



42<sup>nd</sup> ANNUAL SOROKIN LECTURE

***Breadwinning Mothers and Caregiving  
Fathers: A Quiet Revolution, A Resilient  
Problem, and One Persistent Puzzle***

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## **ABSTRACT**

Over the past forty years, enormous changes have occurred in the gender division of caregiving and breadwinning across many countries, including Canada, the United States, and Britain. Women's employment rates have soared, with breadwinning mothers constituting nearly one-third of (two parent, heterosexual) families; meanwhile, fathers' increasing commitment to caregiving is evidenced in rising rates of stay-at-home dads and single dads, and a rise in men's take-up of parental leave. Yet, in spite of this well-documented quiet revolution in women's and men's responsibilities for breadwinning and care work, one resilient problem and one persistent puzzle remain at the heart of this issue. In the 2011 Sorokin lecture, I speak from my twenty-year qualitative research program on gender, work, and care to address the problem that will not go away and the puzzle that has yet to be solved for those who live and study this unfinished gender revolution.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrea Doucet is Professor of Sociology at Carleton University. She has published widely on themes of gender and care work, mothering and fathering, parental leave policies, embodiment, reflexive sociology, and intertwined methodological and epistemological issues in knowledge construction processes. Her book *Do Men Mother?* (University of Toronto Press, 2006) was awarded the John Porter Tradition of Excellence Book Award from the Canadian Sociology Association. She is also co-author of *Gender Relations: Intersectionality and Beyond* (with Jan Siltanen, Oxford, 2008) and *A Guide through Qualitative Analysis: Listening, Seeing and Reading Narrative Data* (with Natasha Mauthner, Sage, forthcoming 2012). She is the Editor of the international journal *Fathering* and an Associate Editor of the *Canadian Review of Sociology* and the journal *Emotions, Space and Society*. She is currently writing a book entitled *The Bread and Roses Project: Breadwinning Mothers and the 'New Problem with No Name'*.

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## OPENING REMARKS<sup>1</sup>

It was such an intellectual and personal pleasure to read about Pitirim Sorokin and to see the marvelous Sorokin archive endowed at the University of Saskatchewan. I especially enjoyed reading the newspaper articles and editorials about him, as they gave a sense of his status as a public intellectual and his location in the social and cultural conversations of the day. I admit I was slightly of awe of his life and accomplishments.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, I feel so honoured to be standing here even remotely attached to his name. This is a man who was imprisoned in Russia by both the Czarists and the Communists, condemned to death, and exiled. According to one newspaper article, he “endured four years of starvation and struggle while he wrote three books.” Another article added, “Facing death every day, he continued to write his books.” I am going to use him as an example to my graduate students who are struggling to finish their theses. I am also going to remind myself of this as I struggle to finish two books.

What I would like to do in this lecture is talk about the following: (i) A quiet revolution in gender, work and care; (ii) A resilient problem in gendered responsibilities; and (iii) A persistent puzzle in how we make sense of these changes and this problematic.

I am going to start by speaking a bit about how I came to my place in this field of study. I will weave a bit of Sorokin’s spirit through the lecture – mainly in relation to a quiet revolution in fatherhood.

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<sup>1</sup> This lecture was delivered via a Powerpoint presentation with many visual images on March 31, 2011. This written version of the lecture draws partly on my chapter (in press, forthcoming 2013): “Can Parenting be Equal? Rethinking gender equality and gender differences in parenting.” In L. McClain and D. Cere (eds.), *What Is Parenthood?: Contemporary Debates about the Family* (New York: NYU Press).

<sup>2</sup> Sorokin Manuscripts and Papers, Murray Memorial Library, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK.

## INTRODUCTION: A SMALL AND QUIET REVOLUTION

Over the past 30 years, researchers in many countries have pointed to massive, gendered transformations in paid and unpaid work and parenting. Across most western countries, we have seen more and more breadwinning mothers, stay-at-home fathers, and gay and lesbian parent households. These large demographic and social shifts have engendered equally massive discussions about the similarities and differences between mothering and fathering, and about how to make sense of gender equality and gender differences in parenting, and what institutional, policy and legal measures might assist those who seek to achieve gender equality in paid and unpaid work.

The scale of these changes has been radical. Some could even say that they have been revolutionary.<sup>3</sup> Most visible are the shifts that have occurred in breadwinning and caregiving. For example, men now constitute about 13% of stay at home parents in Canada.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, these only account for men who *self-identify* as stay at home dads; there are many more men who are the home-based parent who are not captured by these statistics. It is also worth noting that women are now primary breadwinners in 1/3 of Canadian dual-earner (heterosexual) households.<sup>5</sup> This changing landscape of gender, work and care has been exacerbated by the current recession, which has had a particularly negative impact on male employment.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> My first point in this lecture is one that speaks to a “quiet revolution.” Of course, what I am speaking about very much unlike the Russian Revolution, which Sorokin wrote about in his book *The Sociology of Revolution* and in his personal account of the revolution in *Leaves from a Russian Diary*. See P.A. Sorokin, *The Sociology of Revolution* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1925); *Leaves from a Russian Diary: And Thirty Years After* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950).

<sup>4</sup> While these numbers can appear either high or low, depending on how one looks at them, it is important to add that, according to Statistics Canada, stay-at-home father households have increased 25% over the past decade, and they are particularly high in some parts of Canada (in Maritime provinces, they can be as high as 25%). Unpublished data from the Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey (LFS), 2009.

<sup>5</sup> D. Sussmann and S. Bonnell, “Women as Primary Breadwinners.” *Perspectives on Labour and Income* 7, no. 8(2006): 10-17.

<sup>6</sup> In the United States, this is illustrated starkly in employment numbers, with 3/4 of 2008 unemployment rates among working-age Americans being men’s unemployment while, at the same time, women are crossing “the 50% threshold” to “become the majority of the American workforce.” See Anon, 2009, Women and work: We did it! *The Economist*, December 30, 2009, available at: <http://www.economist.com/node/15174489> [accessed February 10, 2012].

I began doing research on this slow and small revolution just over 20 years ago. I was a brand new PhD student and a new parent when I began to conduct research on women and men who were trying to ‘share’ parenting and housework.

Looking back, my goal was relatively simple and perhaps a little naive. I wanted to know what impeded and facilitated gender equality in domestic life and parenting. That first project was the beginning of a two-decade long research program that has focused on some of the following: defining and theorizing gender equality and gender differences in parenting; thinking about how class, ethnicity, and sexuality, as well as time and space, intersect with gender in parenting; addressing a persistent puzzle of a stubborn link between women and domestic responsibility; reflecting on what impedes or facilitates father involvement; and developing an evolving approach to methodological and epistemological questions about everyday ‘evidence’ and what ‘we can know and how’ about people’s intimate lives.

At the heart of my work is a constant scrutiny of the term ‘equality’ in parenting. After two decades of ethnographic work on gender and parenting, I have slowly come to the view that we need an approach that focuses not on equality, but on differences: making sense of those differences, and where and how they matter, or not. My thinking on these issues is embedded in a position that is ethnographic, theoretical, empirical, biographical, and epistemological. Let me start with the biographical.

### **GENDER, WORK, AND CARE: WHERE IT BEGAN FOR ME<sup>7</sup>**

My interest in gender, work, and care began politically and personally. Politically, it started with the work of many feminist scholars, but especially the work of feminist philosopher Sara Ruddick. It was 20 years ago that I first read her *Maternal Thinking*. I

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<sup>7</sup> The subject area I am speaking from today generally takes on the name “Gender, work, and care.” There are so many others who stand here with me around these same puzzles and problems, and there are many whose shoulders I stand on – including some of the scholars who have spoken here over the last 42 years in this Sorokin Lecture Series: Meg Luxton, Dorothy Smith, Susan McDaniel, Pat Armstrong, Wallace Clement, and many others.



was pregnant with my first child, and in my first year of doctoral studies at Cambridge University. I was taken aback by two of Ruddick's statements. The first was this:

“...the most revolutionary change we can make in the institution of motherhood is to include men in every aspect of childcare... Radically recasting the power-gender roles in these dramas might just revolutionize social conscience... and economic, political and international life.”<sup>8</sup>

The second – and what really got me thinking – was this:

“Briefly, a mother is a person who takes on responsibility for children's lives and for whom providing child care is a significant part of her or his working life. I mean ‘*her or his*’.”<sup>9</sup>

Ruddick made a connection between men and mothering in the form of a verb (“men can and do mother”) and in the form of a noun (“men are mothers”). This concept of a genderless mother intrigued me. It still intrigues me, and I will come back to it at the end of my talk. For now, I want to add that I was saddened to learn that Sara Ruddick passed away two weeks ago. She was professor of philosophy and women's studies for nearly 40 years at the New School for Social Research. I actually had the privilege and pleasure to meet her just after my book was published, and that led to a series of e-mail conversations about men and mothering.

So Sara Ruddick's work is part of the beginning of my interest in men and mothering. But I had a personal interest in it as well; one doesn't work in an area for twenty years unless one thinks it is pretty darn important. Indeed, I say to my graduate students, ‘follow what you love. And follow those things that trouble you and keep you awake at night – both theoretically, but also personally.’ Your research topic has to get under your skin. It has to matter to you so that you feel compelled to add your voice to that

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<sup>8</sup> S. Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*, 1st Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

conversation. You have to care about it so much that you wake up every morning and you cannot wait to begin to engage with those questions.

One way that I've come to think about this is to draw on Avery Gordon's concept of ghostly matters. In her book of that name, subtitled "Haunting and the Sociological Imagination", Gordon writes on how ghostly haunts and 'shadow others' can haunt sociologists as researchers, and can matter to us in "the making of our accounts of the world."<sup>10</sup> She contends that when we are haunted by a memory or a figure from our past, the sudden presence of these ghosts can have an impact on the stories we tell. In her words, this occurs "when we admit the ghost – that special instance of the merging of the visible and invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present – into the making of worldly relations and into the making of our accounts of the world."<sup>11</sup> In a similar manner, Martha McMahon reflects on how ghosts from her childhood, especially her Irish aunts, came to haunt her and dramatically influence her interpretation of her interviews with Canadian mothers. McMahon confesses that "shadow others are present in our stories," they "can include characters from the researcher's past," and they "draw us into the research in unforeseen and disturbing ways."<sup>12</sup>

Even Pierre Bourdieu, who once strongly insisted that we should not bring our biographical interests into our research because this would be narcissistic reflexivity rather epistemic reflexivity, actually came to admit before he passed away that comments by both his mother and his father led him to pursue issues on inequalities in education. He wrote about this in *A Sketch for Self Analysis*:

"This kind of experimentation on the work of reflexivity... shows that one of the rarest springs of the practical mastery that defines the sociologist's craft, a central component of which is what people call intuition is perhaps, ultimately, the

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<sup>10</sup> A.F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996). See also M. McMahon, *Engendering Motherhood: Identity and Self-Transformation in Women's Lives*, 1st Edition (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>12</sup> M. McMahon, "Significant Absences." *Qualitative Inquiry* 2, no. 3(1996), 320-321; see also M. McMahon, *Engendering Motherhood: Identity and Self-Transformation in Women's Lives* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 1995).

scientific use of a social experience, which so long as it is first subjected to sociological critique can, however lacking in social value it may be in itself... be reconverted from handicap into a capital. As I have said elsewhere, it was no doubt a banal remark of my mother's... that... triggered the reflection that led me to abandon the model of the kinship rule for that of strategy."<sup>13</sup>

Finally, Sorokin himself admitted that events in his childhood led him to be drawn to particular theories and to reject others. In his autobiographical papers, he wrote about his mother:

“The only thing I remember about her is the scene of her death – which occurred when I was about three years old. This scene is my earliest memory and it marks my birth into a conscious, remembered life. Of my life before this event I remember nothing. (This personal experience is one of the reasons why I regard various psychoanalytical theories... as a mere fancy not supported by any real evidence)”.<sup>14</sup>

There is a memory that has mattered to me and my work, and especially my strong interest in exploring issues of gender, work and care – not only in the lives of women, but men as well. I'm just going to read a story – which is both from my book and from an article I published in *Qualitative Sociology*:

*“When I began a study of primary caregiving fathers in 2000, the motivation for undertaking this research seemed clear to me. My interest was explicit and often articulated since many of the fathers that I interviewed asked me how it was that I – as a woman, as a mother – came to be interested in studying men's lives. I told a simple story. The initial impulse came out of my own first experiences of parenting and my observations of my husband as he took on the primary care of our eldest daughter at varied points in her early years. His recounting of the*

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<sup>13</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*, 1st Edition (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> P.A. Sorokin, “Sociology of My Mental Life.” In P.J. Allen (ed.), *Pitirim A. Sorokin in Review. The American Sociological Forum* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1963), 4-36.

*excruciatingly painful details of sitting sidelined in a 'moms and tots' group in Cambridge, England over several cold winter months awakened my curiosity in the lives of fathers who challenge conventional gender norms.*

*As my research progressed, however, I became increasingly aware of some autobiographical 'ghosts'. Throughout the process of interviewing over 100 fathers and especially while deep into the process of analyzing those narratives, I entered the stage of physical and emotional exhaustion that most qualitative researchers come to know well.*

*It was here that the words of fathers filled my waking and sleeping hours and rolled through my conscious and unconscious mind. Their faces and their fathering stories mixed inextricably with the ghosts of fathers I had known throughout my life, particularly in the 17 years when I was growing up in a small town on the north shore of [New Brunswick]. After months of analyzing interview transcripts, I awoke one night from a dream and suddenly remembered a long-forgotten memory.*

*I remembered my childhood home, a large wooden house on the Baie de Chaleur, a small bay that empties into the Atlantic Ocean. It was also the house in which both my grandfather and father grew up.*

*It sat on Main Street in the working-class, Catholic side of town, just down the street from the pulp and paper mill where my father worked long shifts as a labourer for most of his working life.*

*And then there was the house across the street, and directly on the bay.*

*As a child, I would often look out from the verandah of my house, and constantly observe what my mother called 'the comings and goings' of that other house. It was an up and down duplex and it belonged to Ozzie Aubie, a lobster fisherman.*

*In the upstairs apartment of that duplex was a family of six: a single mother, Penny Melanson, and her five daughters. The story was that her husband had just packed up and left one day, leaving Penny to scrape together a living for her daughters. The people in the town talked. More specifically, my grandmother, my mother, and my aunts talked. Penny was pitied for not having a man to provide a family wage. Yet, as they sat on our front verandah drinking coffee, smoking Du Maurier cigarettes, and looking across the street to Penny's house, this is what they said: Penny was a good mother. Penny was penniless, but her children were lacking nothing.*

*Meanwhile, in the downstairs apartment of this duplex was a family of four – Ozzie Aubie and his three sons, Billy, Johnny, and Harry. Other than the infamous story of Pierre Trudeau taking on custody of his three sons, we had never seen a family living in a house without a mother.*

*Again, my grandmother, my mother, and my aunts talked. “Where was their mother? How could she leave? Those poor Aubie boys. How would they ever turn out without a mother to raise them?”*

*Indeed, everything that went wrong with Billy, who was in my grade at school, was blamed on the stain of being a mother-less boy. In Grade Two when he called me names, in Grade Three when he chased me home from school lifting up my skirt, in Grade Four when he threw my newly knitted winter hat so high into our maple tree that it could never be recovered – each of these incidents was met with the same lamenting sigh and response from my mother and my aunts. “Well, what do you expect? He has no mother.”*

*I grew up with the mystery of Billy's missing mother and the wonder of how it was that the town embraced Penny Melanson's fatherless family living upstairs. And*

*how they harshly judged the motherless family of Ozzie Aubie that lived downstairs.*

*From my nighttime dream of Ozzie Aubie and his three sons, I realized that these autobiographical ghosts had partly led me to deep personal and academic curiosity about the relations between a primary caregiving father and the community within which he lives and is judged.”<sup>15</sup>*

The reason I decided to tell that story is because I think it is one that Pitirim Sorokin would appreciate – because his situation was similar to that of Ozzie and his three sons. In his memoir, Sorokin wrote about how he and his two brothers lived with his father. I sense that as hard as it was for Ozzie to be a single father in the 1960s and 1970s, under the constant scrutiny of the community, it would have been even worse at the end of the 19th century. As Sorokin recalled,

“Of my father I had and still have two different images. In his sober stretch (lasting for weeks and even months) he was a wonderful man, loving and helping his sons in any way he could... Unfortunately the stretches of soberness alternated with those of drunkenness... In his drunken state he was a pitiful figure; he could not care for us nor help us; he was depressed, irritable, and, once in a while, somewhat violent in his treatment of us.”<sup>16</sup>

Sorokin’s story reveals how gender can matter in primary parenting, especially when this primary caregiving takes place in an environment where social norms and ideologies may be at odds with men taking on caregiving roles.

I turn now to the theoretical and methodological roots of my research program on breadwinning mothers and caregiving fathers.

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<sup>15</sup> Adapted from A. Doucet, *Do Men Mother?* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); A. Doucet, “‘From Her Side of the Gossamer Wall(s)’: Reflexivity and Relational Knowing.” *Qualitative Sociology* 31, no. 1(2007): 73-87.

<sup>16</sup> P.A. Sorokin, “Sociology of My Mental Life.”

## **MY RESEARCH ON CAREGIVING FATHERS AND BREADWINNING FATHERS: WIDE METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES**

My lecture draws upon two decades of ethnographic research on mothering and fathering in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and a decade-long longitudinal research project on breadwinning mothers and stay-at-home fathers. My larger research program has also focused on gay father couples, single father families, and divorced and co-parenting families, and has emphasized the role of social networks as important dimensions of parenting work. Across all of these projects, I have personally interviewed over 250 men and women, mainly in households where women are primary breadwinners and men are primary caregivers. I've also followed a small case study of eight heterosexual couples across ten years (as well as a further twelve individuals across five years). Hundreds more mothers and fathers have shared their stories with me through focus groups, and through an online discussion forum.

While the majority of individuals in my studies are lower middle class and middle class, of varied white ethnicities, heterosexual, and living with dependent children, my projects also span diversity across class, race and sexuality. My research has focused centrally on understanding men's fathering narratives. Most of it has occurred with Canadian families.

My methodological approach to this work is grounded in recent innovations in qualitative research practice, feminist methodologies and epistemologies, and reflexive sociology. Although there are many ways to enter into the problems and puzzles of this field of gender, work, and care, my entry point is the oral story. It is not the concept of 'experience', or the concept of the lived everyday world; it is not identity, nor selves. My ontological unit of analysis is the everyday narrative told (or spoken) by a narrated subject that I come to know through a relational encounter that is inter-subjective, reflexively constituted, embodied, oral and textual, and situated in wide set of social relations, social structures, and epistemological communities.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> N.S. Mauthner and A. Doucet, *Reflexive and Relational Knowing: The Listening Guide Approach* (London: Sage Publications, forthcoming 2013); A. Doucet and N.S. Mauthner, 'Knowing responsibly:

In broad terms, my research program is informed by what the late Iris Marion Young called a pragmatic conception of theory, which she describes as “categorizing, explaining, developing accounts and arguments that are tied to specific practical and political problems, where the purpose of the theoretical activity is clearly related to those problems.”<sup>18</sup> Over the past two decades, in order to understand and explicate the ‘problem’ of gender differences in parenting, I have developed a constantly evolving theoretical position that advocates gender equality while recognizing gender differences.<sup>19</sup> Theoretically, I initially drew on work first developed in the 1990s in French, Italian, and American feminist theory which calls for: the constant interplay between gender equality and gender differences; a focus on how context (space, time, and relationships) matters in how equality and differences interact; and analytical shifts from equality to differences, from differences to disadvantages, and to “the difference difference makes”.<sup>20</sup>

My theoretical approach also resonates with a position that can be broadly defined as a contextual approach, which entails a close attentiveness to “context and the complexity of

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Ethics, Feminist Epistemologies and Methodologies.’ In M. Mauthner, M. Birch, J. Jessop, and T. Miller (eds.), *Ethics in Qualitative Research* Second Edition (London: Sage Publications, 2012), pp. 123-145. A. Doucet and N.S. Mauthner, “What can be known and how? Narrated subjects and the Listening Guide.” *Qualitative Research* 8, no. 3(2008): 399-409; N.S. Mauthner and A. Doucet, “Knowledge Once Divided Can Be Hard to Put Together Again.” *Sociology* 42, no. 5(2008): 971-985.

<sup>18</sup> I.M. Young, “Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective.” *Signs* 19, no. 3 (Spring, 1994): 717-18.

<sup>19</sup> See for example: A. Doucet, “Fathers and the Responsibility for Children: A Puzzle and a Tension.” *Atlantis: A Women’s Studies Journal* 28, no. 2(2004): 103-14; *Do Men Mother? Fathering, care and domestic responsibility* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); “Dad and Baby in the First Year: Gendered Responsibilities and Embodiment.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 624, no. 1(July 2009): 78; “Gender Equality and Gender Differences: Parenting, Habitus, and Embodiment (2008 Porter Lecture).” *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie* 46, no. 2(2009): 103-21.

<sup>20</sup> For example: G. Bock and S. James (eds.), *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 1992); P. Bono and S. Kemp (eds.), *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). For an overview see A. Doucet, “Gender Equality and Gender Differences in Household Work and Parenting.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 18, no. 3 (1995): 271; and *Do Men Mother?*; on context and differences, see B. Thorne, *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993). “The difference difference makes” is from D.L. Rhode, *Justice and Gender: Sex Discrimination and the Law* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), 313. See also D.L. Rhode (ed.), *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).



women's interests"<sup>21</sup> in concrete situations; this attention to differences, however, does not mean "absolutist categorizations of difference" but rather a recognition that "meanings are always relative to particular constructions in specified contexts"<sup>22</sup> Finally, my recent thinking on how to theorize gender equality and gender differences has been aided by Joan Williams's theory of 'reconstructive feminism', which in contrast to 'assimilationist feminism' "offer(s) the promise of busting out of the frame of the sameness-difference debate."<sup>23</sup> Briefly put, reconstructive feminism reframes several long-standing debates ("the sameness versus difference debate", the "anti-essentialism debate", and the "difference versus dominance debate") by "shifting attention away from women's identities onto the gender dynamics within which identities are forged."<sup>24</sup>

### CARE WORK AS RESPONSIBILITIES

My work has developed a conception of care work, especially parenting, as a three-fold set of responsibilities.<sup>25</sup> These three parental responsibilities, gleaned initially from Ruddick's work, are emotional, community, and 'moral' responsibilities.<sup>26</sup> I will briefly address each of them.

*Emotional responsibility* refers to attentiveness and responsiveness, careful "knowledge about the needs of others"<sup>27</sup> and the steady process of "thinking about" children or

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<sup>21</sup> Rhode, *Theoretical Perspectives*, 204.

<sup>22</sup> J.W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 175.

<sup>23</sup> J.C. Williams, *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate: Why Men and Class Matter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 115.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> See also M.E. Lamb, "Introduction: The Emergent American Father." In M. Lamb (ed.), *The Father's Role: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (East Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1987); R. Palkovitz, "Reconstructing 'Involvement': Expanding Conceptualizations of Men's Caring in Contemporary Families." In A.J. Hawkins and T. Dollahite (eds.), *Generative Fathering: Beyond Deficit Perspectives* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 200-16.

<sup>26</sup> While I initially drew on these in relation to mothering, I explored these in fathering narratives and thus view them as the central responsibilities of primary caregivers of children, whatever their gender.

<sup>27</sup> C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); J. Tronto, "Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgements." *Hypatia* 10, no. 2(1995): 141; *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993); "Women and Caring: What Can Feminists Learn About Morality from Caring?" In A.M. Jaggar and

“parental consciousness.”<sup>28</sup> A second parental responsibility, *community responsibility*, recognizes that parenting is not only domestically-based but also community-based, inter-household, and inter-institutional.<sup>29</sup> Community responsibility connects the domestic realm to the community and involves social networking, coordinating, balancing, negotiating, and orchestrating those others who are involved in children’s lives.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the *moral responsibilities* of parenting refer to people’s identities as “moral” beings and how they feel they “ought to” and “should” act in society as parents and as workers.<sup>31</sup> This is also well-expressed by Williams, who notes that “masculine norms create workplace pressures that make men reluctant or unable to contribute significantly to family life”, as well as her provocative point that women face “hydraulic social pressure to conform to societal expectations surrounding gender.”<sup>32</sup>

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S. Bordo (eds.), *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

<sup>28</sup> S. Walzer, *Thinking About the Baby: Gender and Transitions into Parenthood* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> A. Doucet, “‘There’s a Huge Difference between Me as a Male Carer and Women’: Gender, Domestic Responsibility, and the Community as an Institutional Arena.” *Community Work and Family* 3(2)(2000): 163; and “‘You See the Need Perhaps More Clearly Than I Have’: Exploring Gendered Processes of Domestic Responsibility.” *Journal of Family Issues* 22, no. 3(2001): 328.

<sup>30</sup> This labour of parents, mainly mothers, and others appears in varied guises in a wide body of feminist research that highlights kin work: M. Di Leonardo, “The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Families and the Work of Kinship.” *Signs* 12(1987): 441; motherwork: P.H. Collins, “Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood.” In S. Coontz, M. Parson, and G. Raley (eds.), *American Families: A Multicultural Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1994); the important work of mothers and others: S.B. Hrdy, *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); and recent work on the role of kin and social networks in carrying out the work of parenting: see K.V. Hansen, *Not-So-Nuclear Families: Class, Gender, and Networks of Care* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005); and W. Marsiglio, “Men’s Relations with Kids: Exploring and Promoting the Mosaic of Youth Work and Fathering.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 624(2009): 118-38.

<sup>31</sup> The concept of ‘moral responsibilities’ is rooted in a symbolic interactionist conception of the interactional relational sense. K. Daly, *Families and Time: Keeping Pace in a Hurried Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996); “Time, Gender, and the Negotiation of Family Schedules.” *Symbolic Interaction* 25, no. 3(2002):323; J. Finch and J. Mason, *Negotiating Family Responsibilities* (London: Routledge, 1993); M. McMahon, *Engendering Motherhood: Identity and Self-Transformation in Women’s Lives* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Williams, *Reshaping*, 149.

## GENDER AND CARE RESPONSIBILITIES: A RESILIENT PROBLEM

I concur with many feminist and family scholars who have argued that gender *should not matter* to the ways in which parenthood is undertaken, and that, indeed, men can and do parent in ways that can be viewed as indistinguishable from those enacted by their female partners.<sup>33</sup> While men partake in parenting in ‘equal’ or symmetrical ways, and while their contributions as measured by parenting tasks and time have increased gradually with each passing year, I maintain that there have been smaller shifts in the *responsibility* for parenting, especially in heterosexual households.

With regard to *emotional responsibility*, there are now ample studies that point to how men care and nurture in ways that very much resemble what are considered traditional maternal ways of responding to children.<sup>34</sup> My research has confirmed those studies.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, my longitudinal research points to how men can still rely on women to take the lead in emotional responsibility; additionally, women expect of themselves, and can feel the social weight of expectation, that they are, and *should* be, the experts in parenting, especially in the first months or years. Put differently, my research also reveals that, in heterosexual households, emotional responsibility is more often a mother-led than father-led process; this is mainly due to the many social, relational, institutional, embodied, and ideological forces that coalesce to lead women to ‘start off’ as the primary parent.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> T.J. Biblarz and J. Stacey, “How Does the Gender of Parents Matter?” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, no. 1(2010): 3; A. Doucet, *Do Men Mother?*; G. Ranson, *Against the Grain: Couples, Gender, and the Reframing of Parenting* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); J.A. Smith, *The Daddy Shift* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009); B.J. Risman, “Can Men ‘Mother’? Life as a Single Father.” *Family Relations* 35, no. 1(1986): 95-102.

<sup>34</sup> See for example: S. Coltrane, *Family Man: Fatherhood, Housework, and Gender Equity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); E. Dermott, *Intimate Fatherhood: A Sociological Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2008); N.E. Dowd, *Redefining Fatherhood* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); W. Marsiglio and K. Roy, *Nurturing Dads: Fatherhood Initiatives Beyond the Wallet* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, in press, 2012); D. Unger, *Men Can: The Changing Image and Reality of Fatherhood in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); Smith, *The Daddy Shift*; K.D. Pruett, *Fatherneed: Why Father Care Is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child* (New York: The Free Press, 2000); Ranson, *Against the Grain*.

<sup>35</sup> A. Doucet, *Do Men Mother?*

<sup>36</sup> I am grateful to John Hoffman, 2011 for pointing me to the work of Doherty, Kouneski, and Erikson (1998) on this issue and their argument that “Fathering can be conceptualized as more contextually

There have been some gender shifts in *community responsibilities* with men being increasingly involved, and accepted, as primary caregivers in schools, health institutions, community organizations, parenting programs, and the sites where adults and children cluster. At the same time, my research has also demonstrated that mothers, in both joint-custody and stay-at-home-father families, still take on most of the organizing, networking, and orchestration around children's lives. I have also argued that part of the problem is that researchers have been using narrow maternal defined lenses, which overlook the work that fathers are doing. That is, fathers do take on this responsibility, especially through being involved in coaching, organizing and participating in children's sports. Nevertheless, this still points to gender differences in the types of community responsibility that women and men take on.

Perhaps the slowest gender change has been in the '*moral*' responsibilities of parenting, which remain tied up with the "shoulds" and "oughts" of what it means to be a good or proper mother and a good or responsible father. Two examples can be provided here. The first is the persistence of distinct, gendered, '*moral*' responsibilities in relation to the still hegemonic ideal of the male breadwinner/female caregiver family. This is well illustrated in the words of one American breadwinning mother who recently lamented to me in an interview: "*Both women and men can be primary breadwinners, and men can be primary caregivers. But there is really is no socially acceptable model for mothers who are secondary caregivers*". Meanwhile, many of the stay-at-home fathers I have interviewed bemoan their loss of income and add that "*it's a guy thing*", thus implicitly highlighting the still dominant connections between hegemonic masculinity and family provision as their main contribution to parenting.<sup>37</sup>

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sensitive than mothering." W.J. Doherty, E.F. Kouneski, and M.F. Erickson, "Responsible Fathering: An Overview and Conceptual Framework." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 60(1998): 277; J. Hoffman, "Father Factors: What Social Science Tells Us About Fathers and How to Work with Them" (Peterborough, ON: Father Involvement Research Alliance, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> G. Whitehouse, C. Diamond, and M. Baird, "Fatherhood and the Use of Leave in Australia" *Community, Work and Family* 10, no. 4(2007): 387; L. McKay, K. Marshall, and A. Doucet, "Fathers and Parental Leave in Canada: Policies, Practices and Potential." In J. Ball and K. Daly (eds.), *Engaging Fathers in Social Change: Lessons from Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, in press, 2012). But, see Dermott, *Intimate Fatherhood*, for a different perspective on the dominance of the male breadwinner norm.

Class also matters. A consistent theme emerging from my interviews with men is that being a primary caregiver without having achieved success as a breadwinner can be out of sync with what many communities consider as a socially acceptable identity for a male and for a father. That is, men without jobs or those in low-income jobs can be viewed with particular suspicion within communities; this recurs for both heterosexual and gay fathers.<sup>38</sup>

A second example of the ongoing gendering of ‘moral’, as well as community, parental responsibilities can be seen in how fathers speak about subtle but recurring surveillance when they are in public settings with children. My research on men and parenting over the past two decades has found sporadic, but consistent, articulations of the community surveillance of men who take on care work. While there has been significant change over the past decade, there is still a continuous thread of suspicion about the proximity between male bodies and children, especially the children of others. Notable instances of strong community scrutiny can occur around households where single fathers are raising teenage girls (especially when teen sleepovers occur), where men enter female-dominated childrearing venues or what one father termed ‘estrogen-filled worlds’,<sup>39</sup> when men are baby-sitting the children of others, and where men in heterosexual households are primary caregivers of infants (and concurrently, where their female partners do not take up maternity or parental leave to care for their infants).<sup>40</sup>

The recurring gendering of these responsibilities for care is a resilient problem in care work. These are gender differences that are created through interactive relations with persistently gendered social institutions, community norms, and ideologies.<sup>41</sup> I have also

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<sup>38</sup> A. Doucet, *Do Men Mother?*

<sup>39</sup> A. Doucet, *Do Men Mother?*

<sup>40</sup> A. Doucet, “Dad and Baby in the First Year.”

<sup>41</sup> M. Luxton (ed.), *Feminism and Families: Critical Policies and Changing Practices* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1997); M. Luxton, *More Than a Labor of Love: Three Generations of Women’s Work in the Home* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1980/2010); B. Fox, *When Couples Become Parents: The Creation of Gender in the Transition to Parenthood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); N. Folbre, *Who Pays for the Kids? Gender and the Structures of Constraint* (London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1994); Williams, *Reshaping*.

argued that these differences are reproduced through deeply rooted gendered habitus,<sup>42</sup> which can still pull women towards care and men towards paid work, especially in infant care,<sup>43</sup> and hegemonic masculinities,<sup>44</sup> which include a devaluation of activities and identities that have strong connections with traditional femininity.<sup>45</sup> They also recur because of occasional community and social surveillance of close embodied relations between men and children.

Yet change is underway, and the ‘moral’ responsibilities for parenting are especially important in such change. As Kathleen Gerson notes, “dissolv[ing] the link between gender and moral responsibility” could lead to a “*social order in which women and men alike are afforded the opportunity to integrate the essential life tasks of achieving autonomy and caring for others.*”<sup>46</sup> We can, in fact, see glimpses of this “social order” in some families who deliberately work to resist gender differences,<sup>47</sup> as well as in gay and lesbian households, where the removal of domestic gender roles and expectations can lead to greater flexibility in how parenting and domestic labour are approached and done.<sup>48</sup>

Yet the problem of women’s persistent responsibility for care work remains. And with this sustained problem comes the added puzzle of how to make sense of it.

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<sup>42</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984); *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1990); *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>43</sup> A. Doucet, “Dad and Baby in the First Year”; McKay, Marshall, and Doucet, “Fathers and Parental Leave in Canada.”

<sup>44</sup> R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>45</sup> A. Doucet, “‘It’s Almost Like I Have a Job, but I Don’t Get Paid’: Fathers at Home Reconfiguring Work, Care and Community.” *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice about Men as Fathers* 2, no. 3(2005): 277.

<sup>46</sup> K. Gerson, “Moral Dilemmas, Moral Strategies, and the Transformation of Gender: Lessons from Two Generations of Work and Family Change.” *Gender & Society* 16, no. 1(2002), 26.

<sup>47</sup> See F.J. Green, *Practicing Feminist Mothering* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Press, 2011); Ranson, *Against the Grain*; B.J. Risman and D. Johnson-Sumerford, “Doing It Fairly: A Study of Postgender Marriages.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 60, no. 1(1998): 23; Unger, *Men Can*; Smith, *Daddy Shift*; Doucet, *Do Men Mother?*

<sup>48</sup> See A.L. Benson, L.B. Silverstein, and C.F. Auerbach, “From the Margins to the Center: Gay Fathers Reconstruct the Fathering Role.” *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 1(3)(2005): 1-29; Biblarz & Stacey, “How Does the Gender of Parents Matter?”

## A PERSISTENT PUZZLE: MAKING SENSE OF DIFFERENCES

A persistent problem for researchers is what to *do* with gender differences. Should researchers aim for some version of gender equality? If so, what does that look like? Is the achievement of gender equality premised on the absence or erasure of gender differences? Are there tensions in giving up differences? Is it possible to adopt an approach that aims for gender equality while also recognizing gender differences?

I have considered the last question in varied contexts over the past two decades. I have examined it in relation to child custody issues and the use of gender equality discourses by fathers' rights groups,<sup>49</sup> the development of programs to support new fathers (especially new immigrant and gay fathers),<sup>50</sup> thinking about how to best encourage fathers' take-up of parental leave policies<sup>51</sup> and theorizing domestic equality.<sup>52</sup> I will deal only with the latter point here.

Theorizing and measuring domestic equality has been a burgeoning field of scholarly work since the mid-1970s. Most social science and feminist studies on gender and parenting and domestic divisions of labour are informed by the view that gender

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<sup>49</sup> A. Doucet, "Fathers and the Responsibility for Children"; "Dad and Baby in the First Year"; 2009b; A. Doucet and L. Hawkins, "Feminist Mothers Researching Fathering: Advocates, Contributors, and Dissenters." In J. Ball and K. Daly (eds.), *Engaging Fathers in Social Change: Lessons from Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, in press, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> E. Bader and A. Doucet, "Canadian Community Organizations & New Fathers: A Report of the New Fathers Cluster of the Father Involvement Research Alliance (Fira)." *FIRA-CURA Project: University of Guelph* (2005); A. Doucet, "Dad and Baby in the First Year."

<sup>51</sup> A. Doucet, "Dad and Baby in the First Year"; L. McKay and A. Doucet, "'Without Taking Away Her Leave': A Canadian Case Study of Couples' Decisions on Fathers' Use of Paid Leave." In M. O'Brien and L. Haas (eds.), *Fathering* (special issue on Men, Work and Parenting) 8, no. 3(2010); A. Doucet, L. McKay, and D-G. Tremblay, "Parental leave policy in Canada." In P. Moss and S. Kamerman (eds.), *The politics of parental leave policies: Children, parenting, gender and the labour market* (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2009): 31-48; L. McKay, K. Marshall, and A. Doucet, "Fathers and Parental Leave in Canada: Policies, Practices and Potential." In P. Moss and S. Kamerman (eds.), *Engaging Fathers in Social Change: Lessons from Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, in press, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> A. Doucet, "Gender Equality and Gender Differences in Household Work"; "Encouraging Voices: Towards More Creative Methods for Collecting Data on Gender and Household Labour." In L. Morris and S. Lyon (eds.), *Gender Relations in the Public and the Private* (London: Macmillan, 1996): 156-73; "You see the need"; *Do Men Mother?*

differences are to be avoided, and that gender equality is the gold standard toward which couples should strive. In some earlier, well-known studies of gender divisions of domestic labour, an egalitarian household was defined as one where the man and the woman within it do “share(d) housework equally”<sup>53</sup> or “whose contributions are roughly equal to one another” whether measured by minutes and hours, or task division.<sup>54</sup> Whatever the terms used, the overwhelming consensus by many researchers remains that a 50-50 or egalitarian division of domestic labour is the ideal or most successful pattern.<sup>55</sup> As Francine Deutsch put it over ten years ago, “Equal sharers, of course, were the stars of this study.”<sup>56</sup>

An underlying conceptual problem with assessing gender ‘equality’ in household life is that it is tremendously difficult to define and measure domestic life and labour. While equality in employment may be measured and tested by factors like pay, promotions, and the relative status of women and men, equality within the heterosexual couple’s home is less straightforward. Does equality in housework mean that women and men perform the *same* household tasks and/or do they spend an equal amount of *time* performing such tasks? Does it mean doing *everything* even if that means that the woman may learn how to do plumbing and electrical chores for the first time whereas her male partner may have been doing such tasks since he was a boy? Does equality in parenting imply that women and men share all childcare tasks from the first day of their first child's life or, alternatively, do they have periods where one parent does more than the other? Should a father go to toddler groups or play group sessions where he might be the only man in the room, and should women spend as much time coaching soccer or baseball as fathers typically do?

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<sup>53</sup> A.R. Hochschild, *The Second Shift* (New York: Avon Books, 1989).

<sup>54</sup> J. Brannen and P. Moss, *Managing Mothers: Dual Earner Households After Maternity Leave* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*; F.M. Deutsch, *Halving It All: How Equally Shared Parenting Works* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); D. Ehrensaft, *Parenting Together: Men and Women Sharing the Care of Their Children* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Hochschild, *The Second Shift*; G. Kimball, *50-50 Parenting: Sharing Family Rewards and Responsibilities* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1988).

<sup>56</sup> Deutsch, *Halving it All*, 7; Risman and Johnson-Sumerford, “Doing It Fairly;” F.M. Deutsch, A.P. Kokot, and K.S. Binder, “College Women's Plans for Different Types of Egalitarian Marriages,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69 (Nov. 2007): 916.



Another problem with striving for gender ‘equality’ in parenting is one that I voiced over fifteen years ago,<sup>57</sup> and which feminist scholars writing critically about ‘carework’ have reiterated: “the employment of equality as a concept and as a goal supposes a standard or a norm which, in practice, tends to be defined as what is characteristic of the most powerful groups in society.”<sup>58</sup> The result is that equality *in* household life ends up being that which enables gender equality *outside* household life. Parental equality is viewed in terms of a traditional masculine norm of minimal participation in housework and childcare and full participation in continuous employment.

Should gender differences make a difference in how we theorize gender equality in parenting? I would argue that we need to attend to the interplay between gender equality and gender differences. Indeed, we should shift the focus from measuring gender equality in parenting towards making sense of differences. Shifting from equality to differences means, as Barrie Thorne has noted, seeking to make sense of “how, when, and why does gender make a difference – or not make a difference” and “when gender does make a difference, what sort of difference is it?”<sup>59</sup> When we take a wide, social relations and contextual view of differences (within and between gender), the issue is not differences *per se*, but rather why, how, where, and when they recur in parenting; how they affect people’s opportunities outside of the domestic sphere; and the interconnections between equality in the workplace and gender ‘symmetry’ in the home. Looking to the importance of challenging masculine norms in the workplace, Williams recently stated: “If feminists seek to reconstruct gender on the work-family axis, they should focus as much, *or more*, on changing the workplace as on changing the family.”<sup>60</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

My lecture has addressed a small revolution in care work that has occurred in the past forty years, the resilient problem of women’s continuing responsibility for care work

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<sup>57</sup> A. Doucet, “Gender Equality and Gender Differences in Household Work.”

<sup>58</sup> E.M. Meehan and S. Sevenhuijsen (eds.), *Equality, Politics and Gender* (London: Sage Publications, 1991): 38; see also Young, *On Female Body Experience*.

<sup>59</sup> Thorne, *Gender Play*, 36.

<sup>60</sup> Williams, *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate*, 5 (emphasis mine).

(even when they are breadwinners) and a persistent puzzle that plagues research in this area: how do we aim for an overall goal of gender equality in the face of recurring gender differences? I have argued that we need to attend not only to the question of *what* and why gender differences occur in care work, but also *where* and *how* differences are manifest in social life. I also argue that gender differences in parenting are elastic, constantly in motion, embodied, relational, and variable according to time and spatial contexts. As Joan Williams maintains: “People have thousands of ‘real differences’ that lack social consequences. The question is not whether physical, social and psychological differences between women and men exist. It is *why* these particular differences become salient in a particular context and then are used to create and justify women’s continuing economic advantage” as well as what creates men’s disadvantage in care work and parenting.<sup>61</sup> I maintain that an argument for gender equality in care work does not necessarily translate into an absence or erasure of gender differences in the everyday identities, practices, and responsibilities of parenting. Thus, we need a way of theorizing, and working with, the interplay of gender differences and gender equality in care work and in domestic life.

Speaking from this landscape of a slow and quiet revolution in gender, breadwinning and caregiving and in the face of a persistent problem of women’s continuing connection to the responsibilities for care work, I argue that we need to re-think this puzzle of gender equality and gender differences. As part of this re-thinking, we also need to think about how to make sense of a wide array of differences, within and between gender, and to attend not only to *why*, but also to *how* these differences become salient in particular contexts.

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<sup>61</sup> Williams, *Reshaping*, 128.