868.2020.1735832

My supervisor, Professor Callahan and I have discussed including an abridged version of this paper in my thesis. The reason for doing this is that it directly relates to the overall methodological and theoretical arguments of my PhD, and also demonstrates the publication quality of my writing. However, I am conscious that in doing this I am at risk of contravening copywrite laws.

I have reviewed the author guidance on plagiarism on the Taylor Francis website and my understanding is that it is generally encouraged that authors promote their journal publications through the properly cited use of the 'Author's Original Manuscript'(https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/editorial-policies/). I have followed this guidance and include a statement at the start of my abridged paper (within my thesis) to say the following:

[this section is an abridged original manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Human Resource

Development International Journal on 23 Mar 2020 - https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2020.1735832]

I therefore ask that you please consider, in your capacity as the Editor in Chief of HRDI, my formal request to include an abridged version of my HRDI paper within my PhD thesis.

Thank you
Mark

Mark Gatto *(AFHEA)*
Graduate Research Associate, Northumbria School of Law and Newcastle Business School
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Pronouns: He/Him/His

E: mark.gatto@northumbria.ac.uk
Please note, I work part time (Monday-Friday), but check my emails frequently and will normally respond to your email within 24 hours.

Recent Publications

Mark Gatto (2020) Parenthood demands: resisting a dystopia in the workplace, Human Resource Development International, 23:5, 569-585, DOI: 10.1080/13678868.2020.1735832

Abdellatif, A, Gatto, M. It's OK not to be OK: Shared reflections from two PhD parents in a time of pandemic. *Gender Work Organ*. 2020; 27: 723– 733. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12465

417a, CCE1, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST, United Kingdom

Appendix 3 – Main Interview Questions

Demographics and initial questions

Participant Name	
Participant Number	
Age	
Gender	
Ethnicity	
Disability	
Length of time at the organisation	
Parent status? Parent to be/ Parent	
First time parent?	
Partner's first child?	
Plans for Parental Leave? *e.g., Maternity, paternity & shared leave? Length?*	
Plans for Childcare? e.g., Nursery, part-time work, family, etc.	

Image elicitation

Image link: https://visualexplorer.smugmug.com/VEse/i-8FHqQPK

Question prompt	**Image #**	**Notes on response**
1. What image best describes your expectations/experiences of your typical role as a working parent?		
2. What image best describes your expectations/experiences of your relationships in a typical working week as a working parent?		
3. What image best describes your expectations/experiences of the policies, processes and practices that apply to your status as a working parent?		

Introduction

During this interview I would like to hear about your views and your role as a working parent, your experiences of the policies in this organisation, your relationships with colleagues and partners and your expectations surrounding this change in your working and family life. I want to follow your lead with the direction this interview takes and will also ask some specific questions relating to these themes throughout the interview.

Grand tour

1. I want to take you back to the start of your journey as a parent/parent to be. What were your immediate thoughts about work-life balance when you first found out you were going to have a baby? What do you think influenced those thoughts? What, if anything, has changed your mind since you have become a parent/parent to be?	
2. Please describe the range of roles in work and at home that you perform in a typical week (to all interviewees). What, if anything, has changed since you became a parent? Please describe what, if any, changes might affect your roles once you become a parent (to interviewees who are not yet parents).	

3. Please describe the nature of the professional relationships you have at work before you disclosed you were going to become a parent (to all interviewees). What, if anything, has changed since you shared your news. Please describe what, if any, changes might affect your relationships once you become a parent (to interviewees who are not yet parents).	
4. Thinking back to when you first discovered you were going to become a parent, please describe your overall experiences of accessing and interpreting the policies and processes related to becoming a working parent.	
5. Before you became pregnant, what were your expectations of how you would be treated based on your understanding of the culture of this organisation?	

Additional questions – to ask when appropriate – listed by priority

Role

1. What are the most important influences on your ideas of your role as a working parent?
2. How, if at all, does the organisation influence your decisions and role as a working parent?
3. How do you decide the distribution of parental responsibilities?
4. How does being a parent, or expecting to be a parent, influence your role at work?

Relationships

1. What were the reactions of your colleagues at work to you becoming a parent?
2. Did any reactions disappoint you? If so, why do you think they reacted that way?
3. What did you expect might happen to your relationships as a consequence of becoming a parent?
4. What were the students like in response to your changing physical state?

Policies

- What is your understanding of the available policies relating to parenthood?
- If you could make one change to the current policies surrounding parental leave and childcare, what would it be and why?
    - How likely would it be that this change would happen at this organisation?
    - Why do you think that?
- How much time did you spend reading and following the parental policies and processes?
- How well do you think managers interpret the organisation's policies? Any examples?
- Is there anything you would like to change about the policies at this organisation? If yes, what? If no, why?

Expectations

1. Please describe any of your expectations that were met or exceeded during the process of becoming a parent?

2. Please describe any expectations that were not met. Why do you think they were not met?

    - What do you think might have influenced this?

Finally, any other thoughts or comments?

Appendix 4 – Stage 2 Interview Questions

Image link - https://visualexplorer.smugmug.com/VEse/i-8FHqQPK **(not for redistribution*)**

Review the previously selected image and ask the participant if they would change it now. Ask for explanation of why.

Image questions:

1. What image best describes your **experiences** of your typical role as a working parent?
2. What image best describes your **experiences** of your relationships (in work) in a typical working week as a working parent?
3. What image best describes your **experiences** of the policies, processes and practices that affect you as a working parent?

Follow up questions for new parents (previously expectant)

- How have you found your first 6-9 months as a parent?
- What have you noticed since returning to work?
- What were your expectations?
- What has surprised you since returning to work?
- What, if anything, has changed in your working relationships?
- How have you decided your responsibilities when returning to work?
- How did you maintain contact with work when on parental leave?
- Why did you maintain contact with work while on leave?
- What pressure did you feel to keep in touch with work?
- Resisting/Re-integrating - Coping strategies?

Describe your ideas of the following:

- Ideal Worker
- Ideal Mother
- Ideal Father
- Ideal Parent

Time questions

- Work Time
- Family time
- Time constraints
- Flexible time

Any other comments or thoughts?

Appendix 5 – Themes and Discourses Map

Appendix 6 – Characters Map