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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF SOCIAL, HUMAN AND MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES

Geography and Environment

**Re-gendering Care in the UK:
The Experiences of Male Primary Carers**

by

Eleni Anna Bourantani

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January 2018

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF SOCIAL, HUMAN AND MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES

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Doctor of Philosophy

RE-GENDERING CARE IN THE UK: THE EXPERIENCES OF MALE PRIMARY CARERS

by Eleni Anna Bourantani

Childcare is a set of practices laden with gender and other inequalities, as it is constructed on the conceptual dualism of paid work/unpaid work that privileges one end of the binary and devalues the other. Feminist authors have highlighted the necessity of making men's lives more like women's in combining work and care. This study uses ethnographic methods to explore the experiences of fathers (n=27) who are the main carers of their children. The purpose is to provide an understanding of the places in which childcare challenges the gendered work/non-work binary and is thus "queered". I use the philosophical building blocks of Deleuze and Guattari (2004) to discuss the participants' "becomings": the unmaking of identities and the constant re-making of new ones that are fluid and emerge from practices.

The study is comprised of three areas of focus that revolve around three major obstacles in male primary caring: work-based masculinities, the mother as the quintessential carer, and the lack of childcare spaces that are not gender-coded. First, I discuss the role of paid work to the participants' lives. Despite the strong association between masculinities and paid work, the participants seemed to actively challenge neoliberal work ethic and to carve out their own spaces that allowed them to prioritize and value childcare.

Second, I looked into the participants' embodied experiences of childcare and how they built bonds with their children that were as intimate as the mothers'. They employed the same haptic and affective means as mothers do and engaged in a 'becoming-carer', a process that challenges binary distinctions and allows identities to emerge instead of prescribing them.

Finally, I discussed the experiences that the participants had in the various places they frequented. Moving in feminized places proved to be both a blessing and a curse, as they were received with overwhelming praise and, at the same time, treated as 'aliens'. The lack of connection to both mothers and other fathers was indicative of their in-betweenness, of their liminal position that challenged binary spaces and urged them to create new ones.

These findings contribute to the geographies of childcare in the UK and add to a journey towards the democratization care through the cultivation of a growing care ethic.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, **Eleni Anna Bourantani**, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Re-gendering Care in the UK: The Experiences of Male Primary Carers

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. Parts of this work have been published as:

Bourantani, E. (forthcoming) 'Queering Social Reproduction: UK Male primary carers reconfiguring care and work', *Society & Space*.

Signed:

Date:

Acknowledgements

Thanks to

Everyone in Southampton for their insightful feedback, patience, advice, support, and guidance, and especially Kate Boyer, Andy Power, Eleanor Wilkinson, Suzy Reimer, Nat O’Grady, Emma Roe, Bilal Gorentas, James Gott, Ana Mota, Jennifer White and Becky Martin;

The amazing Deleuze reading tribe and especially Michael Buser, Katherine Evans, Dani Landau and Maria Fannin;

My Birkbeck Gender and Sexuality mates who were there when I needed them, including Emma Sheppard, Sarah Molisso and Boka En – and, of course, amazing Rosie Cox;

Stuart Aitken, for the wonderful opportunity to discuss my thesis, his support, encouragement and kindness;

My wonderful participants (you are all still shining individually—I hope your children are growing into amazing humans) and all the people in forums, online groups, organizations, nurseries, social media and parents groups for their patience and help (you have my gratitude forever);

My family, partner, and squad (how could I ever do anything without you?).

Chapter 1:

Landscapes of Childcare in the UK

“Tomorrow let’s change jobs. I’ll go out with the mowers and mow, and you can mind the house at home.” Yes, the husband thought that would do very well. He was quite willing, he said.

‘The Husband Who Was to Mind the House’ from *East of the Sun and West of the Moon: Old Tales from the North* (Anonymous, 1920, p.75)

In folk tales like “The man who should take care of the home”, which even has an explicit gender-conservative message, the problem of the man is not that he cannot care for a child, but that he lacks the woman’s technical expertise making butter, beer and other home products. (Holter, 2003, p. 102)

1.1 Childcare as a feminist issue

Care consists of the daily activities we do to sustain life, such as washing, preparing food, or cleaning (for ourselves or for others) and which are indispensable to maintaining our world. It is a set of practices that may have emotional, relational, and ethical meanings attached to them, and are also laden with gendered and other inequalities that are geographically and spatially arranged (Milligan and Wiles, 2010). The sexual division of labour in the western world was a product and a precondition of modernity as it was needed to sustain capitalist production (Molyneux, 1979). With the rise of capitalism, the dichotomy of private/public was materialized and polarized: the public sphere became the realm of work and men, and the private became the realm of unpaid labour, social reproduction and women (MacKenzie and Rose, 1983) – a division that is also

spatialized in the spaces of reproduction in the home and the spaces of production outside it (Massey, 1984). However, the perceived binary distinction between paid and unpaid work is consistently challenged (Mitchell, Marston and Katz, 2004) and questioned through research on the complexities of care.

The feminist movement pointed out early on that childcare is a crucial issue for gender equality (Randal, 1996). The double burden of paid work on one hand, and domestic labour and childcare on the other, inhibits many women from fully participating in all areas of life. In the UK the 'one-and-a-half breadwinner' model is encouraged, as mothers usually have little alternative but working part-time (Crompton, 1999; Ciccio and Bleijenbergh, 2014). Policies can either facilitate or prevent certain work-care¹ patterns. These policies include promoting women's participation to the labour market, providing welfare support to mothers, or encouraging care services provided by the State or private sector.

However, such policies (explored in more detail later in this chapter) assume that the change must occur around women's caring practices. Fraser (1994), inspired by the social-democratic policies of Scandinavian countries, suggested a shift of focus towards men, whose life patterns must change and become more like women's in combining paid work and care. Although researchers agree with this suggestion (Korpi, 2000; Lister, 2003; Crompton, 2006; Esping-Andersen, 2009; Pascall, 2012), there is still little research on men who do childcare, particularly in the UK. With more recent policies on paternity leave and with changes brought forth by the aftermath of post-2008 financial crisis (including austerity measures) it seems that current conditions may make it more probable for men to take up childcare, either by choice or necessity.

Recent research on men as primary carers of children takes place primarily in Scandinavia (Holter, 2003; Haas, Allard and Hwang, 2008; Johansson and Klinth, 2008; Brandth and Kvande, 2009), the US (Chesley, 2011; Medved and Rawlins, 2011; Harrington, Van Deusen and Mazar, 2012) and Canada, where Andrea Doucet (2001, 2004, 2006, 2009) has carried out pioneering work on the study of male primary carers. In the UK there is some recent interest in studying male primary carers (Shirani, Henwood and Coltart, 2012) but it is a project still at its infancy, particularly among geographers. While geographical research has successfully discussed the socio-spatial dynamics of care and fatherhood (Aitken, 2009; Holloway, 1998; McDowell *et al.*, 2005;

¹ Throughout this thesis I use hyphenated *work-care* when I wish to denote the lack of a binary split between the two and wish, instead, to highlight the imbrication of them. *Work/care*, when used, refers to the usage of the two as binary concepts.

England, 2010; Boyer, Reimer and Irvine, 2013; Boyer *et al.*, 2017; Boyer, Dermott and MacLeavy, 2017), a study of male caring practices that focuses specifically on their embodied and spatio-temporal dimensions does not exist yet to this day. This study attempts to fill this gap by enriching geographical and interdisciplinary discussion around gender inequalities in the arena of paid work and care.

1.2 Defining *male primary carers*

Despite the number of newspaper features commenting on the rise of stay-at-home fathers, statistics on male primary carers are surprisingly hard to find. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) does not collect data specifically on stay-at-home parents in the UK because data are classified only in terms of people's economic (in)activity. When interpreting these statistics, it is often wrongly assumed that fathers who are economically inactive are also stay-at-home fathers (Latshaw, 2011). One example of this misreading is a Daily Mail article titled '*Stay-at-home mothers fall to a record low as the number of house-husbands doubles in two decades*' (Chorley, 2015). This draws from ONS data on economically inactive mothers, whose numbers dropped by 31% between 1993 and 2015, while the number of economically inactive fathers in the same period more than doubled.

While this gives us some clues about changes in women's work-care patterns, it does not convey any information on how many fathers are primary caregivers. We can only assume that some fathers in the economically inactive group do a large portion of childcare. However, a better approach would take into account the rise in part-time work, especially in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. In the UK the one-and-a-half earner model has been established for women for decades (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh, 2014), often because childcare is either unaffordable or unavailable. It logically follows that fathers who wish or have to do childcare might have to settle with a similar arrangement. Indeed, the *Modern Families Index* (Working Families, 2015) cites reduced hours for fathers, hinting at the possibility that some of them might be primary carers. This, again, does not confirm a rise in male primary carers, but highlights the complexities of working and caring lives.

Drawing conclusions like the one in the Daily Mail article not only overestimates the number of men who do childcare among those who are economically inactive, but also fails to

recognise those male primary caregivers who earn full or part-time income. As it is illustrated later in this thesis, this was confirmed in my own research since nearly all participants engaged in some type of economic activity and thus would be excluded from the statistical category of 'economically inactive father'. The US-based website *National At Home Dad Network*, recommends an alternative definition of a (stay-) at-home dad as

'a father who is the daily, primary caregiver of his children under 18'

(National At-Home Dad Network, no date)

– a definition which I adopt for the needs of this study. The website insists that stay-at-home fathers should not be defined by their employment status. As reality turns out to be more complex, male primary carers challenge such binary distinctions between work and home—an issue that lies at the heart of this study.

Beth Latshaw (2011) identified this definition problem in the US Census data, which estimated stay-at-home fathers at 214,000. Latshaw gave a mixed-method estimation of stay-at-home dads in the USA of at least 1.4 million. As there is no similar research in the UK yet, we can only have rough estimates of how widespread – or not – male primary caring is. Latshaw crucially notes the importance of qualitative work here: instead of making up categories that do not represent reality, we need to look at how caregiving fathers define themselves. Indeed, there is little knowledge not only on how many men do primary carework, but, as mentioned earlier, we also know very little of what they do, how they do it, what sort of practices they engage in and how they feel about them. This study attempts to add to our knowledge of male primary carers in the UK through qualitative research with fathers who are primary carers, whether they work full-time, part-time, or they are on a break from paid work. Before proceeding, I provide an overview of policies that might facilitate or inhibit male primary caring in the UK.

1.3 Childcare provision and parental leave in the United Kingdom

In recent years, the breadwinner/homemaker model was replaced by the one-and-a-half breadwinner, as high childcare costs led mothers to part-time work (Crompton, 1999; Ciccio and Bleijenbergh, 2014). Policies on childcare have been historically gendered, aiming either at protecting the health of mothers after birth or at sustaining women's participation in the labour

force (O'Brien, Brandth and Kvande, 2007). After a prolonged period of 'rolling back' the welfare state in the 1980's, as well as the absence of any childcare policy during the Conservative governments of that period, the New Labour government launched its National Childcare Strategy in 1997. Among its changes were Sure Start (a programme targeted at poorer areas that offered area-based support to parents of children under four) as well as a series of means-tested benefits (Pascall, 2012). The government also introduced a single universal benefit (Child Benefit)², free hours of preschool provision, and paid leave for both parents. It also began working closely with employers to help with the creation of a childcare voucher system.

New Labour policies have received rigorous criticism, despite their apparent friendliness towards families. New Labour's critics have called it a state of new paternalism (MacGregor, 1999) and its 'Third Way' politics repeated the neoliberal unsustainability of the welfare state albeit in more digestible terms (McRobbie, 2000). The general shift in policies seems to denote that the aim was ensuring that mothers return to work quickly, while the burden of care remained either within the family or was delegated to the workings of the free market. The costs of childcare were, and have remained, high (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2015; Rutter, 2015), thus not successfully guaranteeing any move away from the one-and-a-half breadwinner model. In combination with the maternalist element of a very generous maternity leave (52 weeks) which prioritizes mothers as carers (Blofield and Martinez Franzoni, 2014), this system worked against women regaining their status within paid work and gave little opportunities to fathers for hands-on childcare.

New Labour's middle-class, hegemonic view of childcare was also attacked (McDowell, 2005) because it marginalized poor people such as lone mothers (Millar, 2000). Childcare in New Labour policies was deemed to be not only gendered but also classed (Vincent, Ball and Kemp, 2004), as the childrearing values it promoted were associated with specific social and occupational statuses. Public childcare is a classed phenomenon too, evident in Sure Start's discourse that implied people of certain socio-economic positions are expected to join childcare professions (Osgood, 2005). New Labour's *workfare*, a post-welfarist regime that requires a labour input for the receipt of state benefits, attempted to police the lives of the poor and those who failed to adopt its neoliberal ethics (McDowell, 2004), whilst continuing to ignore the gendered division of labour (MacLeavy, 2007).

² Which has also been means-tested since early 2013.

In the UK ‘daddy leave’ was first introduced, somewhat timidly, in 1996, following a European Parental Leave Directive that entitled fathers to three months of unpaid caring time (Pascall, 2012). New Labour incorporated paternity leave into its programme, providing two weeks’ paid leave (Ordinary Paternity Leave) in 2003 and introducing the Additional Paternity Leave in 2006, which allowed mothers to transfer some of their leave to fathers after they returned to work – a policy that was not implemented until 2011 (Pascall, 2012). Since the election of the 2010 government, a “Coalition” between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, the Liberal Democrats spoke repeatedly about extending the daddy leave, until Shared Parental Leave (SPL) was finally voted by the Parliament in December 2014, in use from April 2015. SPL offers the opportunity to eligible couples to share fifty two (52) weeks of childcare between them.

As discussed above, New Labour introduced paid paternity leave for the first time, although there was no feminist rationale behind it. Featherstone (2006) argues that bringing fathers into care was a tokenistic promise of New Labour, the rationale for which was fathers’ importance to child development. The absence of gender equality among the reasons cited for this change makes one wonder whether this was a desirable move, which Featherstone concludes was not, as it can reinforce the perception that mothers dominate the spaces of childcare and thus widen a gender gap in childcare. Few fathers know details about parental leave, and the Government itself acknowledged that the take-up of SPL from fathers is expected to be between 2% and 8% (Mitchell, 2015).

Moreover, the SPL seems to remain a policy linked to work ethic and workfare. This is reflected not only in how one parent must always be at work, but also in the minimum requirements for work and earnings, the amount of statutory pay, and how the latter is ultimately left to the employers’ decision. Better-paid parents who have more stable jobs receive better treatment, also implying class bias. This is consistent with austerity policies’ binary construction of certain households as good and deserving, and others as troubled and unstable (Jupp, 2016).

Additionally, the two-week paternity leave does not exist as an individual right anymore and in certain cases, such as for families that are in and out of work, it is even harder to claim than it was before: *both* must be eligible for SPL and *only one* can use it at a time. This is ultimately a classist measure, that excludes fathers on workfare programmes, and one that does not value care on its own right by wishing to keep one parent always at work. A ‘take-it-or-lose-it’ approach to parental leave, as applied in some Nordic countries with leave quotas for fathers that are lost unless they are used, would be more efficient in bringing fathers into care, although even this

system does not necessarily guarantee a more gender equal division of childcare and domestic labour (Lister, 2009).

Overall, childcare policies in the UK remain maternalist (Blofield and Martinez Franzoni, 2014) and continue to promote a one-and-a-half breadwinner model (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh, 2014). This was further consolidated with the SPL. According to Ciccia and Verloo (2012) a universal carer model, as proposed by Fraser, would help value caring periods as equal to work and more actively promote father's leave with measures such as 'daddy quotas'. Universal childcare services and changes in working hours would also help promote more equal work and care arrangements (Gornick and Meyers, 2003). Although even Nordic countries have achieved only a partial universal carer model, the SPL as introduced is failing to make a significant move towards realising this ideal.

1.4 A new approach to re-gendering care: queering care and work binaries

In this context, studying men who do childcare contributes an articulated view of their concerns and problems around the current work-care landscape, and points to ways in which Fraser's (1994) *Universal Carer*, who combines paid work and childcare, can be applied. In this study, I set out to explore the lives of men who, despite the obstacles, look after their children as main carers. In this in-depth, qualitative project, I seek not to find out their numbers, but to look at how these carers define themselves, at the problems they face, and see whether they challenge the binary between paid and unpaid work.

I consider paid work to be at the heart of the gendering of care. I am therefore interested in studying the ways in which the binary between work and care can be destabilized. Since doing gender in a caring context is a complex process that involves questioning and re-affirming gender at the same time (Butler, 1990), rather than de-gendering care I am interested in *re-gendering* it. Gender will not disappear from the processes that help us make sense of ourselves, but it can be shifted and re-inscribed into more egalitarian terms. In other words, men who do childcare will do masculinity (Connell, 1995) as well; I am interested in how this caring masculinity might transform

gender. More than that, I am interested in capturing the possibilities of identities that emerge through practices, instead of practices that try to conform to concepts of identity.

In order to study the emergence of these caring masculinities, I ask **how do male primary carers (MPCs) disrupt and/or reinforce binaries of gender difference around care?** The vocabulary I use is drawn from feminist theorists of *difference* (Irigaray, 1985; Grosz, 1994; Braidotti, 2011) and the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2004), in hoping to discover if male primary carers re-inscribe difference as something that exists in itself and not in comparison to something else. Assuming that dualisms like male/female, work/care, and public/private, have an inherent hierarchy which privileges one end of the binary against the other, the way out of the binary is to seek the ways in which difference is validated as something that exists in itself. Deconstructing these dualisms means considering difference based on *multiplicities* and not binaries.

I call this process '*queering*', borrowing the term from queer studies (Sedgwick, 1993; Gibson-Graham, 1999). In this study, queering refers to the breaking apart 'predictable associations' (Gibson-Graham, 1999, p.81) that emanate from gender binaries. Challenging binaries means that a path opens towards considering difference as something positive and open to multiplicities instead of binaries (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). I call this process *becoming-carer*, where fixed, rigid identities of man, father, mother are shaken, and subjectivities emerge from caring practices instead.

1.5. Aims and objectives

Following the question '*how do male primary carers (MPCs) disrupt and/or reinforce binaries of gender difference around care?*' I look in more depth at issues of work, embodiment, spaces, networks, and institutions, and if a '*queering*' happens in those fields. As the binary is centred on the work/care dichotomy, I ask whether male primary caring practices '*queer*' this gendered binary of work and care. I seek the ways in which care is recognized and valued but, most importantly, I seek to find if paid work loses its centrality to the carers' masculinities.

From there I move on to study the caring practices more closely and especially the potential of gendered caring bodies. I ask '*what can a caring body do?*' and seek to find if, among these

practices, there also emerges a caring subjectivity that emphasizes neither motherhood nor fatherhood – in other words, a perspective that values caring difference, caring in itself. I ask how the experiences of male primary carers open up caring identities and, with them, gendered identities, and how these move away from preconceived notions of motherhood and fatherhood.

Finally, I am interested in the spaces that carers frequent, their gender-coding and how the latter is navigated and also how it turns out to be malleable. I seek to find in what ways male primary carers shape places of care and what the role of place is in these processes of becoming. For this purpose, I look specifically into reactions and events in the public and semi-public spaces of childcare, as well as some of the interactions that take place in mothers' and fathers' groups.

1.6. Structure of the study

In the following chapter I present an interdisciplinary overview of the framing literature, drawing not only from geography but from disciplines such as sociology and family studies. I look at feminist work on childcare and why it matters, and explore the relevance of geographies of caring bodies and the spaces of childcare. I also outline existing research on debates associated with families, parenthood, motherhood and finally fatherhood, as it is the research topic in which most of men's caring activities have been previously discussed. I draw out three approaches to fatherhood that exist in literature and add a fourth: an area of budding literature which I call *father-world* relations and of which I consider this work to be part. Before moving on, I critically evaluate the gaps in literature, explain the use of 'queering' in this work, and articulate my research questions.

In the first part of Chapter 3, I offer an overview of my onto-epistemological approach which draws from the works of Deleuze and Guattari as well as from new materialist thought. This lays out the framework both for the philosophical support of my research question (a consideration of gender dualisms) and for my reading of the data through the tools of difference, becoming, and rhizome. In the latter part of Chapter 3, I explore issues of qualitative research from a neo-materialist and Deleuzo-guattarian perspective, and describe my data collection and data analysis processes.

In the second part of this thesis, I explore different thematic strands from the findings. In Chapter 4, I present the first part of empirical data, which centres on the supposed work/care dichotomy. I discuss the participants' shifting views on care and work and how their practices destabilize meanings of gender. Chapter 5 moves on to the intimate geographies of the body and illustrates how participants engage in a becoming-carer through embodied and relational experiences. Chapter 6 discusses the interactions of male primary carers with the feminized spaces of childcare. In the final chapter I round up the discussion, address the gaps and limitations of the study, and recommend future research that would help provoke and reshuffle the gendered world of work-care.

Chapter 2:

Men and Childcare: Geographies of care, work, and fatherhood

2.1 Theorizing Care: a feminist tale of contradictions

On the most general level, we suggest caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

(Tronto, 1993: pp.103 in Rummery and Fine, 2012, p.323)

There is an inherent tension in how we define care³: as an activity necessary to sustain life (as Tronto explains above) or as an activity associated with the needs and experiences of certain groups, e.g. the carers? (Rummery and Fine, 2012). Both views have political importance and are crucial to understanding care. Another tension found in defining care is whether its central feature is the positive emotion caring can bring, or the stressful labour involved: both are present and intertwined, but is one element more important the other, and at what point and under which circumstances? It seems that in all different manifestations and definitions of care, a common feature underlies: that it challenges conceptual dichotomies such as private/public and paid/unpaid labour like no other phenomenon (Twigg, 1989).

³ The term 'care' overlaps with other ideas (such as *social reproduction*, which is a term more often used within political economy). *Care* is preferred here as a more flexible concept that includes material, emotional, relational and ethical dimensions.

The gendering of care had been discussed in feminist writing on domestic labour and care-based inequalities, but the emotional element was largely ignored until the ground-breaking collection of papers '*A Labour of Love*' (Finch and Groves, 1983) appeared. Emotion is often a deeply gendered element common in caring practices (Poole and Isaacs, 1997), present even in the challenging terrain of paid care work. Caring is also a *relational* experience (Ungerson, 2005) that involves reciprocal exchange and at least two sides: the carer and the recipient of care. The recipient of care has often been ignored and denied agency, something that critics from disability studies placed under scrutiny (Graham, 1993; Morris, 1997; Lloyd, 2001; Fine and Glendinning, 2005). Here, I follow feminist authors' contribution to the study of care, which has drawn attention to two perspectives: care as *labour* and care as *ethic*. Care as labour focuses more on the material conditions of gender equality as well as the emotional aspects of care work, and care as ethic gears towards a re-structuring of society by valuing care.

Care as labour

Care used to be largely invisible as a topic of study until its significance was first recognised in feminist writings. Feminist theory recognized care as labour (Ungerson, 2000) while neoclassical economics (the paradigm still dominating today) ignored social reproduction (Gardiner, 1997; Folbre, 2001). Second-wave feminist work first discussed domestic labour (Jackson, 1992; Kynaston, 1996) and noticed the links between patriarchy and capitalism (Hartmann, 1976; Delphy, 1977; Walby, 1990; Folbre, 1994). The gendering of care is viewed in this literature as an economic phenomenon, rooted in industrialization and the rise of capitalism (Oakley, 1974) and involves intertwined and unequal distributions of power.

In the original conceptualization of *care as labour*, care was understood as a potential source of stress (Hochschild, 1983). The introduction of emotion (Finch and Groves, 1983; Graham, 1983; Ungerson, 1983) in discussions concerning social reproduction, further elaborated the concept of care as a source of happiness and more positive feelings, revealing care as a more complex phenomenon. In Finch and Groves (1983) discussed the concepts of caring *about* and caring *for*: *caring about* refers to the corresponding feeling of concern about someone, while *caring for* describes the actual, manual labour of performing tasks of care.

A gendering of care is also present in this distinction because *caring for* refers to what usually women do (caring tasks)⁴. Yet the gendering of public and private place has always been more complex than this simple dualism suggests, with women being part of the wage workforce in the UK since the 19th century (McDowell and Massey, 1984). The distinction between caring for and caring about has been challenged as the two often coalesce and boundaries are blurred (Ungerson, 2005) – for example, this is present in research on the emotional aspects at paid-for care work (Hochschild, 1983) and the emotional aspects of labour that motivate carers (Waerness, 1984). The distinction between paid and unpaid emotional labour can also be considered almost redundant, as the two activities sometimes blur (Himmelweit, 1999). Care is ‘simultaneously emotion and labour and relationship, and [...] this is the case for paid *and* unpaid carers, as well as for those receiving care’ (Rummery and Fine, 2012, p. 329).

Care relations are dynamic and shift along with socioeconomic change (Pain, 2001). With the restructuring of capitalism in the late 20th century and the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, women joined the labour market in large numbers, thus feminizing the workforce and giving rise to new issues around work and care (McDowell, 1991). Feminist geographers have consistently contributed to exposing the relations between neoliberalism, work, and care (Kobayashi, 1994; Massey, 1994; Pratt and Hanson, 1995; England, 1996, 2010; McDowell, 2001; Perrons *et al.*, 2006; Green and Lawson, 2011). More recently, they have discussed issues such as the gendered geographies of work-life balance (James, 2014), domestic labour in Britain (Cox, 2006), the neoliberalization of care in Ireland (Gallagher, 2012), childcare policy in austerity Britain (Jupp, 2016) and the gendered implications of New Labour welfare (MacLeavy, 2007).

Hochschild’s research in the US context has been very influential in this area. She identified a care deficit caused by women’s participation in the labour market and by policies that cut back care provision in the 1980’s – elements which marked the birth of the ‘second shift’ phenomenon: women continued to be responsible for care, shouldering the double burden of

⁴ However, because of their feminist origins these conceptualizations of care remained centred on women who provide domestic labour in a marital context, ignoring, for example, the provision of care in a disabilities context (Graham, 1993). Working class women (Graham, 1991) and women of colour in the USA have also critiqued this approach as very middle-class and white-centric because their relationship to work and family has been historically different (hooks, 1982). The gendering of care has received critique too; for example it was shown that older men often care for spouses (Arber and Gilbert, 1989). Members of gay communities also have developed their own caring networks and moralities, especially due to the impact of AIDS in their lives (Weeks, Donovan, & Heaphy, 2001).

paid and unpaid work (Hochschild, 1989). With long working hours, women will either work part-time or, if they have the financial power, will buy commodified care (Creighton, 1999) which is usually offered by women of other classes, races, or ethnicities. Here, paid care work points to the issue of public patriarchy: care professions are dominated by women, with the gendering of care occurring even in paid care work, while men employed in the service economy continue to engage in traditionally masculine tasks (Kilkey, 2010)⁵.

Thus even with a commodification of care via the market, it is still predominantly women who engage in this work, often with low pay and in poor conditions (Daly and Lewis, 2000). Moreover, only women from certain socio-economic classes benefit from paid carework – those who can afford it (Tronto, 2002). The other option for women is to work part-time, an arrangement that is still popular in the UK. However, if women stay in flexible employment that allows them to work and do the ‘second shift’ at home, a change in the sharing of informal caring burdens between men and women seems unlikely to happen (Crompton, 2002).

Care as ethic

In parallel with work on care as (emotional) labour, research on care as ethic originated in US scholarship. Gilligan (1982) introduced feminist care ethics in the field of psychology, when she noticed how girls grow up to develop moral codes that differ from those of boys, yet these are not recognized as different but instead are downplayed as undeveloped ideas of justice. Care as ethic seeks to value the *difference* in the moralities that carers develop through the practices of care. When proponents of the idea of care as labour seek *equality* in the treatment of women’s unpaid work, care as ethic seeks to value this *difference* that constitutes care ethics. Both approaches draw from respective feminist traditions and are thus linked.

⁵ Women from the global South sometimes cover these positions, creating a globalised network of care that some identify as ‘global care chains’ (Yeates, 2012), that exacerbates inequalities and leaves a care deficit back in the care workers’ countries (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003). Chang and Ling (2000) call care the intimate other of the current ‘techno-muscular capitalism’, which refers to the aggressive, neo-colonial capitalism that needs an undervalued service economy in order to look after its reproduction and survival.

Authors in this literature engage in an effort to bring care into the public sphere as an alternative ethic and morality; they envision a world in which care is a value that permeates society as a whole (Tronto, 1993; Knijn and Kremer, 1997; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Kittay, 1999). As a result, theorists on the ethic of care challenge concepts of modernity such as independence. *Interdependence* instead is a central concept, because humans exist only in and through relations between other humans (Fraser and Gordon, 1994; Sevenhuijsen, 2000), thus making care a core element of every human activity. *Responsibility* also has a crucial meaning here, but one entirely different to the liberal concept of individual responsibility. Instead, it emanates from the responsibility of caring for someone (Sevenhuijsen, 2000).

From this perspective, care has the deconstructive potential to overturn assumptions of modernity around the autonomous, independent, masculine human subject:

As Braidotti (2006) argues, care is bound up with a postmodern humanism that emphasises the interdependence of self and others (including non-human others), acknowledges contingency and values responsibility (McEwan and Goodman, 2010, p. 109).

Feminist care ethic has offered valuable input in policy discussions and has expanded the disciplines of philosophy, politics, and law, which now engage in care debates. It has also influenced much empirical work that pays close attention to the formation and negotiation of caring moralities. In geography this is a relatively new area compared to the already large amount of work on the political economy of care, introducing a 'moral turn' that describes feminist-inspired geographies of ethics, responsibility and care (Popke, 2006; Lawson, 2007; McEwan and Goodman, 2010).

Care ethic is also central in understanding how the economic and the social are intertwined (Crompton, 2002; Green and Lawson, 2011). Care today, as shown earlier, is the product of the socio-economic relations of the past two centuries, yet it remains a set of practices and moralities that are indispensable to our lives. In other words, *care is indispensable to sustaining life; the devaluing of care is indispensable to sustaining patriarchy and capitalism*. Therefore an ethic of care can show a path to the shaping of a more egalitarian world in which care is truly valued and the values developed in caring relationships are celebrated in all areas of life.

Re-gendering care?

If we narrow down our focus on childcare, we will find that it is located at the heart of the patriarchal divide between public and private (Marchbank, 2000). It also remains a crucial topic as it is coupled with motherhood and the mythologies that surround it and which assume mothers as the quintessential carers for children due to a biological bond they share. According to Fraser:

[t]he key to achieving gender equity in a postindustrial welfare state [...] is to make women's current life-patterns the norm for everyone. Women today often combine breadwinning and caregiving, albeit with great difficulty and strain. A postindustrial welfare state must ensure that men do the same (Fraser, 1994, p.611).

Fraser's suggestion can be summarised in what she calls the Universal Carer model (UC for short), that hopes 'to induce men to become more like most women are now; namely, people who do primary carework' (ibid).

It is important to acknowledge that the more women work, the more likely it is for men to assume caring responsibilities (Hook, 2006; Raley, Bianchi, and Wang, 2012), but this is not always the case (Gregory and Milner, 2008). In Scandinavia, policies have proven to be central to the formation of these different caring arrangements (Plantin, Månsson and Kearney, 2003), but they are not always successful (Lister, 2009). Neither men spending more time with children or even becoming main carers can automatically be regarded as tackling gender imbalances, since 'a man taking over women's roles in private spaces is largely irrelevant if citational practices continue to find grounding in patriarchy' (Aitken, 2000, p.596) and thus reproduce gender hierarchies.

In order to study and understand the relationship between men and childcare, context is essential: not only care labour, socioeconomic changes, and policy, but also families, the spaces of care, the meanings of femininities and masculinities, and understandings about motherhood and fatherhood. In the following sections I look at geographies of care and parenting, with a focus on interdisciplinary research on fatherhood and specific issues regarding men's relationship with care.

2.2 The Gendered Geographies of Childcare

Care is fundamentally geographical in its production, development, reception and, now, consumption. (McEwan and Goodman, 2010, p. 109)

Care is a spatial and embodied practice. People-place relationships form *landscapes of care* (Milligan and Wiles, 2010; Power, 2010), which stretch from the micro level of home to the macro level of international care economies and have crucial, political importance in mapping inequalities and thinking about the relationship between care, physical distance, and emotional proximity. Geography matters to the point that it can even be argued that a *spatial turn* occurred recently in social sciences (Cristoforetti, Gennai and Rodeschini, 2011) and led to a rising interest in space and place from outside the discipline of geography. The daily practices of childcare may stretch from the close intimacies of parental and infant bodies to the spaces of home, expanding to the neighbourhood and even the workplace as site of care. These places of childcare and the rich literature around care, parenting and family life, set up the material and immaterial landscape of care that I explore in this chapter.

Places of Care: gendering place and challenging dichotomies

Geographers have researched the daily geographies of families and children (Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Hallman, 2010), parenting (Holloway, 1998; Madge and O'Connor, 2006; Taylor, 2009; Luzia, 2010) and caregivers (Wiles, 2003; Cox, 2006). Specific places such as the home, the childcare centre, and the street as gendered sites of care and parenting have been discussed at length. *Home* is the main site of social reproduction and informal care, and a place associated with women, femininity, the family, the nation, and the heteropatriarchal values that these concepts carry (Bowlby, Gregory and McKie, 1997; McDowell, 1999). Home has been traditionally painted as a haven away from the world – an idea subjected to critique by feminist geographers (Blunt and Dowling, 2006). On the contrary, feminist theory has often viewed the home as a site

of oppression (Friedan, 1963; Oakley, 1974), but it can also be a site of resistance for women of colour (hooks, 1990; Collins, 1991) and a place of relief for working class women (Pain, 2001).

Home, like other places, is 'made'. It is not a static concept, but changes and poses questions regarding the relationship between human and non-human agency like few other subjects do (Blunt, 2005). It is also a site of strong emotions, associated with both the very idea of home and its materiality (Duncan and Lambert, 2004) which is not singular because many spaces can 'feel like home'. Despite the overlap between family and home, the two are not tautological: the members of a family can live apart by constraint or by choice, inserting the concept of distance in caring relationships (Milligan and Wiles, 2010). Migrant labourers have close family in their home countries, stretching caring landscapes over continents (Pratt, 2012), while *living apart together* is a chosen familial arrangement that uncouples intimacy and home-making from cohabitation (Duncan and Phillips, 2010).

Geographers have studied home as a site of care (Milligan, 2003; Dyck *et al.*, 2005) and as a therapeutic landscape (Williams, 2002). Home can also be a site of identity-making: by deciding on its arrangement we can reconcile the multiple, fragmented aspects of ourselves (Gorman-Murray, 2008a). Consequently, home might reproduce heteronormative gender scripts (Morrison, 2012, 2013) and can be a place where gender is done or undone (Dowling, 2008; Gorman-Murray, 2008b; Meah and Jackson, 2013). Meah and Jackson (2013) examined the kitchen as a place of changing gendered subjectivities. In their study, they describe how men have become more involved in cooking, allowing for the expression of new masculinities, but how this also favours a display of masculine competence in tackling domestic tasks. On the other hand, they say that women have a more pragmatic approach to cooking as a necessary caring task for the family and view men's involvement anxiously, experiencing for this reason the kitchen as an 'uncanny' place.

The *workplace* has also received significant attention in feminist geography, as it can be a gendered, masculinized, and heterosexist space (McDowell, 1995; Boyer, 2003) linked to the public/private dichotomy. The dichotomy of home/work appears to be a false one, as once again the boundaries blur through the experiences of care and emotion (Massey, 1995) and the work-life balance arrangements that parents negotiate (Jarvis, 2002). *Neighbourhoods*, social networks and communities are also sites of care provision and the development of local childcare cultures (Dyck, 1996; Holloway, 1998). *Specific places* such as childcare facilities (Holloway, 1998; Boyer, Reimer and Irvine, 2013), Sure Start Children's Centres in the UK (Jupp and Gallagher, 2013), the car (Dowling, 2000; Barker, 2011), parks (Valentine, 1997), supermarkets (Ryan, 2005), public spaces (Pain, 2006) and even cyberspace (Madge and O'Connor, 2006) have been discussed as

sites of care and parenting. In those places, childcare becomes a public, performative practice that is placed under scrutiny.

These places are shaped in ways that actively question dichotomies. For Jupp, Sure Start centres were hybrid spaces, ‘in which everyday life and emotions always ‘exceed’ either policy or theoretical frameworks, but that both remain relevant and indeed are powerful aspects of these spaces’ (2013, p.173). Madge and O’Connor (Madge and O’Connor, 2006) see cyber/space as a hybrid, liminal space that consists of the collapse between cyber and corporeal space due to the crucial role the internet plays in new mothers’ lives (e.g. Mumsnet website). The spaces of institutional or otherwise non-familial care, such as where emotional labour and commodified care take place, also challenge dichotomies not only between home and non-home but also between kin and non-kin (Boyer, Reimer and Irvine, 2013).

Doucet (2006), Marsiglio, Roy and Fox (2005), Shirani *et al.* (2012) all state the importance of situated approaches to fathering, including spatial, temporal and relational. In geography there has been sustained work on the emotional geographies of US fathers by Aitken, who sought to explore the ‘awkward spaces of fathering’ – awkward, because of the lack of role models for fathers; awkward because of the lack of recognition on what constitutes the work of fathering; and awkward ‘because defining the context of embodied practices is never completely comfortable’ (Aitken, 2009, p.4). In the UK there is an exploratory research that followed a similar approach to Aitken’s (Meah and Jackson, 2015), as well as valuable research on the social geographies of grandfathering (Tarrant, 2013). However, there is not yet a geographical study in the UK of men as primary caregivers (especially of younger children) who are responsible for the majority of care labour. Their unique position can shed light on how specific places can reproduce dichotomies such as masculine and feminine, yet still expose them as shaky and unstable at the same time. As domesticity is identified with femininity, while the outdoors, public spaces, and workspace with masculinity, it is interesting to observe how male subjectivities shift in the feminized places of home and day care centre – but also, how they *intra-act*⁶ with those places and change them themselves.

⁶ See page 44 for explanation of this term.

Doing the family: parents, mothers and fathers

As political sites, through actions and practices, families are continually engaged in the reproduction of discourses, meanings, and subjectivities. It may be argued that, because of the supposed hegemony afforded individual families in private standing, deviations from accepted gender performances are transgressions which pose a threat to the continued hegemony of accepted gender norms. (Aitken, 2000, p. 596)

Caring tasks are often carried out in familial context. Families, too, are '*done*': they are non-static, ever-changing networks of relationships based on family practices (Morgan, 2011). Families are also '*displayed*': they convey to an audience how the '*doing*' of the family is important and constitutive of family practices (Rose, 2004; Dermott and Seymour, 2011), making them essentially a kind of public practice and, thus, geographical. Luzia says families can affect and form a sense of belonging and not-belonging:

It is in understandings of the family as a space of belonging (or not-belonging), as the first place for forming relationships with others, and as a crucial site of inclusion and exclusion that geography proves extremely useful (2010, p.361).

When it comes to childcare, care provided by the family is often valued more than care provided in the formal sector (Boyer, Reimer and Irvine, 2013). The reasons for this appear to be rooted in patriarchal views of family as a nuclear unit based on a marital bond, views that dominate to this day not only societal values but also much of research.

Study of the family in the social sciences emerged in the 1950s (Parsons and Bales, 1955) in which a specific model of heteronormative, nuclear family based on marriage and linked to the Fordist mode of production was deemed as universal (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). With the socioeconomic changes of the late 20th century and the emergence of the post-Fordist regime of flexible accumulation, families have shifted and adapted, and researchers have been anticipating the formation of post-modern families in the multiplicity of the familial arrangements that have emerged (Stacey, 1996). Alternative familial arrangements have always existed in one form or another, yet due to the dominant discourse of the heteronormative, nuclear family they have been stigmatized and remained invisible. After gaining more visibility recently, they invite us to redefine rigid categories of ethnic and gender status (Miller and Browning, 2000). Family could be changing into a relationship based on friendship (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004; Bowlby, 2011). Gay

and lesbian households raising children challenge directly the assumed heteronormativity of the family (Stacey, 2006), but it is important to note that gay marriage might still retain much of marriage's heteronormative baggage (Browne, 2011).

From the above, it seems that much is left unexplored concerning family arrangements that can challenge assumptions over what families are or how they are supposed to be. With them, homes, caring, gender, sexuality and parenting can shift their meanings too. Though queer families have been explored for a while, only recently has queer theory been hinted at as a possible source for theorizing the heterogeneity that can be found in all families (Oswald *et al.*, 2009). Aiming at dissolving binaries, queer theorizing can help deconstruct the heteronormative family and reveal the links between masculinity and heterosexuality that continue to form obstacles to a re-gendering of care.

Parents, parenting, and parenthood

A parent is not merely someone with a biological relationship to the child. From a caring perspective, it is the carer of a child who retains a special position: the parent is not just *any* adult carer but enjoys a unique and valued bond with the child. *Parenting* refers to the practices and might not correspond exactly to *parenthood*, which refers to the discourse that is imbued with certain values and societal expectations. Parenting is essentially a geographically situated practice that is sometimes subjected to the public eye (Boyer and Spinney, 2016). Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2014) note the importance of local childcare cultures in the development of differentiated parenting experiences and of parenting moralities depending on locality, which can act as a safety net against the increasing neoliberalization of policy and childcare provision.

Recent societal changes in the meaning of parenthood move away from traditional institutions such as marriage, yet exactly because of the uncertainty caused by this change it might be hard to avoid reproducing existing gender scripts (Castelain-Meunier, 2002). After all, parenting is a gender-producing process (Brandth and Kvande, 1998), although it is worth asking: could it be otherwise? 'Parent' appears to be a gender-neutral term, although 'parent' can be used as a shorthand for 'mother', as the gender of the parent is assumed to be female, thus leaving fathers out (Sunderland, 2006). If 'parent' is tautological to 'mother', then what would be

the truly gender-neutral definition of a parent? Additionally, what would the addition of fatherhood in the equation mean for the way we perceive parenthood?

These questions lead us to an issue with which much of the literature is preoccupied: the gender of the parent and if and how it matters. Parenthood is often perceived as a male-female dyad, according to the heteropatriarchal norm. *Deconstructing the Essential Father* (Silverstein and Auerbach, 1999) has been a central paper in challenging the notion that men play an indispensable, gendered role. The main argument is that parenting can be tackled by any formation of caring adults, thus questioning calls for the importance of a father figure. Studying single and gay parents has also challenged this perception (Gabb, 2004), proving that parenting can be carried out successfully by an adult of either gender. Yet because heteronormative values persist, the importance of the presence of *both* father and mother is a myth that keeps being reproduced.

The question of the gender of the parent persists, but could be reformulated from a feminist perspective as *can fathers who care for a child in the same way as mothers usually do, help deconstruct and reconstruct care and redefine understandings of gender and masculinity?* In the following sections, I address the questions outlined above as they appear in literature. First, to examine if parent equals mother, I discuss literature on motherhood. Following that, I present an overview of literature on fatherhood in order to address the question of how the gender of the parent matters.

Feminist views on motherhood

Discussing fatherhood alongside motherhood is central to understanding gender dynamics that are present in parenting (Dermott, 2008; Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2011) because ‘the idea of the father is constituted in parallel or in opposition to the idea of the mother and, as such, does not account for the imprecise and hesitant day-to-day work of fathering’ (Aitken, 2000, p. 585) – in other words, fatherhood and motherhood constitute the parenting myth that is premised on a patriarchal binary and fails to take account of practices. However, there is latent heterosexism in discussing the two as a dyad (see Stacey, 2006) that assumes the reproductive duo of father and mother as essential to a discussion of parenthood. Yet unveiling the heteronormativity embedded in parenting is part of what this study is about: fatherhood does not exist in isolation, but it is

compared to and contrasted to motherhood. In order to find out why this happens and what its implications are, the two need to be studied together.

Motherhood has long interested feminists. The link between gender and care becomes clear here, as it is mothers who are considered the primary carers of children. Mothers (and sometimes, by extension, all women) are considered as quintessential carers who can provide care like no other person. Traditionally, mothering implies a caring role while fathering only a biological one (Holloway, 1998). Feminists have argued that there is nothing 'natural' about the idea of motherhood, that it is a product of modernity, a socially constructed experience based on biological difference, and that the ideology of motherhood has been used as a rationalization for the exclusion of women from a range of activities and spaces, as well as for limiting them to women-only activities such as childcare (Firestone, 1971; Oakley, 1974; Badinter, 1981). Work on childlessness, especially in the early 1990's, was part of an effort to decouple women from the mothering identity (Ireland, 1993; Bartlett, 1994; Morell, 1994).

As discussed earlier, the entry of women in the public sphere resulted in them shouldering the double burden of paid work and unpaid labour at home. Consequently, the meaning of motherhood shifted too. Some researchers have observed an ideology of *intensive* motherhood (Hays, 1996) that expects the mother to continuously put the needs of children ahead of her own. Intensive mothering culture is made especially evident when maternal care is still valued over other options such as paternal care, care provided by other relatives or friends, professional care at home, and professional care outside the home. In this 'new' motherhood, a good mother is one who both provides materially for her children, by working, and cares for them, by being emotionally close and doing acts of care.

Motherhood is now connected to work in various ways. Because care is considered 'low-value', women might draw more strength from their paid work. 'Good' mothers across Europe are expected to participate in the labour force (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004; Crompton and Lyonette, 2008), thus legitimizing what previously had been incompatible with good motherhood: reducing time from childcare in order to work (James, 2009). But it is vital to remember here that motherhood ideals put tremendous pressure on women, and those who do not fit well into these patterns (such as working class women and single mothers) might be in danger of being stigmatized as bad mothers (Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2008; De Benedictis, 2012).

Inscribing all mothers into a script of intensive motherhood is not portraying mothers accurately, since they often negotiate these scripts. More recent work discusses women who view

mothering as important yet they feel primarily committed to a career (Christopher, 2012). Research from this perspective tries to move away from the intensive mothering theory and examines the practices of women who work not for the sake of their children but for their own. Christopher (2012) reconfigures this as *extensive* mothering: the mother delegates care duties while remaining ultimately responsible for their children. Christopher's research used a diverse sample and put emphasis on class and ethnic differences, signalling that extensive mothering might represent better not only mothers of a newer generation, but also their ethnic and class differences.

Doucet (2001), drawing on Ruddick's (1995) work, applied to her study a theory of motherhood that attempted to bridge the relationship between men and childcare. This approach views mothering as the expression of a specific form of parenting based on care, and her research shows that it is possible that men can 'mother'. According to this definition, mothering is not gender-bound and caring moralities can develop despite the gender scripts that inhibit them. Doucet's project seems to indicate that men becoming more like mothers is what can fill the gap between fatherhood and care – not only in terms of similar patterns in work and childcare, but also in terms of parenting and caring moralities.

Yet this approach remains limited by its reiteration of the language of patriarchy: *mothering* is equalized with *caring* (Ruddick's work has also been accused of ethnocentrism, Keller, 2010). It fails to take account of the day-to-day work of fathering and expects fathers to become the *same* as mothers instead of fathers engaging in a 'becoming *other*' (Aitken, 2009, p.11, italics own). This approach maintains the gendering of the work/care binary and leaves no possibilities to dismantle it. Doucet also concluded that she is 'more inclined to see men's efforts as primary caregivers as examples of constructing and reconstructing *fathering* and *fatherhood*, rather than as examples of men's mothering' (2001, p.175).

Research on men and childcare shows that there is a great distance between *involved fathering* and *men who mother*. Since now a good mother is a mother who works, it means that motherhood has become more masculinized so, in a way, new motherhood is challenging gender binaries. But as with many other aspects of life in which women have had to become more like men, this has reinforced the privilege and value placed on masculine characteristics – thus reinforcing the hierarchical binary. Caring men have a transformatory potential, which, however, implies that they have to lose some form of privilege first.

These differences become evident in research on caring fathers and working mothers: men are rewarded for being carers while the things mothers do are taken for granted (Brandth and Kvande, 1998; Marikova, 2008). This builds on the *economy of gratitude* (Hochschild, 1989): because women are expected to carry the double burden of care and work, when men do housework or engage in caring activities these are valued more than they perhaps should be. Marikova (2008), in her work among Czech men, says that caring fathers weaken their power position in the family, but not towards women, because they still enjoy benefits of being a man. Vuori (2009) in Finland found that motherhood is viewed as a societal expectation while fatherhood is optional and has more choices available. Moreover, men as fathers are not viewed as having a nurturing role, but as actors of masculinity. Consequently, she argues that shared parenting has lost the transformative potential it once had and it is being appropriated in a way that re-inscribes gender in known ways.

So the question ‘does parent equal mother?’ has several layers into it. It not only implies a marginalization of men in childcare, but it might also assume that fathers do parenting differently and are denied their unique contribution or see it devalued. While it is true that motherhood is wrapped in myths, perhaps the unique contribution of men is one more fable – both discourses originating in the same binary thinking. It seems that the real question that follows now is not whether the gender of the parent matters, but rather why we think the gender of the parent *has to matter*.

2.3 Fatherhood and Masculinities

[W]e can understand better the myth of fatherhood by uncovering the work of fathering. (Aitken, 2000, p.596)

As hinted earlier in this chapter, when attempting to define male carers, a contradiction appears. Because care is not associated with masculinity, but is instead a feminine and motherly trait, male carers might struggle to form subjectivities that make masculinity and caring compatible. Stuart Aitken (2009) noticed this when he undertook research on fathers hoping to find out if men can make sense of themselves as parents without becoming ‘Mr. Mum’. However, we are unsure in

what ways the concepts of care, fatherhood, and masculinity overlap. Aitken argues that fathering practices are more complex than fatherhood and that the emotional work done by fathers is largely unknown.

While motherhood seems to be very narrowly defined and, as a result, women are anxious to meet those expectations (Gillespie, 2003), fatherhood appears to lack a link between fathering and masculinity (Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2011) as fathers seem to take cues more often from women than from other men. Researchers talk about *fragmented fatherhood* (Collier and Sheldon, 2008), as father models are largely absent and fathering becomes an *ad hoc* practice. However, this also leaves fatherhood more open to developing new meanings that are still unexplored. As with motherhood, defining fatherhood involves heteropatriarchal assumptions and gender expectations. Fatherhood, after all, 'is a feminist issue' (Silverstein, 1996, p.3). Because fathering is the main site in which men engage in childcare practices, fathering will be the main focus of this study, without disregarding that male carers of adults or of children in different contexts do exist and present researchers with unique challenges (Tarrant, 2013).

A Summary of Viewpoints in Fatherhood Literature

Work on fatherhood comes from a range of disciplines and perspectives. The study of fatherhood began independently from feminist work on care, coming mainly from the fields of sociology, social work, family studies, anthropology, and psychology. Medved in her summary of literature on stay-at-home fathers explains that there are

three questions that to date dominate SAHF [Stay-at-home fathers] research:

- How have discourses and practices of fathering and masculinity changed over time?
- Why and when do fathers choose to (or involuntarily) become SAHFs?
- What types of stigma experiences and identity challenges do SAHFs experience?

(2013, p. 117).

These are questions often heard in research on men and childcare outside the stay-at-home context too. Braun *et al.* (2011) make a useful distinction of literature on fatherhood into three approaches: father-child relationships, mother-father relationships and men and masculinities perspectives. While this is not a rigid distinction and these bodies of literature overlap, it is a useful one that helps examine the origins and the theoretical underpinnings of each perspective. In the sections below I use Braun *et al.*'s distinction to group relevant literature that I came across, and I add a fourth grouping of more recent literature which I call *father-world* relations. All approaches are interested in what ways men participate in care, but the viewpoints can be quite different as shown below.

a) *Father-child relations: 'Are fathers essential?' and 'How much involved are they?'*

Studies on father-child relationships are the main focus of the majority of fatherhood literature and mostly come from sociology, psychology, and health studies. This work revolves around cultural representations, paternal involvement, and developmental outcomes for children and fathers (Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio and Cohan, 2000; Marsiglio *et al.*, 2000; Flouri, 2005; Pleck, 2012) while post-structuralist and phenomenological perspectives discuss father identities as a process (Lupton and Barclay, 1997). This literature concludes that fathers are important to child development (Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2011). The questions often addressed are whether fathers are necessary and what their contribution is. Theories of *essential*, *important*, and *involved father*, as well as *responsible fathering* have been introduced.

The *essential father* has received extensive critique since the Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) paper that first challenged it. Biblarz and Stacey (2010) examined the literature on how the gender of the parent matters and discovered that it has little influence on the child's psychology. What is apparently more influential is the number of parents and their marital status. The critics of this literature conclude that no empirical research has actually privileged families based on marriage and biological parenthood as being better for children, despite the prevalence of this idea (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010). Debunking this tenet is turning into a consensus among fatherhood scholars only recently. Pleck seems to be reformulating it into a hypothesis of the *important father* (2012), not wanting to dismiss the concept entirely.

Involved fathering retains the distinction of caring *about* and caring *for*, as it is more concerned with the emotional involvement of parents rather than their actual participation in

caring tasks (Dermott, 2008). *Responsible fathering* (Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson, 2000) has moral and perhaps normative undertones (Dermott, 2008). As an overall critique of this literature, it seems that gender equality considerations are rarely and only marginally taken into account, and fatherhood is often examined in isolation from motherhood. While this theorizing does reflect wider interdisciplinary work on gender (Lewis and Lamb, 2007), it is still lacking in actual gender analysis.

Recent literature reviews from this area conclude that the focus has been on mothers, who have become a synonym to parenting, and that this has to change by looking at fathers (Lewis and Lamb, 2007; Pleck, 2012). This is reiterating what was found to be problematic in previous sections: not only it acts as a cover for an economy of gratitude by over-stressing the importance of men's participation to childcare, it also presents as 'new' what is originally a 19th-century white, middle-class fatherhood discourse that is hardly disruptive of binaries (Gavanas, 2004). On the contrary, this emphasis on the role of fathers re-affirms gendered binaries by promoting a very specific kind of fatherhood. As seen in the introduction, with New Labour fatherhood policies, traditionalist views hide behind a rationale for paternity leave that is based on the father-child relationship. In the very wording of 'involved' fathering there is the assumption that 'default' fathering is uninvolved. Involved fatherhood and New Fatherhood (another term for the modern, involved father, which I discuss later in this chapter) eventually are wrong focal points, because families and parenting are not static, but fluid and ever-changing. A shift of focus on carers and masculinity instead of fathers is discussed in more depth in the following sections.

b) Father-mother relations: 'Are fathers sharing care? How does this affect gender equality?'

Work based on father-mother relations usually discusses the division of labour—an approach of feminist origin. This is a more dynamic field than the father-child relations and relies on discussing the tensions, negotiations, and power relations that are generated by the expectations of mothers as main homemakers and fathers as main breadwinners. Less concerned with the emotional 'involvement' of fathers as father involvement literature is, it focuses more closely on the equal division of caring tasks. However, this perspective privileges research in a heteronormative setting and does not discuss fathers who have no female partner or ex-partner and who might make different caring choices (Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2011).

A common way of researching the equal sharing of care labour is by looking at *time use* – a strand of research that attempts to bring together considerations of father involvement, equal division of labour and work-based citizenship under quantifiable data (O’Brien, 2005; Bianchi, Robinson and Milke, 2006). This research can show indeed that fathers spend more time with children (Dribe and Stanfors, 2009 in Sweden), although the qualitative aspect remains unaddressed. Results reveal a caring-about/caring-for difference; men take up fewer caring tasks and prefer activities done *together* with the children (Craig, 2006), which is a pattern that persists in many countries (Craig and Mullan, 2013) with some national variations (Hook and Wolfe, 2012). Unemployment has also been addressed, revealing that gender norms persist. Unemployed mothers seem to be taking up more caring tasks than unemployed fathers do (Pailhé and Solaz 2007 in France).

Due to methodological limitations, this strand of research often does not provide an adequate interpretation of care labour. Dermott (2005, 2008) also challenges the assumption that time spent with kids is an indication of hands-on parenting, because while mothering is expected to be time-intensive, fathering is not required to meet the same expectations. Thus, the findings of time-use research on fathers are unreliable. Moreover, Dermott (2006) has challenged the myth that men spend more time at work after they have kids, finding that even if this happens there is no causal relationship between working longer hours and parental involvement.

Other work in this area is conducted on parental and (obligatory) paternity leave and related policies, often in the Nordic countries where the effects of paternity leave are more obvious. This literature frequently combines feminist and masculinities perspectives (e.g. Brandth and Kvande, 1998; Plantin, 2007; Johansson, 2011). Rehel (2013) says that because paternity leave makes men’s experiences of fatherhood structurally similar to those of women (taking extended leave from work to devote time exclusively to the caring of the infant), it helps them think about parenting and practise it in ways similar to mothers. Yet Plantin (2007) describes a less optimistic view, that shows a very slow change because other factors (such as the relation of men to the labour market) and which can work against taking paternity leave even in Sweden. Other work focuses on class differences in leave-taking (Plantin, 2007) and on reasons for men taking, or not, parental leave (McKay and Doucet, 2010). These include the prioritizing of mothers’ care as well as societal and workplace norms and expectations.

Finally, work on father-mother relations has also identified what has been called *maternal gatekeeping* (McBride *et al.*, 2005; Cosson and Graham, 2012): mothers themselves present an obstacle to men obtaining a more active role in childcare. While the phenomenon has been

identified, we are unsure of its origins as many possible explanations have been given. Maternal gatekeeping scholars often use discourse that is inclined to blame mothers, without looking more into contemporary constructions of motherhood (such as intensive motherhood, which can lead women to refuse delegating responsibilities) or into masculinities, male embodiment and the geographies of childcare as obstacles that make men less confident about their role and generate a feeling of exclusion from caring.

c) *Men and Masculinities: 'Are fathers doing or undoing gender? What is the relationship between masculinity and care?'*

Masculinities studies, developed somewhat independently from feminist studies although clearly informed by them, can offer additional insight into conceptualizing male primary caring. Masculinities literature can be a useful tool in unpacking the contradictions present in fatherhood and can directly address what father-child relationship literature avoids and what father-mother literature is sometimes aware of: *since care is supposed to be antithetical to masculinity, how do the two reconcile?* Regarding men and fatherhood, masculinities can pose interesting questions such as *what is the relationship between fatherhood and masculinities?* This approach seems more likely to provide answers to the question *can fatherhood be a space for undoing gender dualisms?*

Conceptual tools such as masculinity, hegemonic masculinity and 'doing' gender form the basis of this analysis. Both social constructionist (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Connell, 1995) and post-structuralist approaches (Butler, 1990) agree that gender is 'done', it is *performed*. This means that gender is something not fixed that needs to be continuously re-affirmed through daily practices. *Masculinities* describe the different ways of 'doing' male gender. There is no uniform way of doing masculinities, but there is a hierarchy among them, that values some ways of doing gender more than others. *Hegemonic masculinity* (Connell, 1995) refers to the dominant model, contingent in time and place and often vague and unclear. Hegemonic masculinity never has a fixed form and, rather than something tangible, it is closer to an ideal that can never be fully fleshed out.

Hegemonic masculinity in the West has been associated with the man of modernity, 'of reason' (Seidler, 1989), who is represented in the white, middle-class male. Emotion and aspects of care are associated with femininity and are thus deemed incompatible with doing masculinity.

Although practices (for example, when doing more marginalized masculinities) prove that there are no fixed boundaries and the importance of hegemony can be sometimes overrated, care and masculinity are still conceptualized as antithetical. Therefore the ideal of current hegemonic masculinity can be an obstacle to the development of a caring masculinity and fatherhood:

If masculinity is hegemonic as many scholars contend then involved and caring fathers would suggest a dramatic change in masculine identity. An important question to ask is to what extent, if at all, is a new approach to fatherhood possible under the domination of hegemonic masculinity? (Seward and Richter, 2008, p. 89)

In the above quotation, masculinities put fatherhood into perspective: if fathers care, masculinity can change, but what are the challenges posed by hegemonic masculinity? Do marginalized masculinities really have the power to overturn hierarchies or do they end up becoming complicit to hegemonic masculinity?

For some men the whole world is accessible, yet childcare is one of the few areas where they are not privileged in the same way. Therefore, it is possible to view childcare as an extension of their masculinity, an enhancement to their identity, as Brandth and Kvande (1998), Brod (1989) and Marikova (2008) agree: '[b]eing hopelessly clumsy with children is not considered particularly masculine. Being able to master a new challenge, even if it is child care, is however, regarded as an important masculine attribute'. (Brandth and Kvande, 1998, p.309). This would have the effect of not valuing care for what it is, but valuing it because it eventually becomes re-inscribed as masculine.

Men and masculinities studies allow us not only to look at men through their relationships to other men, which are of equal importance to their relationships with women (Connell, 1995), but also to 'see' that men have a gender while still recognizing the privilege men enjoy in society and not (wrongly) portray them as victims (Hearn, 2012). Geography emphasizes the spatial formations of masculinity and fatherhood (Berg and Longhurst, 2003; Gorman-Murray, 2008a; Aitken, 2009), as *doing* masculinity depends on *where* it is done. The exclusion of fathers from the world of childcare is a very geographical one.

Studies using masculinities approaches largely agree that men who care *do* shift the meanings of gender, but the process is ambivalent and complex. It often involves both doing and undoing gender, and hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities mix in contradictory ways. The transition to fatherhood has interested researchers, especially in the psycho-social field, as it can shed light on the changes that occur in fathers and the way they view themselves as parents and

as gendered subjects. Research shows that caring for children can be a transformative experience for men, often with optimistic accounts that masculinities are changing (Fagerskiold, 2008; Johansson, 2011).

Finn and Henwood (2009) write that while a positive change to a more motherly behaviour is welcomed by fathers, another discourse, more gender-specific, appears: fathers make sense of their identities as having values mothers do not, thus attaching themselves to their unique contribution *as fathers* and not mothers. Miller (2011), in the UK, agrees that gender is both done and undone, often at the same time, and that the desire and the possibilities are there for men to engage more with care, although in the long run they fall back into patriarchal patterns, particularly after their return to paid work.

So it appears that reconciling masculinity and care is a complex process that demands fathers to re-evaluate the identities they previously thought as fixed and stable – something that also happens to mothers in somewhat different ways. Hofner *et al.* (2011) divided Austrian caring fathers in their research as *traditional*, *feminized*, and *distinctive* fathers, according to the way the fathers viewed themselves and how they grappled with identity. Feminized had no role models, they were ‘othered’, and their work was devalued as feminized. Distinctive fathers coped with the above by adopting non-hegemonic discourses, thus consciously opposing themselves to what they perceived as hegemonic. Hofner *et al.* also mention that the adoption of this identity is associated to a lifestyle choice, hinting that it is possible this attitude represents fathers of a more privileged socioeconomic and occupational status and background that have more options available.

Brandth and Kvande (1998), looking at parental leave takers in Sweden, conducted an earlier, pioneering study on masculinity and fatherhood. They asked how men ‘construct their masculine care-giving identities’ (Brandth and Kvande, 1998, p. 297) by addressing how they manage the discrepancy caused between notions of masculinity that are opposed to caregiving. They also asked whether the fathers’ practices are distinct or whether they try to model them after mothering activities. They found that the fathers of these participants were distant, so the latter lacked role models and had to redefine fatherhood *from within* the home and the nuclear family. Doing things *together* instead of doing something *for* the child appears to be one masculine way of caring, with emphasis on the outdoors and activities that promote independence.

This parenting is contrasted to intensive motherhood and gives fathers a ‘cooler’, laid-back image. Mothers in the Brandth and Kvande study agreed though that equal parenting means

to them equal emotional involvement, so when fathers do not worry enough mothers compensate with additional worrying. Brandth and Kvande mention the presence of an economy of gratitude in the mothers' talk (see also Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2011) which results in masculinity being reproduced, as father's caring is emphasized and valued more than women's contribution. It is interesting that housework was avoided by fathers because, as the researchers said 'there are no gains for masculinity in doing housework' (1998, p.307). Housework is not identified as a parental responsibility, but as a more unpleasant task, more feminized, and more associated with menial labour.

Childcare here was easier to combine with masculinity than housework. So childcare becomes an attribute, an extension of the masculine sphere. Brandth and Kvande conclude that although equality is the intention of these couples, they end up in a gendered result – even if the configuration is different than before, it is still highly gendered. Since then, this pattern has been both confirmed and challenged in different cultural contexts. Other researchers also noticed that the different attitude towards housework that lacks a transformatory potential (Legerski and Cornwall, 2010; Chesley, 2011), but there also are positive accounts from full-time male carers (e.g. Harrington *et al.* 2012, explored more in subsequent section). Brandth and Kvande make masculinity central in their research, although they interviewed middle-class fathers only, thus narrowing their scope. They address this shortcoming by saying that doing a hegemonic kind of masculinity might be a precondition for fusing masculinity and fathering in the case of middle-class men, because middle-class men are closer to the ideal of hegemonic masculinity, so they risk less.

Although this draws attention to the hierarchy among masculinities, Brandth and Kvande state that men identifying with hegemonic masculinity have the power to change it and thus to change all masculinities in a top-down approach. This sounds too optimistic when thinking of what the researchers themselves noticed—that these changes end up gendered and classed, only in different configurations. This is not problematic per se, but if the gendering is imbued with unequal power relations, then gender hierarchies are perpetuated. This view also takes for granted Connel's Gramscian model of power, which implies that change must occur with the hegemonic structures because these oppress the subordinate practices. However, in a Foucauldian model of power, contesting discourses are certainly hierarchized but power also operates from below (Foucault, 1981), therefore non-hegemonic masculinities might operate to undermine hegemonic masculinities.

Before moving on to lay out my own approach to fatherhood, I would like to draw attention to the topic in which research has been most abundant: work and fathering masculinities. Because of men's strong identification with work in the binary male breadwinner/female homemaker, paid work features prominently in every discussion around fathers doing childcare. In the midst of this, the image of the stay-at-home father emerges, whose contradictory features of being male and at the same time responsible for childcare and thus outside or on the fringe of the world of paid work, make him central to a number of debates, at the heart of which the patriarchal divide of private/public, again, resides.

Fatherhood, work and class

Paid work is almost a synonym to masculinity and the breadwinner model always casts its shadow on fatherhood (Doucet, 2004). Because work is so central to masculinities, examining situations in which masculinity is put on the line is one way to study men and work (Morgan, 1992). Male primary carers represent exactly this challenge. The different rationalizations of care and work among the men who are at work, who work part-time, who work at home, who are unemployed, or who are full-time carers by choice, can shed light on how the binary work/care can be dissolved. As Magaraggia notes, '[t]o assign a male-driven social recognition to care work implies an erosion of the gendered separation between the public and private whose maintenance is central to masculinity' (2012, p. 87).

Good fathering is so closely associated with work that if men are absent from their children's lives because of work, they might be considered as good fathers for this reason (Townsend, 2002). For men, work is a legitimate excuse from caring, but the same is not true for many women (Connidis and McMullin, 2002). However, Dermott (2005, 2006), dismantling many assumptions, says fatherhood has little impact on men's working hours, and Brandth and Kvande (1998) show a lack of identification with the breadwinner model from Swedish fathers. In Kelley's and Kelley's (2007) quantitative research on Australian fathers, the fathers did not necessarily prefer work over activities with children, even if they could not take up primary caring. It is possible then that fathers are truly willing but not able to share care, because the pressure to work – and additionally to identify with it – is too strong. This hints at *paid work* being central to this issue.

Class considerations are embedded in the relationship between men and work. Not a lot of research is done explicitly on class and fatherhood despite many references to it (Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2011). The importance of class has been noticed as vital in a UK context (Plantin, Månsson and Kearney, 2003). For some men, earning money is their actual way of fathering (Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2011), and this is something present both in middle and working-class men (although for working-class men it can be imperative because of financial problems). It was noticed early in fatherhood studies that the idea of caring fatherhood has a classed dimension, making it a middle-class phenomenon (LaRossa, 1988). While we can infer that working-class masculinity would be more connected to the breadwinner model, current reality is more complex. In fact working-class men are more likely to face unemployment and therefore have more time available to spend with children and develop intimate caring practices (Dermott, 2008).

Earlier work on working-class fathers found that the better they did at work, the higher their self-esteem and more positive their outlook on fathering (Grimm-Thomas and Perry-Jenkins, 1994). While this reflects a reality, it is possible that it is over-simplifying the experiences of those fathers and perhaps attempts to inscribe them into class stereotypes. Brannen and Nilsen (2006) said that working-class men in the UK were likely to be practising more hands-on fathering because of their tenuous relationship to the labour market, thus eventually identifying as fathers first, then as workers. Plantin's results differ (2007): for middle-class men fatherhood was seen as something new, as a project requiring time, while for working-class men it was viewed as something natural, established beforehand, and drawn in predictable ways because they were simply doing what was expected of them. For this reason, he says, working-class men did not take as many days of leave. One could say that for working-class men fathering is not considered a life-changing experience (as Brannen and Nilsen might suggest), but as naturally incorporated to an already established sense of identity.

Vincent and Ball (2007) studied middle-class families and argued that men juggling family and work did not challenge traditional views of family because mothers retained a central role and fathers had an auxiliary, peripheral position. In a later study by the same people on working-class men this time (Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2011), men rationalized their caring time as a kind of work. They notice the striking diversity of fathering practices among the men interviewed, because fathering is an ad hoc experience, lacking, for example, places where they can join other fathers with their kids. Fathering as an ad hoc practice has been discussed by other researchers as well (Brannen and Nielsen, 2006; Doucet, 2009). Braun, Vincent and Ball (2011) additionally noticed that working-class men often feel uncomfortable in public with their kids and this

indicates strong classed dynamics: it was working-class men that were viewed as possible threats, not middle-class men.

Unemployment can mean a sense of loss of identity. Shirani *et al.* (2012) look at unemployment and its relationship to caring men in UK context, and focus on the differences between unemployed, home-working and at stay-at-home fathers. Unemployed men rationalize caring as something impermanent, as merely a break from work that precedes an imminent return to work. Home-working fathers presented probably the smallest change, because the fusion of working and caring spaces allowed them to prioritize a working identity. Stay-at-home fathers, who were primary carers mostly by choice, were more positive towards caring and did not tend as much to rationalize it as analogous to paid work.

Shirani *et al.*'s work indicates that the reasons and situations of primary caring might affect the way men view themselves in relation to work. Fathers with fewer options, including the younger and less educated, are more likely to take up caring duties. This does not automatically imply, as shown in Shirani *et al.*'s (2012) unemployed men, that a change in masculinities will occur as well. The differences among individual fathers can reveal a lot on how masculinities and work operate. For example, male primary carers by choice and unable-to-work stay-at-home fathers are found in very different kinds of households (Kramer, Kelly and McCulloch, 2013), which will result in them doing masculinities differently and grappling with identities in different ways. Racial and ethnic dimensions are even more under-researched – a gap that was addressed in the UK by recent research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (e.g. Hauari and Hollingworth, 2009). Race and ethnic variations can reveal diverse links between men, work and home, because cultural differences, migration, and structural inequalities shape very different kinds of masculinities and attitudes towards caring. Chesley (2011), working in the US context, thinks class matters more than race but there is still a lack of racial perspectives.

While the link between men and work seems hard to break, some notice that the relationship between men and work is now broader and includes women, as it is premised on the value placed on paid work in today's neoliberalism (Featherstone, 2003; Shirani, Henwood and Coltart, 2012). Work perhaps is more of a problem in general, not just for fathers (Weeks, 2011). In a world where work ethic is all-pervasive, and the demand to work is constantly intensified, little room is left for care to be valued. As the demand for gender equality shifted into changing men instead of women, there is a similar need in changing work in a way that will make the phrase 'work-family balance' not needed anymore.

Stay-at-home fathers

With stay-at-home fathers, an apparent obliteration of working identity happens. Of course, the matter is not as simple because there are no clear boundaries between work and care; stay-at-home fathers prove exactly this. Moreover, studying their experiences enhances our understanding of masculinities and care. In earlier work, a masculine identity seemed to be more important than other dimensions of a 'househusband', causing problems and frustration for these fathers (Smith, 1998). As research expanded in the past decade, it was observed that men would reframe what was considered masculine in order to cope with the emerging contradictory identities.

Work is one way to reconcile these contradictions: rationalizing care as a kind of work and trying to remain connected to work (especially work with masculine characteristics such as DIY) is a common strategy (Doucet and Merla, 2007). Merla (2008), comparing Belgium to other countries, observes that these strategies are drawn from masculinities discourses that are counter-hegemonic and complicit with hegemonic masculinity at the same time. Shirani *et al.* (2012) examined this connection with work in caring men in the UK and found that stay-at-home fathers were the most likely to disrupt patterns and value their caring identities in different ways. Kelley and Kelley (2007) in their quantitative research in Australia give a positive view of stay-at-home fathers, who said they enjoyed full-time caring and prefer it over work. However, most research remains focused in the US, where there is a budding interest in stay-at-home fathers. Findings agree that gender is both done and undone by stay-at-home fathers (Chesley, 2011; Medved and Rawlins, 2011). Even if the different arrangements happened not by choice but out of need, gender ends up being reconsidered even in families with more traditional views (Chesley, 2011).

Harrington *et al.* (2012) conducted a large-scale qualitative study covering a range of issues familiar to researchers of stay-at-home fathering. The study contributed to a positive view of stay-at-home father's lives as they initially faced unemployment but later embraced the shift into a caring role. Despite the above, they notice that the definition of a good father remains largely centred around caring *about* (being emotionally present) and not caring *for* (day-to-day childcare) tasks. Some research also focuses on working mothers in households with stay-at-home

fathers (Dunn, Rochlen, and O'Brien, 2013; Medved, 2009). One of the shortcomings of this recent US-based research is that it is always focused on the dyad stay-at-home-fathers and breadwinning mothers. This reinforces not only heteronormativity, but also gendered dichotomies, as it is assumed that the boundaries are so clear it seems like the breadwinner model in reverse.

Doucet (2016) argues that stay-at-home fathers are important to short-term feminist goals, but in the long-term they perpetuate a dichotomy between care and work. Latshaw (2011) calls us to rethink the term 'stay-at-home fathers'. The reality is much more complex than just 'staying at home' since many of those fathers find themselves engaging in unusual patterns of paid, voluntary and emotional labour. This results in wrong estimations from the government about the number of male primary carers, as they have to fit a category that is actually more fluid. Latshaw suggests the use of the term *male primary carer* instead, and stresses the need for more subjective criteria, something qualitative research in this field can address. While full-time male carers present us with unique challenges, research is still lacking additional perspectives.

2.4 A critical discussion on men and childcare

After an overview of existing literature, I proceed to discuss a few of the problems that researchers on men and childcare might encounter, as well as to challenge some of the assumptions embedded in this research field. The aim of this endeavour is to flesh out concerns not yet addressed by researchers and find out how these questions can enrich the study of care and gender. Before laying out the questions and the ontology of this research I would like to discuss the image of the *New Father* and its problems, as well as Fraser's Universal Carer model. Both New Father and Universal Carer represent what caring masculinities could be like. It is my purpose to warn on the potential negative aspects of caring masculinities and to design an approach that is informed by feminist analysis.

New Fathers, Fathers' Rights?

During the 1980's and 1990's the figure of the *New Father* was prominent in media discourse. Much of the research on fatherhood attempted to explore the existence and the experiences of these so-called New Fathers, who were actively involved with life at home in contrast to 'old' fathers who were distanced from family life. The image of the New Father is indicative of a wider discussion on fathers during the past decades. Some claim that how one becomes a father is now more of an individual choice, more of a matter of personal biography (Williams, 2008). Yet this might be an over-simplification, as we see below, because not all fathers will experience fatherhood in this way due to their diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. After all, certain fathers are marginalized while others are more visible in research (e.g. work on divorce assumes married heterosexual men, Dermott, 2008).

Dermott (Dermott, 2008) noticed the contradictions between prevalent conceptual dichotomies. First, fathers are noticed more by research and media, yet fathers are also more absent from families. Because absent fathers are viewed as a social ill, emphasis on them reinforces the view that fathers need to be noticed as important. Second, biological fatherhood is valued more, yet at the same time social fatherhood (one is not born but becomes father) is discussed in a positive light. It seems that the two do not compete, but rather that biology is brought into the discussion of fathering practices as something necessarily relevant to them. Third, there is a discrepancy between the discourse of New Fathers, involved and caring, and the actual practices that indicate only a minimal shift in care. Dermott says that this is based on a work/home dichotomy that identifies men as breadwinners and that the New Father is created as a discourse in opposition to it. Finally, despite the increasing diversity, there is a tendency to apply uniform labels since some fathers remain invisible to the public and to researchers, as mentioned earlier.

The above issues all point to an attempt at fixing fluid identities around a new kind of fatherhood. Aitken (2009) regards the literature on caring fatherhood as attempting to construct identities in a certain way and thus excluding the potential for new identities by already writing the conclusions. LaRossa (1988) noticed early on that too much enthusiasm is often uncritical of the *New Father*. Research shows that although fathers wish to be involved, there is little actual change in the sharing of care due to structural constraints (Machin, 2015). Others say it is not even a cultural expectation yet (Wall and Arnold, 2007), while for others it might indicate some

shift in the cultural expectations which is inhibited by other factors, such as the majority of the representations that remains traditional (Gregory and Milner, 2011) or the need to work (Plantin, 2007). Among other attempts to pin identities down, such as the New Man and the New Lad (Ochsner, 2012), it is likely the image of the New Father ends up reinforcing and perpetuating specific, classist (Vavrus, 2002) views on fatherhood and masculinity. Finn and Henwood explain that

[k]ey arguments in the fatherhood and masculinities literature dismiss new fatherhood as a cultural fallacy, viewing it, for example, as a strategy for (middle class) men to reassert hegemony within transforming gender relations, interrupt trajectories of social change, and retain a position as main beneficiaries of patriarchal power (2009, p.560).

They insist though that we need to look at how these discourses, among others, eventually contribute to the shaping of current fathering practices. Indeed, research shows that men do consider New Fatherhood as a model for their own behaviour (Eerola and Huttunen, 2011) even if their actual participation is minimal.

However, neither a shift in cultural expectations nor a shift in practices is, per se, positive for gender equality. Segal (1990) drew attention to this ever since New Father images appeared. First, she directs this argument back to a feminist analysis that looks at women's second shift. Women 'play down the inequalities and exaggerate the extent of 'sharing', so as to avoid conflict and make life seem more bearable' (Segal, 1990, p.49). Additionally, she reminds us that 'it seems unlikely that in isolation [the sharing of domestic work] can do much to undermine overall male dominance' (ibid.) because men have more power and privileges in almost every other arena of life, which certainly casts a shadow on any effort made in the sharing of care (see also Orloff, 2009). Finally, Segal discusses 'the problem with reasserting fatherhood' and explains that 'emphasis on fathering is also another way of asserting the importance of the traditional heterosexual nuclear family: 'good families' are male-headed nuclear families' (Segal, 1990, p.53), meaning that reasserting fatherhood can also reassert patriarchy and that promoting the sharing of care can be used as an excuse for welfare cuts.

Segal's observations generate a series of questions for the feminist researcher. Are New Father examples in fiction and real life enough to deconstruct the care/work dichotomy? What if fathering practices eventually reassert traditional masculinities? Could this be a reaction to a perceived threat against patriarchal values and masculinity because of women's increasing visibility in all aspects of life? Subsequently, can this be a way for men to establish their status in

the only arena they appear to be excluded from: the domestic sphere (Marikova, 2008)? These questions gain more texture when put in the context of the Fathers' Rights Movement (Gatrell, 2007; Jordan, 2009; Flood, 2012), which appeared at the same time New Father images were promoted, making them, perhaps, two sides of the same coin. Opinions within the FRM (which have their roots in divorced 'fathers' rights') can range from explicitly anti-feminist to more feminist-friendly, yet a common characteristic between NF and FRM remains: they both present as something new what is a-century-and-a-half-old struggle (Gavanas, 2004). Gavanas explains that since motherhood became a synonym to domesticity, reconciling masculinity with domesticity has been a constant problem. The way to tackle this was by making fatherhood a masculine thing, using the arenas of heterosexuality, sport, and religion as spaces that reaffirm masculinity.

Dermott mentions that public reaction to research findings on fatherhood tends to interpret said findings in 'two polarized categories: as condemning fathers or claiming that they are oppressed' (Dermott, 2008, p.2). This is exactly indicative of the relationship between New Fathers (the positive, perhaps 'feminist-friendly' view of bringing men into care) and FRM (with its tendency to construct mothers as bad and as obstacles to fathers' relationships with their children). New Father is the friendliest of these images, but considering it radical is, as LaRossa (1988) pointed out, too optimistic. More likely, 'Mr Mum' representations are an attempt to re-inscribe domesticity as masculine (Vavrus, 2002). This pattern is also followed by literature on cleaning books for men (Courtney, 2009): special books for men are needed in order to make it a masculine thing. Literature on parenting also reiterates and reinforces at various degrees of intensity stereotypical notions of gender (Krafchick, 2005).

All these examples agree that bringing men into un-masculine tasks is usually accompanied by a moral legitimization of these tasks as spaces in which gender and masculinity can be 'done'. While this certainly proves the malleability of gendered behaviour and the arbitrariness of these inscriptions, it also reveals that these tasks are eventually not valued for what they are, but valued because they are masculinized through a re-association with masculinity. This lifts the shame that comes with a behaviour associated with femininity. Even if – or rather, exactly because – patriarchal structures such as marriage have eroded, placing extra concern on fathering makes up for this newfound gap: there is a possibility that caring fatherhood will bring back family values and heterosexism instead of dismantling gender.

This does not mean, of course, that this is a deterministic course of things. Precisely because these intense reactions such as the FRM reveal the instability of these constructs, they

reveal that concepts can be tampered with, challenged, and deconstructed (Butler, 1996). For example, researchers have supported that cooking is a leisurely, 'masculine' task and not a caring task for men, but Szabo (2013) suggests there are men who do cook for caring reasons and this can lead to 'doing' gender differently. Segal quotes Jeff Hearn in maintaining that 'the notion of fatherhood must be smashed or more precisely dropped bit by bit into the ocean' (Segal, 1990, p.57). She concludes that this is too hard to smash and that instead of father's rights we should look at carers' rights. I agree that a shift of focus is required. This different approach becomes more concrete when we look into the Universal Carer model and what it assumes about work, care, and gender.

Valuing care or devaluing work? A post-work approach to the Universal Carer

Fraser hoped that the Universal Carer (UC) could destabilize the workday. However, this has not happened in Scandinavian countries. The Universal Breadwinner, in which both parents work full-time, is not simply an androcentric model, as Fraser pointed out, but a work-centric one, in which a work ethic, associated with working-class and middle-class masculinities, permeates our lives. I argue that paid work is found at the heart of this problem.

Orloff (2009) hints at the same point when she discusses how Gornick and Meyers (2009) do not seek to change capitalist and masculinist employment structures but choose instead a soft, work-life balance approach. This work-family balance approach has dominated both mainstream and feminist childcare politics and research. Feminist authors, coming from a genealogy that aims at valuing care, have sought ways to address the need for 'time to care' and the reshaping of citizenship around care. But Orloff makes a point that often goes unnoticed: looking at the unfairness in work itself, which originates in capitalism and patriarchy, might be a better approach.

Fraser's analysis explores the US world of work as it was formed after the elimination of the family wage. Fraser rightly wonders how we can make policies that will enable people to be both carers and workers. I take this further, asking *how do we make jobs* for people who are both carers and workers? The question feminist authors often ask is, in the current world of work, how do we make space for care? Yet the question could be reformulated as: *if work continues to be central in our lives, how much space is left to value care?* Work and care are constructed as a

dichotomy, so care is always viewed as less, as feminized. The problem is not how to *value care*, but how to *devalue work*.

Weeks (2011) critiques work-family balance demands and says that they run the danger of reiterating this dichotomy, as well as reproducing traditionalist views of the family. For example she discusses Hochschild's (1997) research which, despite its brilliance, constantly positions family as superior to work, as a haven from work – a positioning that rests precisely on the private/public dichotomy. Weeks, working in the same US context, has discussed how the 8-hour working day was constructed according to a breadwinner/homemaker model, thus is already gendered and unsuited to the lives of people who wish to combine care and work. Week's anti-work critique can further illuminate Fraser's suggestion, as it exposes work-family balance as a wrong focus: the problem lies with work.

How can the shift from valuing care to devaluing work occur? Weeks (2011), inspired from the autonomist Marxist tradition, suggests anti-work politics and post-work demands instead: work and work ethic need to be de-centred, providing us with more time for other aspects of life, including family – but not *just* family. Week's view seems to point at the explicit gendering of work, care, and family, but locates the problem in work as a monism, not as a dichotomy of care-work or family-work: productivity is the inside, unproductiveness is the outside. This is why work is valued, while so-called unproductive care labour is not.

Researchers can thus ask: is there anything in the practices and developing subjectivities of male primary carers and their families that can destabilise a work and productivity-centric society (and if there is not, can it be developed)? In this thesis, I propose a different analytical approach based on queer and new materialist perspectives that take into account the obstacles and potential pitfalls of the re-gendering of care. I proceed to ground this perspective to the tangible, researchable topics of space and embodiment. Finally, I formulate my research questions that follow the theoretical approach outlined and the indicated topics of interest.

2.5 Towards an embodied and relational understanding of fathering

To the three distinctions in fatherhood literature made by Braun *et al.* (2011), *father-child* relations, *father-mother* relations, and *men and masculinities*, I add my own approach, *father-*

world relations, which draws from recent work in (broadly defined) new materialist philosophy. This approach is less interested in discovering the ways men participate in care and more interested in understanding how they and the world around them change when they do. It takes accounts of the fluidity of bodies, affects, relations, and material experiences, and pays attention to the small, day-to-day realities that shape and are shaped by the world in co-constructive encounters. This is the literature in which I situate my work too. First, I give my understanding of this literature's background, which is situated in corporeal feminisms, new materialisms, the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, and non-representational theory, and then proceed to provide an overview of research that makes use of these theories and how my own work fits there.

Caring Bodies: corporeal feminisms and geographies of affect

Geographers have had a long-term interest in the primary geographical locus – the body (Rose, 1993; Longhurst, 1995). During the late 1980's and early 1990's feminist theorists, often coming from very different strands of theory, discussed the need to study gendered bodies (Irigaray, 1985; Haraway, 1991; Grosz, 1994; Young, 2005) and developed an interest in *corporeal feminisms*. Elizabeth Grosz explains that the focus on bodies 'has the added bonus of inevitably raising the question of sexual difference in a way that mind does not' (Grosz, 1994, p.vii). Grosz's argument warns that *gender neutrality* is a dangerous concept because it succumbs to what is supposedly universal and effaces gender difference – a view shared by other theorists of *sexual difference* such as Irigaray (1985) and Braidotti (2011). Grosz additionally recommends to look at male bodies because 'women can no longer take on the function of being the body for men while men are left free to soar to the heights of theoretical reflection and cultural production' (Grosz, 1994, p.22).

Theorists from a range of disciplines have added to new ways of thinking about gendered bodies, introducing *new materialisms* and *material feminisms* (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Coole and Frost, 2010). Karen Barad (2007) looks at the materiality of non-human agents and how these, in Barad's term, *intra-act*. While inter-action presupposes independent actors, intra-action is a performative account of matter, in which subjects come to define their ever-shifting boundaries via events and material encounters. Barad attempts to unravel the conundrum

between representation and materiality which has been addressed in geography through *non-representational theories* (Thrift, 2007). While emotional geographies (Anderson and Smith, 2001), which have feminist origins, have long been interested in studying bodies, some recent work on bodies comes from the field of non-representational or *affective* geographies. This is a diverse field that could be defined as a series of emerging *tactical suggestions* (Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002) and which aims at developing *relational* instead of *representational* understandings of the world (2012). The focus here shifts from language and representation to bodies and what bodies *do* and the relations between them.

Anderson and Harrison (2010) draw from, among others, the works of Deleuze and Guattari in order to explain this as an attempt to go past the Cartesian divide of the world (matter) and its meanings (representation) and instead search for meanings of the world as *emerging from practices*, as thought-in-action. Non-representational theories (NRT) are thus characterized by 'a concern with and attention to emergent processes of ontogenesis, how bodies are actualised and individuated through sets of diverse practical relations,' as '[i]t is from the active, productive, and continual weaving of the multiplicity of bits and pieces that we emerge' (Anderson and Harrison 2010, p.8).

Affect, in conjunction with *assemblage*, are two powerful tools that can be used to study the dynamics between human and non-human bodies through a non-representational, or relational understanding of the world. The term affect can be interpreted as 'the aleatory dynamics of experience, the 'push' of life which interrupts, unsettles and haunts persons, places or things' and 'it is often through affect that relations are interrupted, changed or solidified' (Anderson and Harrison 2010, p.16-17). Thus affect can be the language in which male primary carers talk about their embodied, pre-discursive experiences that are little explored. Meanwhile, assemblage 'functions as a sensitising device to the ontological diversity of actants, the grouping of those actants, the resulting distribution of agentic capacities, and an outside that exceeds the grouping' (Anderson and Harrison, 2010, p.13), making it a powerful tool to understand parents and children in a relational way.

NRTs have the potential to link geographical work with other disciplines, go beyond ontological problems of binary thought, and propose a new ontology. Critics include feminists who prefer emotional geographies as having a clearer commitment to feminist politics (Thien, 2005; Pain, 2006; Tolia-Kelly, 2009). However, Colls (2012) proposes a conciliation between the two through the lens of corporeal feminism, which, as described earlier, has allegiances towards both directions. According to Colls, the relationship of corporeal feminist authors with theory

is not based upon an outright rejection or acceptance of particular poststructuralist philosophical work. Instead, in Braidotti's words a different approach is used 'to invent new frameworks, new images, new modes of thought' (1994, 1). For feminist geographers, these engagements can provide a way into the ideas of non-representational geographies that may have been dismissed as abstract and exclusionary to the 'uninitiated' whilst remaining committed to theorising and researching with (sexually) differentiated subjects (2012, p.433).

Colls thus provides a bridge between feminist work and NRT as the two do not have to be mutually exclusive, but in dialogue with each other.

Andrea Doucet believes that embodiment is practically missing from literature on care (Doucet, 2006; 2009; 2013) – possibly a symptom of earlier representational and post-structuralist thought, which is striking as care is fundamentally an embodied and inter-embodied experience that involves touching and awareness of one's body and other bodies in space. Caring bodies have been studied in emotional and cultural geographies with particular emphasis on the care of the body (Atkinson, Lawson and Wiles, 2011), specific practices such as bathing (Twigg, 2000), disabled bodies (Chouinard, Hall and Wilton, 2010), infant (Holt, 2013) and maternal bodies (Longhurst, 2007), including pregnant (Longhurst, 2005) and breastfeeding (Mahon-Daly and Andrews, 2001; Boyer, 2012) bodies. Emphasis has been placed on the maternal as a caring body, while there is little geographical knowledge about male caring bodies. Recently, interest in embodiment reached fatherhood studies as well (Marsiglio, Lohan and Culley, 2013).

The experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding for some women contain a few of the most striking examples of how bodies can shape gendered caring subjectivities. Work on the pregnant body initially looked at the experiences of pregnant women, but later moved on to how the world – and especially men/expecting fathers – perceives them, (Davidson, 2001; Longhurst, 2001; 2005). The pregnant body might have classed dimensions to it (pregnant women of different social class are perceived differently) and it can be performative; pregnancy too, is 'done' (Neiterman, 2012) and can even be considered as a form of carework in the workplace (Gatrell, 2011). Because this initial contact with the infant is, for men, mediated through the body of the mother, this engenders many concerns, such as a feeling of exclusion from the dyad mother/child and an undoubtable privileging of the mother as the main carer (Höfner, Schadler and Richter, 2011). This feeling of exclusion can extend to breastfeeding (McKay and Doucet, 2010).

However, this experience can be transformative too:

[L]earning to be fathers physically holding a child is to learn to perceive the others [through] touching and being touched, in a pre-linguistic and pre-discursive way. It means being open to the other: touching, being touched, exposing yourself and waiting (Pieroni 2002, p.11 quoted in Magaraggia 2012, p.81).

In this pre-discursive site, geographies of emotion and affect (Davidson and Milligan, 2004) can be useful in unpacking inter-embodied experiences. Draper (2003) discusses how the disembodied (for men) experience of pregnancy and childbirth in what is often a medicalized environment changes their views about the body and its perceived boundaries. This relational understanding of the world assumes no fixed and autonomous selves, but rather shifting selves that co-exist with other human and non-human bodies in space. Though the body has been hinted at, no work has yet primarily addressed the experiences of male primary carers as embodied actors.

Father-world relations: towards an ontology of becoming?

A fourth approach, not included in the initial Braun *et al.* (2011) distinction, has the potential to overcome the tensions laid out by previous research, such as the conciliation of masculinity and childcare in a binary system in which childcare is considered exclusively feminine. This approach considers fathering as a process of *becoming* (Doucet, 2013), meaning an ever-changing, non-static process that questions fixed identities. Aitken drew from Deleuze and Guattari to 're-imagine the subject and subjection of fathers as unbound and fluid' (2009, p.57), wishing to see if something is produced 'beyond discursively enabled shifts in identity' (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p.127). Because fathers have no fathering role models, they end up drawing from mothers. Aitken argued that the day-to-day work of fathering means that fathers re-make fathering daily, they *become other* and they discover *difference* that is not premised on reproducing fatherhood ideals or imitating mothers. The day-to-day work of fathering is not a repetition, but a difference producing multiplicities.

Other work with similar influences has studied families and fathering (Hendricks and Koro-Ljungberg, 2013) and parents of children with disabilities (Goodley, 2007). This mode of analysis starts from the practices and their potential, and not from identities, thus allowing more flexibility

and openness to possibilities. While masculinities approaches have produced valuable research, the *father-world* perspective can widen the scope of research on male primary carers by allowing us to see the move between identities not as a clash between oppositions, but as a journey towards understanding difference. The usefulness of this approach lies in its ontology that can overcome the tensions stemming from the binary of work/care and the incompatibility between masculinity and childcare. As the question *how can fathers reconcile masculinity and care* remains, so does the problem with gender binaries. This approach offers a way out of this through its ontological view of *difference*: difference not as lack, but as difference in itself. If we can seek the ways in which male primary carers actively create a kind of difference-in-itself, we have the key to move away from binary thought and into thinking with multiplicities. The concept of difference and the ways to do research using the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari are explored in depth in the following chapter, where I lay out the ontological and epistemological background of this study.

2.6 Conclusions: towards queering care

This geographical and feminist study of male primary carers rests on previous work on theories of care, geographies of care and parenting, and interdisciplinary work around motherhood and fatherhood. From this discussion of related literature, it seems that the tension inherent in men becoming carers goes back to the problem with gender and how it operates as a dualism in which one end of the binary is always privileged against the other. Male primary carers are in the unique position of shaking up this binary. On one hand, they engage in the feminized practice of care, potentially challenging hegemonic masculinities and shifting the meaning of gender. On the other, they enter this realm of mothers, suddenly finding themselves both marginalized and at the centre, experiencing both an 'othering' as well as an extension of masculine privilege through the economy of gratitude. This is the tension I seek to explore in this study and find out if and how men who care can challenge binaries of gender around work and care.

To explain this, I use the concept of 'queering'. Queer theory as a theoretical tool can challenge what is considered normal and what is not, who is named an outsider and who is included, as well as discuss the relationship between the normal and the deviant (Sedgwick, 1993; Gibson-Graham, 1999; Eng *et al.*, 2005; Puar, 2005; Oswin, 2008; Oswald *et al.*, 2009). These

relationships are constructed upon binaries to which the regulation of sexuality is intrinsic. By 'queering' those binaries we question them, disrupt them, and expose them as false. I ask the question *how do male primary carers (MPCs) disrupt and/or reinforce ('queer') binaries of gender difference around care?* In specific, I address the following three aspects of MPCs: work, bodies, and places. Regarding *work*, a well-researched topic within literatures of fatherhood, I wish to further our knowledge by exploring the potential of MPCs to queer the meaning of work and care. Do they change views on work and care, thus destabilizing the binary of work and care, or do they reinforce it? Is care valued and work de-valued? What new masculinities operate here? And is the understanding of caring overshadowed by binary thinking (such as the breadwinner/homemaker dyad) or is this challenged?

Regarding *bodies*, they are little researched and have the potential to reveal aspects of gender that are located outside the realm of discourse, that push and press with their materiality towards shaping and shifting of identities. I am interested in seeing how these embodied experiences of intimate care (such as bottle-feeding and bathing) lead to different understandings of care and gender caught in the betweenness of being a father who does childcare—but is not the same as mother. Regarding *places*, I wish to add to the rich literature on geographies of parenting by looking at the moments when MPCs challenge binaries and whether they form new, in-between geographies. I am particularly interested in seeing how the feminised spaces of care intra-act with male bodies, and how inclusion and exclusion operate there. In the following chapter I lay out the onto-epistemological basis of a new materialist approach to these questions and present my methodology.

Chapter 3:

Towards a New Materialist Methodology: Ways of becoming with research

Being, I imagine, must be very simple. It is Becoming which is so messy and which I am all for. – James Tiptree Jr.⁷ (Phillips, 2007, p. 219)

The purpose of this research project is to shed light on the caring practices of men and their potential contribution to meanings of gender. In this context, care is viewed as a gendered practice linked to the perpetuation of gender inequalities. Previous studies on male primary carers have discussed fatherhood and male primary caring from various onto-epistemological backgrounds popular in social sciences, such as phenomenology (Doucet, 2009; 2006) and symbolic interactionism (Doucet, 2004; Brandth and Kvande, 1998). More experimental ways include Aitken's ethno-poetry (2009), that consists of an ethnography modified so that it conveys emotions that exceed the text. Recently, Andrea Doucet provided a reading of her previous work through new materialist lens (2013). I argue that a new materialist approach can provide a strong background to this project and will add new perspectives to these approaches.

This study seeks to explore events that challenge the gendered dichotomies of everyday caring spaces and practices. I call this process **queering**, which in this context goes beyond the study of gay and lesbian places and subjects. While this term has a contested history⁸, it is

⁷ Pseudonym of science fiction writer Alice Sheldon.

⁸ My use of 'queer' as a tool to challenge the self-evidence of what is considered normal draws from Sedgwick's definition (1993) and Gibson-Graham's (1999) use of the term as a tool to queer capitalism, meaning a tool to challenge the idea that only one thing is normal. It is also inspired by the work of Jasbir

nonetheless a helpful concept to 'consider the construction of normative and non-normative identities and practices' (Oswin, 2008, p. 97) and refers to an active process of shifting self-evident boundaries and challenging dichotomies (Sedgwick, 1993; Gibson-Graham, 1999; Oswald *et al.*, 2009).

Although I borrow the term from queer studies, I base this project on the closely related new materialisms, which describe a range of diverse, yet by no means unified theoretical approaches to science that focus on the imbrication and co-production of matter and language—what Haraway (2003) would call 'naturecultures' (Van Der Tuin and Dolphijn, 2010). New materialisms seek to dismantle dualistic thinking that ultimately privileges discourse over matter (Colebrook, 2000). This binary thinking has its roots in Cartesian philosophy, while new materialisms draw from what Deleuze called the minor tradition of philosophers such as Spinoza and Nietzsche who employ not a dualist but a *monist* view of the world, and introduce an ontology in which discourse and matter are entangled (Van Der Tuin and Dolphijn, 2010).

In this chapter I discuss how binary oppositions are under fierce attack in new materialism: '[r]eworking and eventually *breaking through* dualism appears to be the key' (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, 2012, p.97, italics own). This reshaping of dichotomies happens not by rejecting feminist and post-structuralist philosophy, but rather by considering it and integrating it critically, making new materialisms a surprisingly open and flexible way to theorize the world (Van der Tuin and Dolphijn, 2012). For this project, although I choose the word 'queer' to describe the challenging of boundaries, the ontological frame I use comes from Deleuze and Guattari's work and its feminist readings. Butler's *performativity* (1990) is only one way to understand 'queering' which, according to critics (Colebrook, 2009), lacks the positive view of difference that can be found in Deleuzo-guattarian thought. This view of difference not as lack, but as something that exists in itself, permeates new materialisms and is central to the onto-epistemological underpinnings of this project as I discuss them below.

In this chapter I lay out the basis of a new materialist methodology and introduce the concepts I use in my ontology and analysis. My approach revolves around three ideas: a) the concept of difference as non-dichotomous, b) becoming and the rhizome as conceptual instruments to understand male primary carers, c) embodiment and affect as ways to understand

Puar (2005) on the queer corporealities of 'terrorists' and how their bodies are cast as abject. In these cases *queerness* is used as a tool to study the constitutive outsider, while drawing attention to the supposed normality of the insider as the problem.

the world. Deleuze and Guattari created a web of interlinked concepts which they intentionally left open to interpretations and transformations. There is no textbook approach to these, so for the purposes of this project I lay out their meaning as I have come to understand it through various lenses, including that of my research, my other readings, my feminist background and my own becoming with the project and data.

3.1 A Deleuzian Ontology: Dualisms, Difference and Becomings

Dualisms and Difference

My approach to this study follows a new materialist spirit of *breaking through* dualisms. Borrowing primarily from concepts invented by Deleuze and Guattari to describe a non-dualist mode of thinking, I try to use these as building blocks for *a new materialist methodology*. My intention is to discover if male primary carers can ‘queer’ binary genders and de-polarize ideas of work and care. This engagement with binaries is prominent in Deleuze and Guattari’s work, who, like Derrida, understood that what is intrinsically problematic about dichotomies is how one of the two ends of the binary is always prioritized over the other, e.g. male over female:

Binary oppositions, for Deleuze, are based on ‘centrisms’ not unlike the ‘logocentrism’ that Derrida and others criticise. Like the other poststructuralists, Deleuze insists that all binaries privilege one term as standard: ‘“white”, “male”, “adult”, “rational”, etc., in short the average European, the subject of enunciation’ ([Deleuze and Guattari 1987:] 292). In other words, these characteristics take majoritarian Man as the centre and make territory of all else (Flieger, 2000, p. 45).

Why do we need the concept of difference, then? The way Deleuze moves away from thinkers like Derrida, is found in how he attempted to re-define difference as **difference in itself**, not as Lacanian lack, not as difference in order to define something else (Braidotti, 2011). For this reason, this project does not seek to de-gender care or find a gender-neutral approach to care and work—this would be something short of impossible. It rather seeks a recognition of difference as important in itself, since ‘[o]rdinary dualism is inherently problematic, the act of

making distinctions between terms is not' (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, 2012, p.121). 'Difference' here can be both about the gendered, feminized practice of caring and also about the non-dominant caring masculinities of male carers.

What is key here is that difference happens positively: while *identities* try to pin down selves by constructing 'others', *difference* only makes a distinction in a positive, not 'lacking' manner (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, 2012). Todd May explains Deleuze's difference:

For Deleuze, difference—difference in itself—is not to be defined in terms of the same. We characteristically define difference negatively, as the not-sameness of two or more entities. [...] Not-sameness can be not identical; the two items are twins, but they occupy different positions on the space-time continuum. [What they] share is that they begin by positing subsisting entities, and derive difference by means of negating the sameness of the entities. What Deleuze wants is not a derivative difference, but difference in itself (May, 2003, p.144).

Deleuzian difference, thus, seeks to understand difference as something in itself, not as derivative from what is not-same or 'the Other'. Derivative difference means being *one or multiple* (one or not-one) while difference in itself means being *multiplicities* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004).

Feminist thinkers of difference such as Elizabeth Grosz elaborated on Deleuze's framework and sought productive links with feminist work. Although critical of Deleuze's lack of gender analysis, Irigaray (1985) also talks of 'sexual difference' as something yet to happen because we only know *one* gender and everything is categorized as either this gender or its lack. Recognizing sexual difference means opening up to new ontologies and epistemologies, as well as to many genders:

Phallocentrism is explicitly *not* the refusal of an identity for women [...], but rather, the containment of that identity by other definitions and other identities. Thus Irigaray does not seek the "real" woman somehow beyond her patriarchal containment: instead she aims to challenge conceptual systems which refuse to acknowledge their own limitations [...] The questions she asks focus on how to develop conceptual schemas, frameworks, systems that reveal what is at stake in dominant representational systems, and how to develop different ways of theorizing [...] (Grosz, 2005, pp.174–175).

Irigaray speaks of developing new ways of thinking in a political manner that will affirm sexual difference. With this in mind, we can look at the effect that male primary caring practices have on

the emergence of sexual difference by asking if *the differential masculinities of male primary carers challenge the binary of masculine work/feminine care*. With Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy we ask *how* they do this, how these carers engage in a—as I discuss below—'becoming'. Choosing this concept of difference is both an ontological and an epistemological choice, but also a political one. It offers more possibilities not only to research themes, but also to the research itself as a process with yet unexplored capacities. Deleuze and Guattari recommend we start from what happens, from the 'difference' as in *differing*, and let flexible, changing identities emerge from difference, instead of assuming a prior, fixed identity and derive an Othering, not-same difference from there. The way to do this is through what they call *becoming*.

Becoming and the rhizome

Becoming is a process, a betweenness that is experienced, not attained (Flieger, 2000). In Deleuze and Guattari's work, 'the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities' (2004, p.291). Becoming stands for the process that is neither fixed nor repetitive; it allows us to think about identities in a fluid manner instead of assuming transcendental, pre-existing, unified subjects:

To become is to be part of a process by which the stable identities—the majorities—are dissolved in creative acts in which more fluid "identities" are created, but only as the by-products of the process itself (May, 2003, p.150).

This dissolution of stable identities (*majorities*) happens through processes of *territorialization* and *deterritorialization*. Territorialization stabilizes an identity, while deterritorialization throws it off balance; in the first process a whole emerges from its parts, while in the second, internal homogeneity is destabilized (DeLanda, 2006). Both processes are part of a becoming and offer us a methodological approach that starts from difference itself, not from identities; from what is potential and possible, not from already established structures:

[Becoming] is not to imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor it is to proportion formal relations. [...] starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfils, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that

are closest to what one is becoming, through which one becomes (Braidotti, 2011, p. 249).

The usefulness of becoming is evident when Deleuze and Guattari invite us to engage in a becoming with what is *rhizomatic* or *minoritarian* as opposed to the *majorities*, the fixed identities. Not all becomings are the same; Deleuze urges us to *become-minoritarian*, to make rhizomes⁹. Instead of making trees, which are hierarchical and disciplinary, we should make rhizomes instead, which expand on surfaces and are thus without organization. This messy subjectivity that the rhizome, with its tangled roots, represents, manages to capture the qualities of becoming, of the self as a constant work in progress with infinite possibilities of connecting to anything. Another word for becoming is minoritarian: '[t]here is no becoming-majoritarian; majority is never becoming. All becoming is minoritarian' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.123).

Minoritarian, however, is not a minority; women might be a minority, but *becoming-woman* means becoming-minoritarian. It means assuming a minoritarian position by creating a 'line of flight'. The line of flight carries a meaning not of flying, but of 'disappearing into the distance' (Massumi, 2004, p. xvi). It represents the possibilities of becomings which we cannot predict; creating lines of flight is a goal in itself. Lorraine explains the importance of becoming-minoritarian when we talk about gender and othering—that is creating new forms of subjectivity that are not marginalizing:

mapping subjectivity in terms of sex and gender in [minoritarian forms] respects the importance they play in orienting lived experience in its contemporary formations at the same time as it fosters lines of flight that could lead to forms of subjectivity that do not require marginalizing others with respect to a majoritarian norm (2011, p.57).

In this project, hegemonic forms of masculinity constitute the majoritarian and new becomings for fathers constitute lines of flight from normative gender scripts (which code caring as women's work) towards the minoritarian.

⁹ Rhizomes are underground stems of plants that grow horizontally, sending out roots and shoots from their nodes. The image of horizontal and forever entangled rhizome is apt to understand the non-hierarchical, relational complexes of lines that constitute groups of actants (assemblages).

In the following chapters, I call this a **becoming-carer**. Care could be considered as minoritarian because it is marginalized and feminized, but without being essentialized as such¹⁰. With *becoming-minoritarian* we can understand how male primary carers deviate from the norm, assume a marginal position, and create lines of flight through practices of caring. As mentioned above, however, not all becomings are the same, meaning that not all becomings take us to a line of flight. Butler (1990) would say that gender is done and undone, often at the same time, so practices that seemingly destabilize binary gender might consolidate it as well. Where Butler and Deleuze would agree is on how fragile these structures truly are and how they carry with them a potential for change. It is this potential I wish to find and see what might happen.

A philosophy of immanence: matter and bodies

Both Deleuze and Irigaray recognized that if we wish to break the unequal relationship between binaries then we need to start *thinking differently about difference*. This idea is framed by, according to Deleuze and Guattari, a 'philosophy of immanence', where the discursive permeates the material world. As noted earlier, this favours a Spinozian view of a monist, unified world of *multiplicities*, and opposes a Cartesian, transcendentalist, mind-over-matter philosophy of *dichotomies*. Philosophies of immanence see no distinction between discursive and material. This does not imply that the 'linguistic turn' is rejected, but rather that linguistical-ity is 'given its proper place, that is, a more modest one' (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, 2012, p.98)¹¹. This philosophy of immanence is aligned with new materialist thought:

The new materialism produces a revolution in thought by traversing modernity's dualisms (structured in a negative relation between terms), and by constituting a new conceptualization of difference (structured by an affirmative relation) along the way (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, 2012, p.115).

¹⁰ In the same way that women are a minority but only becoming-woman is minoritarian, care is a 'minority' as a phenomenon but could be considered as a minoritarian practice that leads to becoming-minoritarian, becoming-carer.

¹¹ Haraway calls this the 'material-semiotic' (1991, p.200), Barad calls it 'material-discursive' (2003, p.810) – the hyphen illustrates how they happen at the same time. In Haraway's *naturecultures* (2003) neither culture nor the material is privileged. 'The material dimension creates *and* gives form to the discursive, and vice versa' (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin 2012, p.91, italics own).

In new materialist thought and in Deleuze's immanent philosophy, not only the breaking of dualisms happens, but a positive view of difference sets the building blocks for new, non-binary concepts.

In geography, Deleuzian thought plays a prominent role in *non-representational theory* (NRT). However, NRT has become synonymous to an anti-representational and anti-textual rhetoric that might perpetuate the dichotomy that an immanent approach seeks to overcome. As Jacobs and Nash say, we ought to move towards

considering embodiment as *not only, but also always* the product of representation, regulation, relationality and performative reiteration [which] comes close to the spirit of non-representational theory but is more overtly concerned with the implications of attending to non-discursive and bodily materiality for those historically subordinated by discourses about their (supposed) innate inferiority (2003, p.276).

In other words, a philosophy of immanence allows us to approach the topic of male primary carers in a manner that is consistent with the question of 'queering' by challenging dichotomies and what is perceived as normal. A philosophy of immanence sees no binary between language and matter, and starts from the *potential* that bodies have. A Deleuzian approach can also:

[undo] masculine and feminine paradigms: the body is not to be overcome nor does one think through the body. Rather, one must plunge into the body to reach the unthought, that is (material) life (Conley, 2000, p.31).

The concerns of this research around embodiment draw from the Spinozian tradition (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) and corporeal feminists (Grosz, 1994; Barad, 2003; Braidotti, 2011), because '[w]e know nothing about a body until we know what it can do' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.284).

3.2 Doing rhizomatic research: from theory to a new materialist methodology

[W]e will need to unmake many of our methodological habits, including: the desire for certainty; the expectation that we can usually arrive at more or less stable conclusions about the way things really are; the belief that as social scientists we have special insights that allow us to see further than others into certain parts of social reality; and the expectations of generality that are wrapped up in what is often called 'universalism'. But, first of all we need to unmake our desire and expectation for security.

(Law, 2004, p.9)

I have outlined the purposes and conceptual building blocks of a new materialist ontology. The question that follows is, naturally, how to do research with these tools? How to design methodology and how to apply them? Rather than starting from zero, I suggest rethinking and repurposing already existing methodological elements (such as qualitative research and ethnographic methods) in a way that would take us to a methodology that is based on a new materialist onto-epistemology. Part of this challenge is introducing new ways to think and to think of research in particular. This task draws from a long history of epistemological thought, starting from early examples of qualitative methods and going all the way to recent efforts in applying new materialist philosophy. As expected, it is sometimes highly experimental, but the pitfalls and shortcomings give us more opportunities to think and re-think how we do research. This is not *a* methodology, but a journey towards one, a *methodology-in-becoming* itself.

From qualitative methods to post-qualitative approaches

While quantitative approaches accept the existence of a single reality to be measured and known, qualitative methods aim at understanding everyday realities in depth and at reflecting upon them; they are interested in 'the complexity of everyday life' (Dwyer and Limb, 2001, p.2). Qualitative work has multiple roots in various disciplinary practices, although it is more commonly associated

with ethnography in anthropology and with the interpretivist approaches of phenomenology and symbolic interactionism in sociology (Mason, 2002). Feminist approaches that sought to challenge existing scientific paradigms and give voice to women and marginalized people have deeply impacted qualitative research (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). There is a long legacy of qualitative research in geography, including humanistic, post-structuralist, cultural and non-representational geographies (Dwyer and Limb, 2001).

O'Brien *et al.* (2007) suggest that research on male primary carers should not be quantitative only and that it is imperative to produce qualitative data that address the nuances of caring experiences. There is valuable qualitative literature on stay-at-home fathers, first-time fathers, fathers on paternity leave that has been discussed extensively in the previous chapter (Aitken, 2000; Brandth and Kvande, 1998; Doucet, 2006; Miller, 2011; Shirani *et al.*, 2012). As this study is concerned with the multiple material-discursive realities of male caregivers, as well as the intimate experiences and embodied understandings of these caring places and events, qualitative research is considered to be the best approach to answer these research questions (Winchester and Rofo, 2010).

However, qualitative work has received criticism, leading to what researchers call a 'representational crisis'. The neatly packaged presentation of qualitative research, complete with illustrative quotes, supposedly re-creates an external, static, and objectively viewed reality using representational means. This raises questions on how qualitative research assumes unified and fixed realities, and seeks to convey supposedly authentic voices (Crang, 2005). This distinction originates in Cartesian thought that privileges our supposed access on the world (Barad, 2003). It perpetuates a dichotomy between reality and representation that assumes the researcher is external to those realities and can objectively record them.

Some have suggested changing the way we think about qualitative methodologies might be the key in resolving this tension between reality and representation. *Post-qualitative* approaches attempt to 'imagine and accomplish an inquiry that might produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently' (Lather and St. Pierre, 2013, p.653). Law for example brings attention to the works of Latour and Woolgar and says that 'methods, their rules, and even more methods' practices, not only describe but also help to produce the reality that

they understand' (2004, p.5). Barad makes a similar claim with her 'diffraction grate' argument¹²: the laboratory apparatus co-creates the reality we seek to learn more about (2007, p.104-105).

Instead of seeking fixed realities, Law calls us to affirm and accept vagueness, because 'the world in general defies any attempt at overall orderly accounting, [it] is not to be understood in general by adopting a methodological version of auditing' (2004, p.7) and 'science should also be trying to make and know realities that are vague and indefinite *because much of the world is enacted in that way*' (2004, p.14). As Barad says, '[w]e do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because "we" are *of the world*' (2003, p.829). Her approach sees no distinction between ontology and epistemology; her *onto-epistemology* means that production of the world and production of knowledge are intertwined.

I find the connection between onto-epistemology and methodology that Law and Barad describe a necessary one to the development of a research strategy. From a Deleuzian perspective, the problem with the representationalism of qualitative methods would lie in how the latter assume that 'the world is static and resistant to change, not *becoming*' (Lather and St. Pierre, 2013, p. 631). However, it seems that methods deemed as inherently textual, like the interview, when viewed from an ontology that sees no distinction between text and matter, make this representationalist 'flaw' ontologically incorrect. St. Pierre writes that the 'hierarchy that enables the privileging of the material in the material/textual dualism is not thinkable in [Deleuze and Guattari's] ontology, and the "just textual analysis" distinction doesn't make sense' (2014, p. 12), illustrating how this theoretical choice can influence research design, from ontological underpinnings all the way to analysis.

Cultural geographies have added to this dialogue. According to Crane and Kusek,

[c]ultural geographers do not simply "'report' on an already existing reality" but, in the words of John Law (2004, p. 143), they "make things more or less different" and thereby modify conditions of possibility for future action. Translated into a different analytical vocabulary, the choices that cultural geographers make in the field, in data analysis, and in cultural geography classrooms are "aesthetic" choices that make different realities present to the senses and therefore actionable (Crane and Kusek, 2014, p.123).

¹² Barad, a physicist, draws from the well-known problem in physics in which light behaves either as a particle or as a wave, so its nature is indeterminate. The answer, given by physicist Niels Bohr, is that light behaves differently depending on the apparatus used to study it. Barad uses this to discuss sciences, including social sciences: the methods and their application are part of the phenomenon they seek to observe (for more see Barad, 2007).

What they talk about is essentially different configurations of perceptive fields as an active process that impacts the future. This is where the importance of these choices lies: modifying conditions of possibility for future action. Research here is not passive, not an account of a pre-existing and external to us world, but an action, a becoming that co-produces the world and is co-produced with it.

Shaw *et al.* write how cultural geographies have caught up with and embraced new theories, focusing on the messiness of practices and ‘seeking less to tidily encapsulate things than to show how things always exceed their concepts, and how the world is inevitably messier than our theories of it’ (2015, p.212). The acceptance of a messy world alludes to Law’s acceptance of uncertainty and insecurity about our results. This approach to research does not assume fixed realities to be uncovered, but is a snapshot of worlds-in-becoming, of a world that ‘exceeds its concepts’. It is also research that becomes with the subject of study, with the field, with the participant, with the researcher, and with the readers of this thesis.

In this study, I use a qualitative approach through a Deleuzo-guattarian and new materialist lens. In practice this means that I use methods traditionally perceived as ‘representational’, yet I do not assume them to ‘represent’ anything – only co-create the world and our knowledge of the world, as there is no divide between the represented reality and the text that supposedly represents it. Thus the results of this study do not claim to be accurate representations of existing realities; the findings and their write-up are parts of a *becoming* in which researcher and participants engaged. Their value lies not in a generalizable power, but exactly in the fragmented, uncertain experience they offer, that can lead to new becomings. In the following sections I look at relevant research, its applications, and the foundations of my own approach.

Doing research with Deleuze and Guattari

Despite the difficulty of applying the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari in research, there is a recent interest in methodological applications (Mazzei and McCoy, 2010; Coleman and Ringrose, 2013). Deleuze and Guattari themselves had an interest in methods and coined the term *schizoanalysis*: an analytical approach, which, when applied to gender, is ‘a materialist philosophical practice interested in conceptualizing sexuality beyond the male/female dualism and even beyond human sexuality’ (Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, 2012, p.118). Jessica Ringrose

(Ringrose, 2011) has applied schizoanalysis in affective assemblages at schools and students' online behaviours. St. Pierre uses a methodology 'in the fold' (2014, p.7) to replace troublesome qualitative methodology concepts such as field, data, and interview, with the Deleuzo-guattarian concept of *fold*. She goes as far as saying that concepts like assemblage and rhizome can be methods.

Hultman and Lenz-Taguchi (2010) have used Deleuze in education research, applying what they call a *relational materialist* methodology. Inspired by Barad, they move away from an anthropocentric analysis of data towards one that incorporates the intra-actions that occur between different agents, human and non-human, through which a positive differentiation emerges. One way they do this is through an analysis of photographic data that focuses on the surroundings as contributing to the events taking place in the photo as much as the people depicted do. In this way they analyse data not by placing people at the centre of what is happening, but rather as part of it, allowing new understandings of spaces and bodies. Lenz-Taguchi (2012) also employs a diffractive and Deleuzian approach in interpreting interview data, pointing to interesting applications of new materialist theories that do not dismiss data that are considered 'representational', such as the interview.

I find these approaches particularly suited to the study of male primary carers. Doucet (2013) recently reflected on her decades of research on male primary carers by using a new materialist lens and analysing data in novel ways. Hendricks and Koro-Ljungberg (2013) have applied Deleuzian thought in their research with families and fathering, developing methodological approaches that can change the way we do research and think about research with families, fatherhood, and care. Aitken (2009) adopted a Deleuzian framework for his ethno-poetry with fathers. Goodley (2007) studied parents of children with disabilities through a rhizomatic understanding of their resistance to a disabling society and change. Moreover, there is recent work on bodies in the context of bodywork (Coffey, 2013) and illness (Fox, 2002) but not yet on embodied caring practices. There is an evident interest in working with Deleuze and parents, to which I wish to contribute.

Designing a new materialist methodology

To be whole is to be part; true voyage is return. (LeGuin, 2001, p.84)

The ‘representational crisis’ of qualitative methodologies led to an experimentation with a range of methods. The spatial and performative qualities that are already present in these methods can be thus readjusted to create research that is more grounded in an ontology that is not representational (Crang, 2005). In geography there is an interest towards the non-human, the emotional, the affective, and the embodied (Davies and Dwyer, 2007). Non-representational (Vannini, 2015), more-than-representational (Lorimer, 2005), as well as creative approaches, in which geographers co-produce knowledge with artists (Hawkins, 2015), tell us that research methods in cultural geographies are truly ‘limited by imagination alone’ (Shaw *et al.*, 2015, p.211).

Fox and Alldred introduced a new materialist methodology based on a Deleuzo-guattarian ontology. They recommend that research design ought to be orientated

towards what things do, rather than what they ‘are’; towards processes and flows rather than structures and stable forms; to matters of power and resistance; and to interactions that draw small and large relations into assemblage (2015, p.407).

Although Fox and Alldred introduce a specific design based on this approach, a range of methods and approaches could serve the same purposes. An orientation towards what things do, rather than what they ‘are’ would seek to uncover the processes, the moves, and the journeys of male primary carers, instead of their identities – which is also my orientation in this study.

In my methodological design I attempt to tread on the soundness of well-known routes, but with the critical eye of the onto-epistemology I have laid out in this chapter. I follow a design rooted in *grounded theory* that seeks to inductively and concurrently produce theory from data (Mason, 2007). This suits both the exploratory character of the study, as well as its neo-materialist focus on doings rather than beings, processes rather than structures. It is additionally an approach that seeks to uncover multiple agencies and intra-actions between bodies, material objects, and spaces, and allows me to be more attuned to the material environments of the participants’ daily lives – the pushchair, the bottle, the nappies.

Regarding choice of method and fieldwork, in the following sections I explain and justify in more detail how I chose in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation as my methods and how this fits with my engagement with bodies and places agentic and as catalytic to the male carers' experience. I proceed to discuss data collection and finish with data analysis, where I return to Deleuze and Guattari and lay out the analytical tools I draw from their philosophy. My approach is thus evident in three phases: a) the onto-epistemological framing of my research questions, b) the use of interview as an appropriate tool, c) data analysis based on Deleuzo-guattarian concepts.

The shape of the methodology is that of a circular journey: I start from Deleuzo-guattarian onto-epistemology as it is well-suited to the questions I wish to ask around the dissolution of gender binaries and the validation of difference. From there, I move away to tread the well-known approaches of qualitative research (grounded theory, qualitative interviewing and participant observation), although I do not break the continuous line of that circle – I follow its course. Then with data analysis the circle closes back to the same onto-epistemology, where it started from. The circular journey of research is that of a deterritorialization, territorialization and, again, deterritorialization. Constant reflection on my position, the study, and my own becomings act as a rhythm throughout this process.

A note on positionality: from reflexivity to diffractive practice

Before moving on to methods, data collection, and data analysis, I wish to address my position as a researcher. Our roles as researchers have been discussed as far from those of neutral, external observers. The problem with qualitative methodologies was found in how they initially emulated the supposed rigour of quantitative and positivist inquiry which assume a world exterior to the researcher that waits to be discovered by an objective scholar (Haraway, 1991; 1997). *Reflexivity* is a term that describes the ways in which these considerations are incorporated in actual research: the researcher thinks, reflects on their position, and addresses these issues in their write-up.

England calls reflexivity a 'self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher' (2001, p.244) and considers it critical to fieldwork as it

induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research questions [...] allows the researcher to be more open to any challenges to their theoretical position that fieldwork almost inevitably raises (ibid).

Thus the all-knowing impersonal researcher writing in third person becomes the reflexive 'I' of a researcher who considers what impact and consequences her interaction has with those participating to the research.

However, this too can create a sense of separation and externality to the realities we seek to understand. Crang writes:

Bourdieu frets that textual reflexivity recreates the myth of the exceptional researcher set apart from their respondents not now by the clarity of their knowledge, but by their level of introspection, doubt and anxiety (2005, p.226).

So in some ways reflexivity is still part of a representationalist logic. Haraway uses the metaphor of the god trick to criticise the shortcomings of scientific objectivity: the all-seeing eye of science pretends to be as far and as unbiased as god is, while it still retains bias and additionally removes all responsibility from knowledge production. She suggests instead that we create situated knowledges: knowledges (in plural, as there are many) that are imbued with our individual positionalities in natural-cultural matrices. There is no single one, universal vantage point from which to create knowledge, but several.

Rose (1997), drawing from rich work in feminist geography, addressed the failures of reflexivity and of applying Haraway's situated knowledges, as the 'identities' to be situated are extraordinarily complex and relational, and therefore it is impossible to pre-determine how they will affect knowledge production. To address the problem described by Rose, I align with Haraway's approach of situated knowledges, although I have an additional level of introspection based on Haraway's *diffraction*, as elaborated by Barad. Haraway wrote that '[d]iffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals. Unlike reflections, diffractions do not displace the same elsewhere' (1997, p.273). Because reflection assumes something pre-exists and is merely mirrored or represented, diffraction better describes fieldwork and research as events composed of multiple agents. These agents, instead of inter-acting (which assumes pre-existing entities, 'things') they intra-act (which assumes relations rather than 'things') (Barad 2003; 2007). A diffractive and intra-active approach to research and thinking about research assumes a *relational* world that better encapsulates the partial and co-produced nature of knowledge.

In this study, I approach my design, fieldwork and data by acknowledging my position as a white, middle-class, female researcher from Southern Europe in her late 20's. These positions do not pre-determine a fixed knowledge, but intra-act with the research environment and co-create knowledges. I follow Kim Enland's reflective approach that allowed me to be open to challenges, but I did so in diffractive ways, considering my presence and impact as part of a knowledge-producing event or assemblage, instead of reflecting from a safer, more distant vantage point. One of the ways in which diffraction crept into my research was how a Deleuzo-guattarian approach was born along with the data. While I was acquainted with new materialisms when I designed my methodology, and had decided on a 'queering' approach to my study early on, I conducted my fieldwork as I read Deleuze and Guattari. I was introduced to concepts such as *becoming* and *difference in itself* while I did my fieldwork, thus influencing the way I did and thought about fieldwork, causing change. The intra-active event of my meeting with theory and fieldwork resulted in a co-creation of knowledge between me and the participants that allowed me to recognize how entangled I am with a plethora of agents, how knowledge is a product of relations instead of autonomous actors.

3.3 The interview as a new materialist method

Interviews are informal exchanges of dialogue focused on specific topics of life history during which the interviewee can relay their own situated and contextual experiences (Mason, 2007). As a method, it relies on people's perceptions and representations, and also on the researcher's interpretations in order to draw conclusions and produce knowledge. For these reasons it might be considered too textual or too representationalist a tool (Crang, 2005). Yet, as discussed in the previous section, qualitative methods are not defined by their 'representational crisis' and can be adapted into powerful methods for a new materialist methodology – this of course includes interviews.

Qualitative interviewing assumes an ontological reality in which people's knowledge and perceptions are important to the social reality we seek to explore (Mason, 2007). Epistemologically, it assumes that knowledge can be generated from people's accounts, but it is important to remember here that these are re-constructed experiences that do not directly reflect reality. It could be argued that qualitative research in geography differs depending on its

focus: it is either how people *understand* their realities, or how the realities are *done*, how they are enacted (Smith, 2001). This split is the legacy of the representational turn and its non-representational answer which perpetuates this dichotomy. Smith suggests we combine the two, but onto-epistemologically we might consider them as inseparable to begin with.

Through a new materialist perspective, language is not privileged over matter, or vice versa, and both are events happening during the same encounter. 'Discourse' implies that boundaries between human/nonhuman are not transgressed, because only humans can produce language (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008)¹³. Yet, adopting Karen Barad's view of discourse as an encounter and not as speech, interview data can be treated not as a representation, but as part of a material-discursive reality. Language, for Deleuze, contains something 'wild' that resists representation. The word he uses is 'sense' to describe the non-representing, un-representable element found in language:

Sense is important for a materialist methodology because it works as a sort of 'mobius strip' between language and the world (Deleuze, 2004, p. 23). Sense 'happens to bodies and insists in propositions' (p. 142), allowing them to resonate and relate, while never being reducible to either 'side' of that old duality that separates the material world from the words that putatively represent it (MacLure, 2013, pp.658–659).

Although data generated from linguistic narratives are associated with anthropocentric approaches that privilege language, a pre-discursive, non-representational element already exists within language, because, for Deleuze, language is not entirely representational. Juelskjaer suggests we treat methods such as interviews 'not as means to obtain subjective representations of the world but as evidence of how respondents are situated within assemblages' (Juelskjaer, 2013, p.759). Assemblages, which are groupings of human and non-human actants, are a way to theorize the world in a relational way (Anderson and Harrison, 2010; Anderson *et al.*, 2012). Qualitative interviews can give us a way to map parts of these relational constellations.

Far more than objective accounts of external realities or subjective representations of the world, qualitative interviews are *events* in which we co-produce knowledge, instead of seeking insider knowledge (Crang, 2005). Both in its doing (an event, an intra-action) and in data analysis (Lenz-Taguchi, 2012), the interview does not have to be representational. Naturally, a

¹³ Although Karen Barad offers a better definition of discourse that uncouples it from language and, in a truly Foucauldian manner, associates it more with power: '[d]iscourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said' (2007, p.146).

reconstruction of events occurs as diverse and possibly unruly elements are pieced into meaningful narratives, but as long as we abandon our need for certainty, as John Law urges us, we can start doing research differently.

The interview assemblage

Some recommend approaching each research question with the most suitable tool (Mason, 2002). As all my questions largely revolve around the participants' experiences, personal interviews were an ideal tool. Interviews seek depth, help us understand the complexities and contradictions of relayed experiences, and also uncover mundane details of everyday life (Valentine, 2005). Interviews can be empowering for participants, as they encourage them to speak for themselves and co-construct knowledge with the researcher. I chose semi-structured interviews, because of their reliability and flexibility. A semi-structured interview schedule has a set of questions rather than loose topics of conversation, a feature that made it more suitable to produce data that were linked to my research questions and were thematically connected (Mason, 2002). The same schedule also allowed for probes that helped enrich data and gave more freedom to both researcher and participants. The interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes (usually were about an hour) and the participants were also encouraged to provide any additional thoughts and experiences that they found significant through post-interview e-mail communication. The number of participants totalled to 27, which is considered a good size for social research (Baker, Edwards and Doidge, 2012) and allowed me to answer my research questions.

One possible limitation of these interviews could be that they were a one-time event with each participant. Miller mentioned how it was necessary to do multiple interviews with her participants because, had she stopped at one, then 'a new man would be found' (Miller, 2011, p. 1098) and confirm a change, while multiple interviews through a length of time revealed how the participants gradually fell back into more traditional gender arrangements. Due to the material and time constraints of this project, I was not able to do follow-up interviews that would cover significant amounts of time, but I agree that multiple interviews would have offered additional insights, especially in the case of fathers on parental leave (as were Miller's participants).

One of my main concerns regarding interviews was how to enrich the method in order to generate data that could give us additional ways to explore embodied and geographical aspects of male primary caring. As a way to attune myself more to 'sense' and the wild elements of language, as well as to my surroundings, I combined semi-structured interviews with *participant observation*. An ethnographic method, participant observation was developed initially from a type of witnessing that assumed the researcher to be external, uninvolved and merely reporting on the situations observed (Mason, 2002). As this was challenged because total externality and complete lack of involvement are impossible, the position of the researcher moved more towards that of a *participant* to the events, and continuously moves between the positions of observer and participant.

In my interviews, I used participant observation (or, we could say, *participation-observation*, since there is no clear boundary between the two) by being attuned to the surroundings, the actions, the small details. These observations were later recorded in my field journal, along with reflexive or diffractive thoughts on the research process. This observation enriched data by watching and being part of caring practices and relations as they unfolded, and allowed me to reflect more on the themes discussed in interviews and issues picked up in existing field notes. Barad (2007) would say that the very act of 'seeing' is a doing, an event, because it requires careful preparation, training, and action. Both interview and participation-observation happened at the same time and both methods were entangled in one event, an assemblage. As researcher, participants, often the participant's children and, sometimes, even their pets formed an *interview assemblage*, I was allowed to attune to its affects and co-produce knowledge by becoming a small part of these daily realities.

The interview as a becoming

Another way to enrich the interview was to let it transform and allow it to intra-act with its surroundings, to engage in a becoming. Placing the interview is important, as participants might feel more comfortable in one place and less comfortable in another, and also because some places might reinforce relations of power between researcher and participant (Elwood and Martin, 2000). Valentine (2005) recommends choosing places familiar to the participant, with their home being an excellent choice as it allows for more relaxed conversations and offers the

opportunity to observe the participant in their own environment. Because of the limited time available to carers, I invited them to choose the time and place of the meeting, which naturally affected the type of interview, producing a new experience every time. I walked with participants in parks while pushing prams, met them in cafes that they frequent in their daily lives as carers, and spoke to them, of course, in their homes, where we spent an hour chatting and playing with their children (and witnessed the occasional nappy change). These interviews tended to adopt their own rhythm, which was affected by me, the participant, the surroundings and, most of all, by the child.

Interviews at home with the children had their own character: interruptions, changes of discussion topic, and opportunities to talk about unexpected topics, drawn straight from the portion of daily reality I was invited to. Walking interviews revealed more about daily life patterns, as they provide rich material-discursive data and allow to connect to the local environment (Davies and Dwyer, 2007; Clark and Emmel, 2010; Evans and Jones, 2011). Interviews in cafes tended to be a little disoriented and chaotic, but cafes were still part of the carers' daily realities – many of the interactions that they describe happened there. Even in my two online interviews, in which I did not get an immediate sense of the surroundings, daily realities pushed through. In one of these, I was given an on-line tour of the house as we continued chatting on-camera at the same time as the participant went upstairs to wake his daughter up.

Type of Interview	At home with child	At home without child	At café with child	At café/park without child	Walking with child	Online
Participants	9 (Mark, Chris, Sam, Tony, Ben, Nathaniel, Ian, Jordan, Charles)	9 (Nick, Giovanni, Matthew, Daniel, George, Lewis, Ron, Vinny, Andrew)	1 (Albert)	5 (Robert, Greg, Will, Eric, Max)	1 (Pete)	2 (Colin, Michael)

Table 3.1 Types of interviews

As a striking example of interview-in-becoming, I would like to discuss George and Maria's interview as one of those moments during which research decides how it wants to be shaped. Although my call for participants was open to the carers' partners for individual interviews, many of them worked full-time jobs and were not around at the times of the day when I met with the primary carers (usually quiet weekday mornings). In one of these cases, George's partner, Maria,

was at home that day. He told me on our way from the station to their house that he chose the day when Maria would be at home because he had a hard time remembering facts and dates, and that he asked Maria to be with him during the interview in order to help him recall his life history (they have three children and their stories go back to over a decade of alternating care and work patterns).

The result was something between a conversation between three people, a joint interview with the two of them, and an interview with George to which Maria added vital parts of information and during which she also spoke her mind about her own experiences, but without taking over the conversation. The hybrid end product was one of my favourite moments during fieldwork, exactly because it was so unique. The interview was still George's interview, but it would not have been the same if Maria was not there. Maria's presence and participation certainly coloured George's responses, but I do not read this as a 'flaw' that 'coerced' George into saying certain things and not saying others and thus produced 'bad' data – it just produced *different* data. As Barad says, apparatuses (in this case, this interview) are themselves phenomena, and 'phenomena constitute reality. Reality is not composed of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but "things"-in-phenomena' (2003, p.817). "You saved my wedding," he told me as a joke after the interview ended. It was an empowering opportunity for both to reflect on things they had never discussed before, to think about events in their lives that were so entangled to day-to-day needs they rarely had the opportunity to stop and think about.

Ethical concerns

The participants were not exposed to any possible harm. One possible source of discomfort was the nature of the questions which could touch on sensitive issues such as gender identities and details of personal life. Participant observation also engenders several issues, among the most important being the power-knowledge dynamics between researcher and researched (Kearns, 2010). Because the observation was part of the interview and explicit consent was given to both, no serious implications were born from this research.

Before the interview, it was made clear to the participants (in the information leaflet, at the interview/observation and on the consent form) that they may withdraw consent to participate at any time without consequences. Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was

maintained throughout the research and after its end. The data was not shared with anyone but the supervisory team and were stored under password protection on computer according to the Data Protection Act and University Policy. Pseudonyms are used in any reference to quotes from the research and a summary of the findings will be provided for interested participants. All the above information was included in the information sheet and was communicated to the participants verbally. This plan received ethical approval by the University of Southampton in October 2014 and a copy of the information sheet can be found in the appendices.

3.4 Data collection: people, places, processes

The study was carried out in two phases of fieldwork which were preceded by pilot interviews. Recruitment started in October 2014, right after receiving ethical approval, and the pilot studies occurred in November-December 2014. A first period of fieldwork followed between January 2015 and May 2015, then a second one between September 2015 and December 2015.

Recruitment methods varied. As I was faced with many difficulties when finding participants, I tried several methods such as internet resources, posting calls for participants on social media (Facebook, Twitter), forums, fathers' groups and mailing lists. I also got in touch with local childcare facilities and Sure Start centres, and snowballed through people who had existing childcare networks. Interviews were recorded with the use of a Dictaphone, then inserted into NVivo programme, where they were transcribed, coded and analysed.

The participants and the field

For the recruitment of my participants, I followed the *National At-Home Dad Network's* definition of a stay-at-home dad as 'a father who is the daily, primary caregiver of his children under 18' (National At-Home Dad Network, no date). This is an extremely flexible definition that could describe any father who is or has been a male primary carer of children, regardless of his paid work status or whether he identifies as a 'stay-at-home dad'. I kept the call open to any *men* who were primary carers of children, so this could potentially include grandfathers or other male

carers who were not fathers. The call was also open to the partners of these carers, but because the partners were at work during the time of the interviews I only managed to talk to one (Maria) and not in a personal interview with her (the same-sex partners I interviewed were interviewed as male primary carers and not as partners).

The male carers that responded and were interviewed were all fathers of the children they were looking after. Due to my flexible definition on male primary carers, I was able to recruit fathers with diverse work-care arrangements. Out of the total number of participants (n=27) almost half of them identified as stay-at-home fathers (14), while the rest were on paternity leave or worked full-time (8 and 5 respectively). Their ages were between 29 and 51 with an average of 39 years. Three were single fathers, six were same-sex and/or gay fathers, five were adoptive parents, and three had been primary carers sometime in the past. The number of children was usually one (18 participants), followed by two (6 participants) and three children (3 participants), aged between 3 months and over 18. More than half of the participants had children aged between 0 and 3 years (15 participants).

Regarding their background and income, four of them were EU migrants and three non-EU migrants, while the rest were British. Twenty-two (22) of them owned a house and, out of those who rented, three were migrants and two were on the lower end of the pay scale. Nineteen (19) had university education, 10 out of which was postgraduate. A surprising number of participants had an occupational background in the arts (8) while the rest varied between being employed in private companies, sales, running own businesses, academia, social work, and in the banking sector. These demographics, rather than being representative of all UK or male primary carers, are focused on a slice of population with more or less similar characteristics. While the conclusions we can draw from the findings do not suit to generalizations, we can still earn insight that is focused geographically and demographically, and thus pairs well with a qualitative study. Despite this, 8 out of 27 participants have no university education, so the sample is not as uniform as it might seem (highly educated participants still seem to be over-represented though). Gay and same-sex parents are also represented robustly, with 6 participants in this sample.

One of the strengths of this focus is that this is a study concentrated in Southern England and especially the bustling locale of Bristol. Because of the uncertain and still growing number of male primary carers, I began this study with no geographical limitation within Britain. Due to my own location and the networks that I was able to build and draw from, the study eventually focused on Southern England. Most participants lived in Bristol (9), followed by London (8). One of the reasons Bristol featured so prominently in my research was its friendliness to childcare. Bristol

had at least two Facebook groups on childcare, and one of these is the largest group for UK parents on Facebook. Bristol is also the only place where I encountered an unofficial dads' group composed entirely of stay-at-home dads. The experiences shared by the participants, then, are often quite localized and unique.

Barriers and limitations

Barriers are among the most common reasons to cause researchers to think back on themselves and how they affect the co-production of knowledge. They can be split into practical barriers, concerning access to the field, and barriers within research itself, where power relations and difference of status can influence dynamics between researcher and participants (DeVerteuil, 2004). Regarding access to the field, often in my recruitment I realized that as a childless person I was an outsider with no access to childcare networks. As a researcher coming from another country, I had no access to any local networks either. This made direct contact with places of childcare difficult. Considering the above, it comes as no surprise that the ways of recruitment that yielded the best results were Facebook groups and personal references (introduction from acquaintances and snowballing).

Online methods	Personal references	Other
Facebook: 8	Acquaintances: 7	Sure Start centres: 0
Forums/Websites: 6	Snowballing: 2	Local childcare facilities: 0
Twitter: 4		Local dads' groups: 0
Total: 18	Total: 9	Total: 0

Table 3.2 Methods of recruitment used and their results

The former is probably due to the popularity of Facebook compared to forums and mailing lists that are harder to access. The Facebook groups used were popular groups such as *Things to do with kids in Bristol* and *Things to do with kids in Eastleigh*. One of the reasons these worked particularly well was that people who read my post immediately passed it on to any male primary

carer friends they knew, so the latter could look at the call for participants and contact me if they wished so. However, despite the nation-wide reach of the internet, my sample was still limited in the South. This was also reflected in the Facebook groups: there were many groups about southern counties but very few about northern ones. To balance this out, I got in touch with dads' groups in more remote areas, like Scotland and Cornwall, although no potential participant contacted me via these routes. The only response I received from the north was from a single gay dad in Manchester, but due to busy schedules the interview could not be arranged.

Snowballing through participants and circulating my call for participants through acquaintances was particularly helpful in accessing childcare networks, as people seem more likely to respond to a call recommended by a friend. The drawback to snowballing is that the pool of participants ends up more or less homogeneous. In this study, the participants were largely from middle-class backgrounds and personal references might have contributed to that. Another consideration is that, because participants answered my calls at their own volition, to some extent they were all eager to find time to talk to me. As a result, almost all of them were carers by choice, although 'choice' is not very clear when it comes to male primary carers. As I argue in the next chapter, when it comes to making this decision, necessity and choice are usually tangled up.

Regarding barriers within the research itself, again, discussing parental practices as a non-parent made me on many occasions an outsider. I was often asked if I had kids myself, perhaps as a way to narrow the communication distance, as an opportunity for the participants to say something like "if you have kids, then you probably understand that..." When I answered that I did not, I sensed some lost opportunity for connection and a different understanding that could have come from my part. On the other hand, they seemed willing to talk to a childless woman about childcare, possibly assuming that as a woman I was closer to childcare by default. One participant asked me if I was doing this study because I liked children, and I explained that, while I do like children, this study focuses on the gendered inequalities in care.

Because of my gender and possibly my age too, it is also likely that they offered me a more diluted version of their true concerns, as men's responses to a white middle-class woman might be biased. Braun, Vincent, and Ball wrote that

it is possible that the interviews contained 'a fair degree of 'political correctness bias', the fathers were very aware of the discourses of gender equality and may have felt the need to let the female, white and middle-class interviewers know that they embraced

and shared ideals of being involved fathers, supportive partners and helpful around the house' (2011, p.28).

Something I encountered in my pilot study and could relate to this was that asking direct questions about gender elicited somewhat defensive responses that tried to downplay the role of gender and focus on something else instead. As the interview unfolded, the participants themselves returned to issues of gender without me prompting them. Learning from this experience, I adjusted my interview schedule slightly so that I would give better prompts that allowed gender concerns to arise, or not, on their own. With the above in mind, I transcribed and analysed my data while consulting my field notebook. In the following section I describe how this process unfolded and in what ways I communicated how these participants were situated within daily caring assemblages.

3.5 Data Analysis: interpreting text or becoming with it?

[T]he living present encourages non-linear, open-ended readings of past events, and therefore represents a new lens through which to approach our documented and assumed histories (Walker, 2014, p. 48)

My data analysis journey is characterized by a tension between schooling in traditional qualitative analysis and a desire to think about data in new ways. The result has been a hybrid of these approaches, in which, I hope, I tried to do justice to a new materialist ontology without deviating from the rigour of qualitative research. While someone might say the two are incompatible, it is not within the scope of this thesis to re-invent research, but to seek answers to the research questions in a way that is compatible with the nature of these questions. I have already explained how the choice of a Deleuzian ontology is appropriate to this study. Here, I explain how this ontology permeates my analysis of data.

A diffractive and Deleuzian becoming with the data

England wrote how the field is co-constructed by both researcher and researched through a 'research encounter' (2001, p. 210). I consider this encounter as not occupying a single moment in time; it extends beyond the limits of the meeting with the participant, and happens again and again through every encounter with the data (Crang, 2005). This approach deviates from representationalism. While on one hand representation and interpretation is unavoidable and even desirable, on the other hand there is no researcher sitting on the outside, ready to derive meaning from data or even to reflect upon them. MacLure writes:

[t]he materialist critique of representation would also confound interpretation, to the extent that this implies a critical, intentional subject standing separate and outside of 'the data', digging behind or beyond or beneath it, to identify higher order meanings, themes or categories. (2013, p.660)

So the researcher, rather than external to the data, is already embedded *within* the data. Not only we co-produce data, we also become with it. MacLure writes that data has almost agentic qualities. Rather than a passive mass that waits for us to code it and analyse it, data choose us and choose the ways they make themselves intelligible to us:

This can be seen, or rather felt, on occasions when one becomes especially 'interested' in a piece of data – such as a sarcastic comment in an interview, or a perplexing incident, or an observed event that makes you feel kind of peculiar (2013, p.660-661).

Claiming to have control and choice over data not only over-estimates the researcher's position, but also underestimates the shaping power of other agents, sometimes as elusive as 'data'. Acknowledging the imbrications between the different agents and being attuned to the relational nature of the research process itself can steer our handling of data towards a way of doing research akin to a *becoming*.

Lenz Taguchi recommends a similar approach. She goes beyond reflexive approaches of reading data into applying *diffractive* readings: 'Whereas reflexivity or reflection invites the illusion of mirroring of essential or fixed positions, diffraction entails the processing of ongoing differences' (2012, p.268). Diffractive thinking is applied here in terms of co-constitution between ideas and matter, between data and researcher. With diffraction we can 'explore what it might

mean to do research where discourse and matter are understood to be mutually constituted in the production of knowing in a flow of continuous differentiation' (ibid).

Qualitative approaches to data are usually split into literal, interpretive, and reflexive (Mason, 2002). In my study I employ all three, but through a diffractive lens that allows me to think of myself and the data as mutually constituting. This became particularly apparent in the indexing and organizing of data, as explained below. In a way much like the experience that MacLure describes, data 'told me' how they wanted to be organized – without disregarding, however, the entanglement of data and researcher: what data chose to tell me was also contingent on what I was ready to hear.

Indexing and organizing data

For my indexing of the data, I turned to qualitative approaches to data analysis while leaving a window open for experimentation. As I became with the data, I used both cross-sectional analysis and contextual indexing (Mason, 2002). I started out, in traditional qualitative fashion, indexing my data in NVivo software using literal (what happens), interpretive (what it means) and reflexive (what it tells us about research and ourselves) codes, based on the questions asked (initially the 'main' codes) and the types of answers received (initially the 'sub' codes). The hierarchy of codes into main (my questions) and subsidiary (the answers) quickly dissolved in a truly rhizomatic way, as some clusters of answers took over some of my questions.

For example, I had a question on experiences of home (initially a main code), but the participants did not find it interesting and had not much to say about it. *Home* quickly turned into a sub code that showed up only when relevant to something else. Instead, many of them mentioned how their own fathers affected their choice to care, which turned into a main code. The indexed data were treated as 'unfinished resources', meaning they were primarily used as a thematic organizing of the data that allowed me to ask further questions and seek the links (Mason, 2002, p.157). Acknowledging the limits of cross-sectional analysis, these categories/codes were open and flexible, sometimes changing along with the research, and also ignored whenever some piece of data resisted categorization.

Soon I noticed that this type of indexing removed too much of the context of each participant's life history. As another layer of indexing, I started documenting the parts of data that emerged as stories, in which context mattered more than individual responses to each question (Mason, 2002). This allowed me to build better comparisons and make better arguments resulting in an analysis that is thematic and additionally uses cases studies (Shirani *et al.*, 2012 previously used a similar approach to study male primary carers). For this reason, the end product of this analysis are three empirical chapters that vary slightly in structure and presentation. Chapter Five employs a more contextual reading, focusing on case studies, while Chapter Six emerged more naturally from the cross-sectional part of the analysis. Chapter Four draws from both indexing processes.

Analysis using Deleuzian concepts

According to Barad, theories are performative of the phenomena they seek to understand, as 'apparatuses are productive and part of phenomena' (2007, p.199). Doucet, when revisiting previous research, applied new materialist concepts on research that was previously done from phenomenological and social interactionist perspectives, proving that a different ontological approach to data can provide new analysis and thus new results (2013).

In my analysis, the ontological concepts borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari are part of my reading of the data. MacLure writes that analysis

might be a matter of alertness to the mobius strip of sense/nonsense that runs through Deleuze's two primary series, bodies and language, focusing on instances where that frontier line between the two can almost be glimpsed as it rises to the surface (2013, p.665).

The Möbius strip, that seemingly has two surfaces that end up as one, captures Deleuze's view on language. Language does not belong 'on one side of two already distinct realms – discourse and matter – that will connect in the mangle. Rather, language is the 'metaphysical surface' (Deleuze, 2004, p. 278). A Deleuzian approach to textual data is, therefore, not by default representationalist and interpretivist. A Deleuzian approach would be more akin to viewing the transcribed interview text as a material-discursive event.

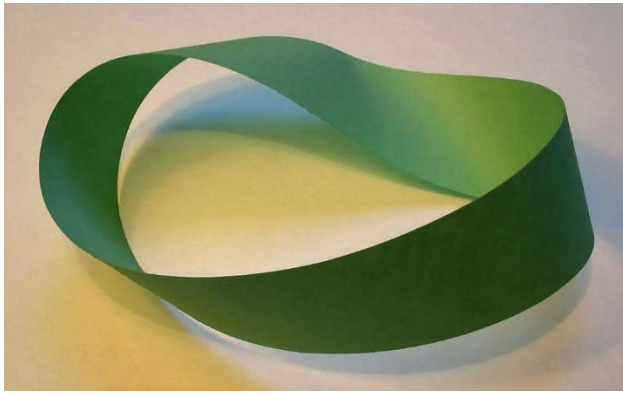


Figure 3.3 Möbius strip. By David Benbennick.

Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=50359>

My analysis of the interview data, combined with my own observations recorded in the field diary, sought this ‘alertness to the Möbius strip’ of language. The analysis was done on all three – literal, interpretive, and reflexive/diffractive – registers (Mason, 2002) using the concepts outlined in my ontology as building blocks. Below I revisit these concepts as they are used in the following chapters – however, I offer more and varied definitions of them throughout the text, aiming at an understanding that will come to the reader experientially and through handling the data. I start from the concept of **difference in itself**: the Deleuzian view of difference that exists on its own and not as an absence or lack of something else. Difference as lack contributes to a binary logic in which something is either *one* or not-one (they call this *multiple*). Difference in itself leads, instead, away from binaries and to *multiplicities*. To understand this, I use **becoming**, which means

to be part of a process by which the stable identities—the majorities—are dissolved in creative acts in which more fluid “identities” are created, but only as the by-products of the process itself (May, 2003, p.150).

For male primary carers, *caring* is part of this *process* of becoming; stable, *majoritarian* identities (man, father, mother, etc.) give way to fluid, *minoritarian* identities (becoming-carer). Becomings start from the potentialities of human and non-human bodies and can lead to *lines of flight*.

The **rhizome** explains how becomings move between identities by forming rhizome lines, as ‘rhizome lines oscillate between tree lines that segment and even stratify them, and lines of flight or rupture that carry them away’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p.588-9). It also tells us how, by having ‘no beginning nor end, [being] always in the middle, between things, inter-being’ (Goodley,

2007, p.149), it is open to possibilities and is able to form infinite connections. Finally, **de- and re-territorialization** speak of de- and re-stabilization of identities. This is a process somewhat similar to doing and undoing gender. They are both parts of a becoming as they are

variable processes in which these components become involved and that either stabilize the identity of an assemblage, by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries, or destabilize it. The former are referred to as processes of *territorialization* and the latter as processes of *detrterritorialization*. (DeLanda 2006, p.12).

Chapter 4:

Queering work-life balance: rhizomatic practices and minoritarian perspectives

A re-framing of their relationship to paid work and care is something that emerged among almost all the fathers I met. Masculinities have been associated with paid work and breadwinning identities. Previous research on men who do childcare overwhelmingly agrees that, regardless of the volume of care they provide, men still consider paid work as central to their lives, view themselves as providers and even take up activities that resemble ‘masculine’ work such as home improvements and communal work (Doucet, 2004; Doucet and Merla, 2007; Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2011; Chesley, 2011; Shirani, Henwood and Coltart, 2012). With such strong ties between masculinity and paid work is there space, then, for men to challenge these breadwinning identities?

More recent research has argued that male carers have displayed a greater shift in valuing care and disassociating from paid work (Rochlen, McKelley and Whittaker, 2010; Wall, 2014; Lee and Lee, 2016), which might suggest that this has started changing, albeit only among middle classes. Paid work is very much the unit of discussion in this chapter, the notion we seek to ‘queer’. By queering, I mean a destabilizing of the binary logic that maintains gendered hierarchies between paid work and its perceived opposite, whether that is unpaid labour, childcare, or family. Paid work is traditionally associated with masculinity and work ethic is central to our lives (Weeks, 2011); it is therefore essential to address it as the root of the devaluing and feminization of care. While for mothers the problem with work and care is justifying that they can do both, for men it is disassociating with a work-based masculinity that poses the greater challenge. In this chapter, I ask the question *do male primary caring practices queer this gendered*

binary of work and care? In other words, is care valued more but, most importantly, is paid work starting to lose its centrality to men's subjectivities?

To explore these questions, I use the concept of *becoming*. Displacing work from this binary system means that men will have to re-frame the relationship between work and masculinity – something which, in previous research, seemed hard for them to do. This displacement is an act of becoming: a de-stabilizing of identities, which are locked in binaries, through the emergence of difference, which is multiple. Becoming means assuming the minoritarian position of a carer – in other words, it is a deterritorialization, a line of flight, which are 'the trajectories which open up possibilities for becoming-other' (Fox, 2002, p.359):

To become is to be part of a process by which the stable identities – the majorities – are dissolved in creative acts in which more fluid "identities" are created, but only as the by-products of the process itself. [...] In undermining stable identities, becomings do not substitute other stable identities or fixed terms for the abandoned ones. (May, 2003, p.150)

This undermining of identities is not the same as substituting them; there is no tossing one identity to pick up another, but a creative process of undoing. Becomings are open, always in the middle, with no start or end. The concept of the *rhizome* also reflects that. It stands for a different approach, one that starts from below, from the experiences and the practices and expands from there, instead of finding a place in the hierarchized tree of pre-determined, pre-fixed, binary identities. I find becomings and rhizomes to be concepts particularly useful in discussing the participants' experiences, as they give us ways to imagine the shake-up of binary-based identities. Rosi Braidotti has written on becoming-minoritarian for men and how this does not imply a destruction of gender or going beyond gender. It has a non-teleological nature that aims at transformations, redistribution and displacement:

What becomes central instead is the process of undoing, recomposing, and shifting the grounds for the constitution of sexed and gendered subjectivities. (Braidotti, 2011, p. 279).

For male primary carers it is this process of undoing –and undoing gender dualisms in particular— that I am interested in.

In this chapter I discuss in detail these experiences, which I have split into three loose groups depending on the time spent in care and work. The first group comprises of long-term,

full-time carers, who are often part-time workers as well. The second includes fathers on shared parental leave that lasted between three to six months, and the final group is about the fathers I call full-time carers *and* full-time workers. This includes single dads and partnered dads who work full-time but are main carers. Almost half of my participants belonged to the first group (14), while the rest were split between the other two (8 and 5 respectively). I choose to group them in this way not only because of structural differences in their work-care experience, but also because the findings show similarities. All of the participants challenged ideas about work, but did so in different ways.

Full-time carer (Stay-at-home), sometimes part-time worker	Mark, Sam, Matthew, Daniel, Greg, Colin, George, Nathaniel, Eric, Lewis, Max, Vinny, Andrew, Charles
Parental Leave	Pete, Albert, Chris, Robert*, Ben, Giovanni, Ian, Jordan, Ron
Full-time worker, main carer	Robert*, Tony, Nick, Will, Michael

Table 4.1 Work-care arrangements of participants

*Robert had been on parental leave before and at the time of the interview he was a full-time worker and main carer.

Key findings

4.1 Full-time carer, part-time worker dads: falling into place

They call themselves “full-time dads”, “stay-at-home dads”, and “househusbands” even when they do paid work on a part-time basis. Worker, parent, carer are not static or monolithic ways to make sense of one’s self. Goodley says that parents are like rhizomes and that ‘[r]hizomes/parents are not models but maps with multiple entryways’ (2007, p.150). As paid work, unpaid work, and an ethic of care are not independent structures but pieces in an

assemblage of daily life practices, these fathers challenge such distinctions and *rhizomatically*, (meaning from below, from their practices, through *becomings*) put themselves on the map. As they are the fathers who are the most distanced from the world of waged work, they seem keener to question its current structure. As they are the main carers without a specific timeframe limited by parental leave, it seems natural that childcare has become their priority. Yet after a closer look, childcare has not simply become a priority, but work has also lost its prominent status. Both happen at the same time.

It is in part necessity, in part decision that set new lives in motion. The work-care arrangements can assume different forms, depending on the family's practical needs, but also on the parents' values and wishes. Eventually, many of the parents view this experience as "it just happened" and "it all fell into place". Eric (48), a stay-at-home father for his two children who lives in a small town in Southern England, calls this "a pragmatic approach": what happens when life gives you certain circumstances and you do your best to adapt to them.

It works, it just works. It's pragmatic. And you can't afford to think I'm a man, I can't be doing this... I've never been brought up to think that way. It's kind of whatever works, whatever makes life easy. Don't put anybody on a pedestal. If it needs doing, just do it. – Eric (48, stay-at-home dad to his two primary schoolers)

Eric's own experience as a child connects to his approach. He grew up watching his father looking after the children whenever the mother had seizures. This "falling into place" experience includes both needs and desires. What Eric is describing is a rhizomatic process of not taking root into fixed identities. Taking root would mean being one or multiple, meaning being part of a binary, one or the 'other'. Making rhizomes means, instead, discovering difference in itself and making *multiplicities*. When roots dig deeper, rhizomes expand and make alliances, relations. Eric's experience of watching his father as a carer taught him that "if it needs doing, just do it", that *capacities* are more important than clinging onto ready-made identities.

However, the work-care arrangements of the fathers in this group largely follow a well-known pattern for many UK middle-class households: the one-and-a-half breadwinner, albeit in reverse, with fathers as the part-timers instead of the mothers. Out of the 14 fathers who identified as full-time carers, 10 of them engaged in part-time activities that earned them some income and one was actively seeking for a part-time position. In today's UK childcare landscape, childcare costs are so high that many households opt for one parent taking up care, thus saving on childcare costs, but not leaving work completely (Lewis, Campbell and Huerta, 2008). There is also

additional value placed on care provided within the family as inherently better when compared to institutional care (McDowell *et al.*, 2005).

Participants cited all of the above reasons as factors that affected their decision. Yet several differences from the norm led to a diversion from traditional gender roles and to a process of becoming for the fathers and the families. The fathers had a keen interest in taking up a caring role, but what was more prominent was a deep dissatisfaction with work. Job loss or work dissatisfaction have been previously cited as reasons fathers become primary carers (Chesley, 2011). In this study, job loss was cited only once (although in conjunction with dissatisfaction) and job dissatisfaction took various forms. The desire to care and a dissatisfaction with work are not separate, but parts of a tangle of threads as messy as the experience of caring and first-time parenting itself.

For some participants, disappointment and often mental health problems came from work. For Lewis (45), work was “driving him to an early grave”. In his household in a small community in Hampshire, where he worked in sales and his wife was a stay-at-home parent with some paid caring hours on the side, they decided to do a complete swap. His wife went full-time as a formal carer and he took up informal care for their three children. While he was looking for a part-time role to earn some extra income, his view on work was that it is only a necessity:

A career is fine if that's what you want to do. I've done all that, the careers, the ladder stuff. I only ever worked for money. It's hard to find a job you love. [...] It's so much [more] stressful out there now. Work these days really does suck. It's not as much fun as it used to be. – Lewis (45, stay-at-home dad to his three children of ages 13, 6 and 3)

The corporate world also left new fathers disappointed. George (46) reflected on the first time he left his job in a high-profile industry in a field he used to love, in order to care for his first child. He admits it was not so much a decision made around caring necessities, but mostly because of a deep disappointment with his job:

I didn't have to leave work when I left work. I could have had it now. It would make more sense to wait until I got redundant and get the big payoff. So I think in some ways I was hiding behind the fact that I had to be the primary carer and that was why I was quitting work. – George (46, father of three, alternated caring/working with his wife)

George has been through many career changes and alternated them with periods in full-time childcare. This alternating process helped him settle into what he really wanted from a job and from life:

That relentless pressure of performing in a role... I'm not really a kind of corporate person. I started working for a small organization and just ended up having a bit of a breakdown really and just [had] been driven slightly mad through anxiety and stress. And since then we both sort of levelled that a bit. I don't know why it took so long to reach the realization that you just get by if you don't get into a panic about money and if you don't mind compromising a little bit.

For many dads, leaving the world of waged work behind and taking up care has even been an opportunity. This is in stark contrast to previous research (Chesley, 2011; Doucet, 2004; Merla, 2007; Shirani *et al.*, 2012), in which fathers had discussed even a 'violent loss of identity' because they couldn't provide (Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2011, p.27). Aitken (2000) has previously encountered something similar to an opportunity when a participant mentioned that a child did not limit his career opportunities but instead encouraged him to work harder. 'Opportunity' is something mothers would rarely mention when it comes to caring duties, giving evidence of privilege in both Aitken's participant and mine. However, in my study the opportunity has been of an entirely different nature, as participants did not seek to work harder as an expression of bread-winning masculinities, but the 'opportunity' was found in their strategies to actually *escape* the organizational structures of paid work.

Andrew (31), for example, worked in education and was increasingly disappointed with the corporatization of the field. He had a small photography business on the side and managed to focus more on it as he took up primary caring. Similarly, Eric, who had been through teaching and market research jobs, discovered that freelancing as a writer and artist was a much better option. Dead-end jobs and contracts that end are common too, reflecting the precarity of work today. Vinny (34) was in a private sector job that offered no prospects, so he took up care while putting together his own recording studio. As he discovered, caring was more interesting and fulfilling than a job he did not like:

What I was doing, I wasn't in love with it, while looking after my son is much more passionate and means so much more to everything else really. And people's jobs are important to them. They like their work, possibly, and the idea of being important in their work, but I didn't really care about that. I wanted to go out of work, get into this new [thing], looking after him and starting an adventure. – Vinny (34, stay-at-home dad for his one-year-old)

Vinny also admitted that he was not very career-driven from the beginning. Colin (42) too always dreamed of being self-employed. He left a well-paid job to care and set up a successful parenting blog, initially for fun.

I always wanted to be self-employed and work for myself. So this has actually presented me with an opportunity to do it and now that I've done it I can't see myself going back. [...] Having that sort of job, fitting it around the kids is probably going to become more common I suspect, even for guys. It'd be nice to have a regular income but you do what you have to do for your family. – Colin (42, stay-at-home dad for his two children, ages 6 and 2)

Colin's comment is a reminder of the structural realities of work today and especially in the UK. Workdays are not made for people who care; nine-to-five was set up for breadwinner-homemaker households (Weeks, 2011). Time and the working day was a recurrent theme throughout the interviews.

Colin seems to have been interested in being self-employed even before having a child, but not everyone was driven from the beginning. For many, more or less "it happened", as they took up some freelance work for financial reasons and found it much more satisfying, allowing time for care, and fitting well around caring hours. Marc (41) used to work 9 to 5 for a graphics design company. He enjoyed the work itself, but loathed the structure and the possibility for career advancement was slim. Being a stay-at-home dad meant that he was able to care full-time for his daughter and earn some money on the side by freelancing for the same company he used to work previously, as an employee. This gave him a sense of freedom which he intends on keeping once his daughter goes to school. He should then be able to work part-time as his own boss, while he is currently building a client base.

I won't be returning back to work full time, definitely not my last employment. Working part time on a freelance basis for them is brilliant. I won't be going back to graphic design fulltime, I don't want to pursue it that much anymore. It pays its bills and it's an easy way for me to go in for a week and earn quite a bit of cash [...] If I did go back to work and do anything, not working for myself, it would have to be the part time [...] But I quite like working by myself. – Marc (41, stay-at-home dad to a one-year-old)

Marc's example shows that the problem with work for some people can be found in its structures, not its content. He is also determined that he is not going back to being an employee. Other dads

stressed the same thing and, even though freelancing can be hard work, it actually helped them maintain better mental health. Andrew explained that combining caring and freelancing is stressful, but it is a kind of stress he can manage, whereas the stress in his previous job, was not.

Previous literature on home-working fathers has shown that, although the spatial organization of work changes, the binaries of work and care remain as the traditional division of labour persists at home (Halford, 2006). However, Halford's research was conducted with men who worked from home for companies and who, in other words, remained within the organizational structure of waged labour albeit with a renegotiation of spatial practices. In my study, the fathers considered themselves primary carers first, they were usually freelancers in charge of their work, and emphasized that this work was of secondary importance. These new lives might have fallen into place well, but not all participants were free from struggle. For the more career-driven, it has been a problem. Greg (44) is a full-time dad of two and a journalist living in the outskirts of London. He discussed how deprioritizing a career can be more of a necessity rather than a choice:

I guess there's a challenge in having to deprioritize your work, to have all these inflexible things that stop you doing what you were doing before... a sense of loss of status – isn't exactly the right word but that side of you can't work as much as you used to, can't do the same sort of projects you used to, you can't just go off abroad on an assignment. So your options, your world becomes smaller. You're not making the same progress in your career the same way as your peers were where you were before. – Greg (44, stay-at-home dad for his two children, ages 6 and 3)

Greg was already in a field that involved working from home and on his own initiative, so the patterns of work and its type were not the real change for him. The real change was questioning career ladders, competitiveness – effectively, a sense of self that relies on success in work. He too, shows a shift in his priorities as he reflects on the choice to leave these things behind:

Before we had kids – I've written a couple of books, big project, quite an egotistical thing to do. It was quite vocational, like a mission, whereas the job I've got now it's interesting and I enjoy it but it's just a job in a way that work wasn't before. It's just something I do to help pay the bills. And it's good for me psychologically as well, it kind of fits round other things perfectly so that's a big part of it. If you'd tell me ten years ago that I'd be doing my current job I'd probably been a bit disappointed. But actually it's fine. So because

everything else has changed, my priorities have changed. [...] I haven't got a great job, but I've got a great life and that's preferable.

This change is not simply starting a family. It is not even becoming a father. It is *becoming-carer* that brings forth this fragmentation as a line of flight. This is the process that dissolves the fixed identities into more fluid ones. In a way, caring has been again an opportunity, to not just start a better job but to view one's self in a different light. For Greg it is this valuing of care, this line of flight from heteronormative gender roles that helped him distance himself from work-based masculinities and maintain that he has "a great life and that's preferable".

Charles (38), a tree surgeon living in a small town in Southern England, became the primary carer for his second child and transferred his skills from the public to the private sector by taking up freelancing. He doesn't think of going back to the way things used to be.

E: Has this experience changed the way you view paid work now?

C: Yes. Now whatever I go back to when my youngest is older I'll probably always try and not work full-time. Before I was very career-based, loved my work I always wanted to do what I ended up doing [...] I'd like to go back to it but now I wouldn't go back to it full-time because [of] the value of the family structure and home, being at home is more... So when I do get back, if we can afford, I won't take such a high ranking job [...] so I can pick and choose my work and make it fit around family commitments. – Charles (38, stay-at-home dad to his two-year-old)

Charles shows a similar shift of priorities that Greg experienced. A career within organizational structures, associated with hegemonic masculinities, used to be important to him but now it has taken the backseat. Charles' caring experience has been instrumental to that:

I probably would have gone for [the promotions], because that's what you do. You climb the ladder. But I don't think it would have made me happier. I think now having done this, I'll go back with a completely different philosophy and say I don't want to be upper management I want to be able to work here, do what I do and spend more time with my family.

This shift of priorities is not about putting family above everything else – this could happen simply by initiation into parenthood. It is rather the caring experience that produces this change. It is an embodied experience of the world that rhizomatically produces new, multiple, fluid identities

through practices. The reason for this shift is evident in the views of the fathers on their caring experience and on care itself. By assuming the minoritarian status of the carer they have produced a line of flight. Vinny (who worked with short-term contracts in the private sector) and Lewis (who left his job in sales due to the stress it was causing him) reflected on that, showing appreciation for care and an understanding of women's experiences they would not have otherwise:

It's such a good thing for a man to spend some time, find out what's it about, what the mum has to go through. You got an understanding. So I have more understanding now that I would ever have. – Vinny

Sometimes I think some people should just do it for a year. Take a career break and look after the kids for a year, have fun with them. Even women do it. Career women, they do it all the time. And my dad, used to work [from] 6 o'clock in the morning [to] 6 o'clock in the night, he said yeah, I missed half of your growing up. And we don't want that with ours. [...] It helps because they get both sides of the story. – Lewis

However, Eric offered a different type of piece to this puzzle. He spoke as being attached to his masculinity, describing himself as an "alpha male". Stressing masculinity is something other researchers have noticed before, such as Doucet who described a dad thinking of construction workers and how he felt just as manly because he could 'dig up the road any day' (2001, p.172). Yet this was something only two of my participants mentioned (Eric and Andrew, both in the first group of stay-at-home dads). Andrew in particular, although he emphasized his heterosexuality often throughout the interview, also said "I think I'm probably quite feminine in being a man. I'm not a manly man, blokey bloke, I don't go to the pub. I don't like football". Here he distances himself from what he thinks a stereotypical masculinity in his small community and does not hesitate to call himself "quite feminine". There is a simultaneous doing and undoing of gender order. Researchers recently have argued that male carers begin to incorporate femininities into their sense of selves, creating new, more flexible masculinities (Rochlen, McKelley and Whittaker, 2010; Wall, 2014; Lee and Lee, 2016) – something that seems to be the case with Andrew, even if he re-asserts hetero-normative masculinity in other instances.

Eric, in the following quote, takes care out of its supposed feminized, 'soft' qualities and rationalizes it as a masculine thing:

There's still a hell of a lot of other men who think it's women's work, you shouldn't be doing it. It's macho stuff. I'm actually very macho [...] However, it's pragmatic. You just

have to get along with whatever you get and be in that flexibleness and attitude of being pragmatic, it's what makes you survive. Some of these guys are like 'blimey, you can cook and iron?' I'm like yeah, can't you? 'I've never done any of this stuff'. Well that makes you rely on women! If you can cook you're not relying on anybody.

Eric illustrates the gender problematic around care. As something feminized, it has been underappreciated. But it seems that he appreciates it by turning it into something masculine. This is a concern which haunts this field of research: if care is valued because it turns into a 'male thing' then femininity remains un(der)valued. However, things turn out more complex. Eric said he "can't afford to think [he's] a man, [he] can't be doing this", calling his choice "pragmatic". He describes care as quite masculine, promoting autonomy and self-sufficiency, but also understands it something necessary for everyone and for life itself:

If you can wash and you can shop you don't need anybody, you're self-sufficient. It's a good feeling. Because it means you can survive, you are equipped. It's like foraging. Basic caveman stuff. It's survival. It's not that's woman's work, that's man's work. That's life.

This initially quite masculine description of care, gradually loses its gendered character. It echoes the suggestion that came from many of the carers: as many men as possible should try it. It hints at a different experience, at the need to retrace the lines and create new shapes. Even though Eric thinks of care through his own masculinity, this is not necessarily a negative thing. He would think of care through his self in any case, as it is not an experience separate from him. What is important is that the shapes of these practices and becomings are mapped in subtly differential ways. Eric, eventually, comes to value care for what it is: important to life, difference in itself. It is not difference as absence, as different from what *is*, but difference in itself, drawing value from its own existence.

This remapping of positions has been made apparent in many little ways. Overwhelmingly, primary caring dads seem to challenge the one-and-a-half breadwinner model, exactly because gender roles are reversed. Being the 'half' breadwinner contributes to women's overall lower earnings, as 42% of women in the UK work part-time, while men part-timers are at 12% (Office for National Statistics, 2013). Yet the way it currently works for these fathers it means a practice of the *universal carer* is encouraged, as they are able to see what it is like to combine care and paid work. More than that, their practices go past the universal carer into challenging the centrality of work and destabilizing its importance through their differential becoming. This is

particularly prominent in couples that alternate between periods of care and work and do not simply follow a reversed breadwinner-homemaker or one-and-a-half breadwinner arrangement.

George and Maria were an example of alternating working and caring roles for their three children during the course of a little more than a decade. As most of the parents interviewed were new parents, it is exciting to think that they might follow patterns similar to George's and Maria's in the future. George explains how, again, things more or less "happened":

I guess we're unusual because both of us have been through such tangent career changes. Two of them were imposed on me and one wasn't. I've been through three different industries and people usually plough on one career but we've been quite flexible. –
George

In their interview, they both got to reflect on their life histories in a way they had not done before. George mentioned how being the homemaker has actually been rather stressful, although not as stressful as a full-time job he hated. When Maria was the breadwinner, he felt bad at how when she returned from work, the house was often a mess. He admitted that childcare is inherently chaotic and keeping the house in shape was almost impossible. Yet this did not stop him from feeling like he was not keeping his end of the bargain. Reflecting on that, he says:

It was only an issue for me when the roles were polarized. [...] If we're both working or both childrearing it doesn't matter because we're both quite chaotic people anyway so I think we don't mind. When it's mutual, when you've seen each other throughout the day or the week it doesn't matter because you're both aware of what's been going on and why the washing up hasn't been done for a couple of days or why there's no white socks. But when you're polarized in those roles you don't have the insight... [...] clearly it doesn't work with us when we have those delineated roles so clear. One of us is really happy and the other is utterly miserable. Maybe that's why we haven't done more of those absolute black and white roles.

George's realization is instrumental to understanding the experiences of these fathers and their families. Trying to fit into the mold of a breadwinner-homemaker model has been stressful. A dual earner pattern, when both worked full time, was their worst experience. Negotiating these arrangements and finding a schedule that keeps both happy has been much more satisfying. The pattern that makes them the happiest is both being involved in care and work, even if this sometimes means that both work part-time and their income is limited. Currently, George works full time and Maria works part time. Both allow ample time for care and although money is just

enough, they much prefer it this way. In a world that puts tremendous pressure on workers to justify career breaks and not lose their skills, taking time out of work sounds daunting, and maybe is not for everyone. But effectively what this example illustrates is that the experience of caring can reshape working lives. The notions are binary, but reality is rhizomatic and multiple. Immersion in the experience of caring, even for a while, can be the key in changing the way we think. Dads on paternity leave did exactly this.

4.2 Dads on parental leave: between two worlds

The time of the interviews (November 2014 to November 2015) coincided with the introduction of Shared Parental Leave in April 2014, which enabled more fathers to care. Although the change in parental leave policy was not radical it was nevertheless significant. Later during my fieldwork I met more fathers on parental leave, who were aware of the legislation and intended to make full use of it. Sadly, this is not the case with many families who are not aware of these options or are not structurally able to do a share in childcare, usually for financial reasons. Indeed, between 2009 and 2012 only between 55-60% of fathers took (an extremely limited, as seen in Chapter 1) paternity leave for various reasons – among them 49% said that they could not afford it (Kelly, 2010; Williams, 2013).

While many among the full-time carer, part-time worker dads have managed to leave the world of waged work by going freelance, dads on paternity leave know they have to return to it. Their feelings about work and care, as well as their view of the future, were shaped according to this knowledge. Of all dads, they seemed to be the ones experiencing the most rapid change perhaps because of the brief, immersive, full-time caring experience. As Ian said, “You’re doing something you’ll never get the chance to do again. She’ll be this age once. You’re immersed in an experience that will never be repeated”. They seemed to embrace what Goodley calls ‘a philosophy of the present and a becoming’ (2007, p.155). Through immersion in a block of caring time they were able to build their own story, different and even resistant to well-known narratives of masculinity and fatherhood.

They, too, mentioned mental health problems. Albert and Jordan, both Bristol dads who had clerical and sales jobs, discussed stress and possible career changes after going back to work, as the experience of childcare had them thinking about an alternative work-life balance. They

both appeared to be suspended between two lives, and the future was still open on to how to reconcile these. This in-between state is what a becoming is all about, as it is always in the middle. Ron, who was higher on the pay scale and happier with his job as a psychiatrist, said:

Part of me is looking forward to going back because looking after a baby is really hard work [...] it's different. My job's tricky but not hard and relentless in the same way, so part of me is [looking forward to going back]. And obviously part of me would quite happily just carry on doing this. – Ron (39, on paternity leave for his ten-month-old)

Ron is in the middle, like a rhizome, but this uncertainty causes him some unease. Chris (30) illustrated this tension best. After caring for his son for six months, Chris had to return to his job as a policeman and showed a lot of worry regarding where his identity lies:

In about eight weeks' time it's time for me to go back to work. [...] I need to request a shift pattern so I can leave work at 4 pm [...] But at the same time I'm aware of a possible promotion as soon as I get back that I would be eligible to apply for so it's definitely put me into a bit of a conflict about am I a working guy now? Or am I more, is being a dad more important? And where is the trade off? Can I be both at the same time? [...] So I switch between the two basically. Sometimes I wanna give up work and be a stay-at-home dad full time and other times I'd rather be at work full time just to raise lots of money so he can have what he needs. – Chris (30, on paternity leave for his 10-month-old son)

Chris is concerned about his working subjectivity: it seems almost incompatible with a caring subjectivity, so he either has to be one or the other. This is part of the binary thought that dominates how we think about not only work-care, but also about gender. Chris is in the middle, cancelling, in a way, both ends of the binary. Because paid work is such strong part of masculinities, making sense of one's self through an additional caring dimension can create a line of flight. What Chris experienced was precisely the fragmentation, the destabilizing of what he thought a fixed identity, and an immersion in becoming-other. This rhizomatic line passes *between* things. Rhizomes oscillate:

The line no longer forms a contour, and instead passes between things, between points. [...] the multiplicity it constitutes is no longer subordinated to the One, but takes on a consistency of its own [...] rhizome lines oscillate between tree lines that segment and

even stratify them, and lines of flight or rupture that carry them away. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.588-9)

Chris is mapping his own becoming by wondering if he can be both things at the same time. On one hand, the 'tree' lines of the world of work and childcare as we know them try to segment him, while lines of flight created by the caring practices seem to be trying to carry him away. Between the two passes the rhizomatic line that Chris forms. The uncertainty both he and Ron describe is about this fluidity that rhizomes embody. *Becoming* means embracing the uncertainty of not being fixed into pre-conceived identities and rather allowing those to emerge through practices.

His worry draws attention to another issue of a much more practical nature: work is structured not for carers, but for workers. We saw this earlier, in Colin's words, when he assumed that people will soon wish to find more ways to fit work around childcare and not the other way around. This is possibly pointing towards a de-centering of work, a questioning of the hierarchy between work and non-work. Chris too has been thinking of ways to reconcile this tension (such as both he and his partner going part-time, like Maria and George), but certainly this will not be an option for everyone. He also resolved to commit to caring as his priority and negotiating a four-day work week, while keeping an eye on the promotion that will bring more money to the household. Money still features, but there is no masculinity commitment to earnings and long working hours – Chris prioritized a four-day work week instead.

For others, there was a clearer reversal of career and caring priorities. Ben, a gay dad who works as a social worker in London, was already back at work when I met him. After going back to work full-time in a quite important position, he realized that was not what he wanted anymore:

Before I kind of wanted to be an important person in my career. I think a lot of people, you are ambitious, you want to be respected, you want to be in a position of authority maybe. And I almost say that I do not have that desire. I took over the role earlier this year and for a few weeks maybe a month I was like oh, I'm in these meetings and I feel powerful and I'm control of this or that. And then after a few weeks [...] it gets so clear how thin that really is. I think being a parent has made me feel a real, deep understanding of how being important in the world is not that important. I'm not gonna say something so sentimental as 'it's much more important to me to be important to my son' [...] That goes without saying. But being important in the world is just not important to me. I'll enjoy being called Doctor if I finish my PhD but it just doesn't hold the weight it did before. – Ben (40, previously a single carer for his six-year-old)

It is interesting that, among the dads who returned to work, it was gay dads who experienced this reversal most and also experimented with alternating care and work. The reasons are many, including how they had to go through a lot to have their children. To them, caring has been more of a conscious, persistent choice. Their periods of solo caring have been significantly longer from the beginning and without the presence of a female partner. Giovanni, another gay adoptive dad, also added that adoption

... puts a weird kink on those things. Because you can't fall back on your patterns too much. You're constructing all these things artificially and I think the other part is being gay also lets you be way less attached to what society expects of you because you've already broken every other rule, so why not break this one? I'm already outside the ruleset so I can figure out what I want instead. – Giovanni (34, used to be stay-at-home dad for his six-year-old adopted son)

“Making new patterns” is a recurrent theme. At the time of the interview with Ben, his partner Nick was the main carer due to his flexible hours as an academic. But Ben was also in the process of building a freelance career so he could be a full-time freelancer in the future and be able to also have more flexible hours, just like the dads in the first group. Then they would both share equally, something that often seems quite dependent on working hours and schedules. Ben explains his view on how a 9 to 5 lifestyle is just not convenient for primary caregivers:

It's not conducive to childcare. [...] Basically what the trends is nowadays especially in comprehensive secondary schools like academies is they dress the children like businessmen and they have this 9 to 5 day and it's almost like contracting them into this business culture. And I don't want that. [...] The rhythm of childcare is a very different rhythm than that of work – Ben (40, previously a single carer for his six-year-old)

His view is aligned with Weeks' (2011) observations on 9 to 5 as the legacy of breadwinner/homemaker division of labour and with Bowlby's (2012) *caringscapes* on the importance of time-space trajectories in care. Part of what he and other fathers are doing challenges this temporality structured around a binary. This happens through a fluid, ever-changing use of time that flows *with* the rhythms of childcare.

Matthew, an academic, and Giovanni, a banker, are another London couple that alternated – first with Giovanni's one-year adoption leave and then with Matthew's choice to leave his job and take up caring for some time. Giovanni discussed how he finally had time to reflect on work and it completely changed his views on it:

I've been working since I was 19, full-time, always working. I never had a break and so this is the first time when I had no job so actually I had the time to think about what I'd been doing all this time. And it wasn't that great a feeling actually. I wondered what value I added to the world, which is a question I probably wouldn't have asked before. And this is totally cliché but it totally resets your priorities. Work was important and you need to push, and fight and put all your energy into it. That's totally gone away. I feel like the biggest insight was 'it doesn't matter'. Really it does not matter at all. [...] But I'm trying to draw a distinction between 'your family is the most important thing'. That's not what it feels like. It feels more like I want to make sure I did a good job as a father and I turned him into a good human. – Giovanni (34, used to be stay-at-home dad for his six-year-old adopted son)

Notice how both Ben and Giovanni in their respective quotes wish to distance themselves from traditional views of "family is naturally the most important thing". In the change they are describing, family has been the trigger, not the purpose. It is the process, the immersion in care, the *becoming* that brought this. He makes clear how it is the experience of caring that changed him, not simply fatherhood, in the following vignette:

[...] I was trying to explain it to this very ambitious guy and very tough [guy]. And he's not done the caring – I don't know if that makes difference – and he does have a baby. And everyone [at work] thought maybe he will chill out now that he has a kid, that he'll be a bit more understanding and he was like 'if anything, I feel more driven. Now that I have this child I'll make more money, be more successful and throw myself at work so I can provide for my family'. And I can see that, but to me that's not providing. Because then you're just never there! Maybe that's because I was home. I wouldn't have felt that way. – Giovanni (34, used to be stay-at-home dad for his six-year-old adopted son)

Giovanni is not sure about his own change from a breadwinning fatherhood to a caring fatherhood, but, after watching his partner Matthew, he thinks that is definitely the case with him. Giovanni was interested in becoming the main carer; Matthew was not. Giovanni describes how, at first, Matthew was like that colleague at work. Yet his own caring experience, later on, was crucial:

Looking at Matthew and comparing myself I think that's how he felt that first year, throwing himself in. And now that he's home he's like 'I don't even want to go back to

work. I like this! Or if I have a job I want a job where I can still be the caregiver'. – Giovanni (34, used to be stay-at-home dad for his six-year-old adopted son)

The alternating pattern that this couple adopted is in many ways similar to George and Maria's. Working hours are stricter for Matthew and Giovanni though, so it will be difficult to have flexible part-time jobs – something Chris found a problem too.

George and Matthew, however, viewed this alternating as a reiteration of a polarity of roles: one goes to work and the other is the carer, thus perpetuating a breadwinner/homemaker binary distinction. While this is true, the reality they were engaging in was much more complex and fluid. The breadwinner/homemaker was one pattern out of many they were trying out, and one that did not remain static but instead was fluid, in becoming. Having seen many sides of combining work and home, these couples are experimenting in ways of doing the *universal carer*, an experience that was changing them.

Long periods of primary care are valuable because they can change attitudes to work and care, promoting a better share of caring duties in the long term. Respect, but also enjoyment of care is something the participants repeatedly talked about. This experience seems to have benefitted the dads in terms of how they view care and women too. Jordan, a father on Shared Parental Leave from Bristol, says:

I respect women more. Mothers more, for doing this. And parents and stuff. When people turn up late and say oh my kid, I understand that now. [...] It does open your eyes. There's a guy I know who goes like 'oh I don't know if I could do that. And I say just do it, apply for it and do it! [...] They can see what women do. Lots of women go like 'my husband would never do what you are doing. He can't get [out] that door quick enough at six past in the morning'. – Jordan (34, on paternity leave for his four-month-old)

Previous research is consistent with these findings. More recent research in particular seems to emphasize that fathers show shifting masculinities that incorporate feminine features as fathers develop respect for care (Rochlen, McKelley and Whittaker, 2010; Solomon, 2014; Wall, 2014; Lee and Lee, 2016). The process of becoming a carer is a Deleuzian *becoming*: by experiencing what is to be 'minoritarian' – in this case, a carer whose position is feminized, marginalized and othered – they value this position as difference but in a positive way, 'in itself', not as the absence of what is hierarchically superior – in this case, hegemonic masculinities. By destabilizing this hierarchical binary, they open up to change.

Regarding their view of work, Ron had time to think on how this reflected on any primary carer's career:

It's been eye-opening. Thinking about women who take time off maternity leave and what that means. There have been quite a lot of opportunities workwise this year. To give my first keynote presentation at a conference for example. Had to say no! – Ron (39, on paternity leave for his ten-month-old)

His realization has more to do with women's current realities. The *universal carer* means exactly this: making the lives of men more like the lives of women. Parental leaves are important because they create this structural similarity to women's experiences of early motherhood (Rehel, 2013). "Getting both sides of the story", as Lewis called it, is essential. The last group, the working dads, know this best.

4.3 Dads in full-time work: living working mothers' lives

While full-time caring, part-time working dads rejected the world of waged work and were not interested in a career anymore, the full-time caring, full-time working dads remain quite career-focused. So is the case with their partners, when these are present. The participants in this group often found themselves to be the main carers due to their partners' work that put temporal and geographical constraints on those partners' availability to care. Nick has a flexible schedule while his partner Ben has not. Will's and Robert's partners both have to commute so far they often have to spend working weeks away from home and return in the weekends. As a result, Robert and Will spend most of the week as single carers and in the weekends the family reunites.

This too is an interesting, rhythmical pattern, similar to George and Maria's arrangements or to Matthew and Giovanni's alternating periods. In a way, these families are experimenting with many family formations – in this case they alternate in shorter periods of time, within the same week. The routines and the dynamics can completely change from one day to the next, flowing, once again, with the rhythms of childcare. Will (45) describes how this is a mixed feelings experience:

The main difference [when my partner is away] is that it's just the two of us. We have dinner just the two of us, breakfast just the two of us. I might telephone her but that loneliness, that's the big difference. [...] When there's three of us it involves more negotiation. But on the other hand it's nice and happy to be the three of us. Sometimes I don't mind when she's away for two days and just have all the time to myself in the evenings. In a way it works quite well. – Will (45, main carer for his 10-year-old)

Will is describing a family in constant motion. These patterns might change again when jobs and locations change, but these different stages create a unique sense of rhythm. This, again, resembles a rhizomatic oscillation, a becoming. Deleuze writes about rhythm:

The rhythm runs through a painting just as it runs through a piece of music. It is diastole-systole: the world that seizes me by closing in around me, the self that opens to the world and opens the world itself (Deleuze, 2003, pp. 42–43).

'The world that closes around me' and 'the self that opens to the world' sound like pieces of a becoming, where the world and its necessities shape the decisions and life patterns of these families, and then the self shapes the world back. One is constantly deterritorializing and reterritorialized by the other.

What is interesting with these fathers is that although they say they changed priorities, they are doing this through and with work, instead of outside it, like the fathers in the first group chose to do. Strong connection to work-based identities has featured prominently in older research (Doucet, 2004; Doucet and Merla, 2007; Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2011; Chesley, 2011; Shirani *et al.*, 2012). However, this study shows some differences. Work is questioned by the fathers of this group, albeit in a more inconspicuous manner. Nick (30), Ben's partner, explained how there was certainly a shift of priorities between work and care, partly because he had already managed to put a career into place and allow himself to focus on a family. In a way, securing a career beforehand allows this smoother shift of priorities. If we applied Brandth and Kvande's (1998) analysis of masculinities (which is, however, with heterosexual fathers and Nick is gay), we could say that Nick has anchored a strong work identity and thus does not feel particularly worried about losing status through care. Yet despite a strong work identity, there is still room to displace work's centrality. Being a gay adoptive father probably has a deeper impact on Nick, especially when compared to Brandth and Kvande's fathers.

This negotiation between childcare and work has not been without its struggles. As a first-time adoptive parent, Nick found he had to learn everything very fast and parent a six-year-old starting from zero:

It's a challenge of fast forward process for yourself. I think it's more of the fear that you think you're gonna lose that part of yourself when you get into the care of a child.

Because it's quite chaotic at the beginning and you have the fear there's not gonna be much time to develop other parts of your identity, like your work. But then you come to realize it's all bouncing itself and it's all manageable and it's not gonna happen. So you go back to knowing what it was. You just have a new aspect in your life and that's all. – Nick (30, main carer for his six-year-old)

Nick has reached a point of understanding regarding identities that Chris, in the previous group, was still trying to resolve – perhaps because Chris hadn't returned to work yet. What is a prominent reversal of priorities for other fathers, to this group it is an added perspective. A career is still important, but it is not associated to a rigid, majoritarian sense of self. It is not career-based, breadwinning masculinity either. Their sense of self and of their masculinity has expanded to accommodate something else—an act of capturing territory through re-territorialization.

Will shows this discreet de-centering of work from his own life. A restaurant owner in London, he describes how being an active carer is actually bringing him a work-life balance he would not otherwise have:

I'm kind of hands off. Many restaurant owners are there all the time, they're there at the evenings, they drink there or they do the till in the evenings. What I do is I delegate and I also trust the people. That's the only way I can do it. That's the main difference probably from the typical restaurant owner. I hardly work in the evenings for example because that's family time for us. I think I also accept that not everything is perfect all the time. In a way maybe my son is a safety net for me as well not to go mad or crazy with work. – Will

Will's universal carer life is actually beneficial for him. Nick finds this harder to do, as his flexible hours mean he is thinking about work all the time. He gave an interesting insight on the 9 to 5 structure. While it would be more difficult for him to do the school hours in a 9 to 5 job, his work would be more clear-cut time-wise:

In such a strict job it would mean that my work is only from 9 to 5 Monday to Friday and that's it. Which means I'm free to do whatever I want for the rest of the time. Whereas now, in an academic career, your work doesn't really have an end. You don't ever stop thinking. [...] Physically I'm not anywhere near Monday to Friday 9 to 5 but mentally I'm locked in different boxes on a very constant level. – Nick

Tony, a single gay dad in Brighton, offered an additional view on managing time. A 9 to 5 actually helps him spend more time with his son:

I own my own company. [...] I'm a bit more 9 to 5 these days. Once he's in bed I put the laptop on and start work again. I get him out of nursery as soon as I can because I want to spend time with him. I could leave him to nursery until 6 but he goes to bed just after 7 so I'd rather have two hours with him in the evening than one. – Tony (41, single father to his 2-year-old)

What all these carers show is different strategies to reconcile a full-time job with full-time caring. Time arrangements can differ depending on their needs, but all discussed how, while work is still important, it is not central anymore. Because of how time-consuming care is, when they shoulder this responsibility it is a case of tailoring work around care, not the other way around.

Robert, also an academic like Nick, although at a later stage in his career, initially took three months of unpaid leave. He is now the main carer of his two toddlers due to his partner's long commutes. Robert accepted this situation, but still showed some frustration about it. He was torn about the feeling that doing all the childcare dragged him behind in his own career advancement as an academic. However, this had more to do with how little society and workplace cultures are accustomed to male carers:

I think I felt very much a tension between different sets of expectations. One, the expectations of what a carer is doing when they're looking after their child [...], and the other set of expectations that I perceive other people have of me in relation to work or social, my friendships, and previously in doing sport. Maybe an issue is that I've kept these things quite separate so probably my colleagues who now have children, I don't know how many of them appreciate how much childcare I do. [...]

In terms of expectations of what fathers will do I think that that could change in a big way. I remember one of the senior members of staff who essentially was my boss for a long time when I was explaining to him I was going to be away for three months he was

like ‘you won’t be doing that again’. It was completely anomalous. I don’t think he really... He thought it was a bit of an aberration. It wasn’t expected. – Robert (34, main carer for his 4 and 2-year-olds)

Robert works in a male-dominated, highly competitive field. He found himself in the position of a woman who wishes to keep track of a career and a family and it was a real challenge:

I think it would be good if my [male] academic competitors did a lot more childcare (laugh). It would level the playing field in terms of my career and it would also help me. I would modify my expectations of what I had to do if I realized that other fathers were doing serious, equal childcare.

Robert points at a lack of support and workplace culture that can enable men to combine work and care. He has found himself in the place many women have in the past few decades, but his positioning as a man in this situation eventually alters it. What Robert shows is that work is the problem as a structure created for people who are not carers – for the default man or father who does not do “serious, equal childcare”. While it can be more accommodating to women, this is often at the expense of their own careers. By not being the default man, by becoming-minoritarian/carer, Robert’s experience sheds light on the real problem of work-life balance: work itself.

4.4 Conclusion

Like the experience of becoming-carer, the research process into it has been fleeting, caught in the middle. It is a brief look out of a window that did not even exist before. As a result, it has its limitations. Not only the limitations of the research itself, addressed in the methodological considerations, but the limits of male primary caring. A simultaneous doing and undoing of gender is unavoidable; the focus here is rather on how the un-doings seem to push towards change. If we ask again, *do caring dads help ‘queer’ work-care or, in other words, question the binary and work’s centrality*, the answer seems to be certainly positive: the spatial and temporal politics of male primary caring lead to a questioning of rigid distinctions between work-care and male-female, as this experience becomes a messy, rhizomatic becoming.

The full-time carer dads, who are the most distanced from the 9 to 5 pattern, seem readier to challenge the centrality of work in their lives. Dads who return to work have to opportunity to look at it from a different perspective: they have to return, but their priorities have changed, so work means different things to them now. The last group of full-time workers seems the least distanced from challenging the importance of work, but they have also changed. They are put into the position most mothers in the UK have found themselves in the past few decades. These examples queer work-life balance by questioning work's centrality, valuing care, and by practicing familial arrangements that are different from the usual models. But this is not all there is to the answer.

Almost all the participants had flexible schedules. The part-timer dads in particular had partners with better career prospects, better income, and who were more career-driven in general. This means that the more women have access to better-earning jobs, the more likely it is for men to take up primary caring. It also possibly makes this a class phenomenon. The participants were largely middle class and it makes one wonder, how many working class women will have access to the well-paying jobs the participants' partners had? However, while this is a limit, other options are possible. Lewis was a working class father and his reasons for switching were due to dissatisfaction with work, as were many others'. He did not have the higher family income other families had, nor the prospects of going freelance, but he was doing it all the same. George and Maria also lived on a limited income, consciously prioritizing life outside work. Nevertheless, the participants had quite similar features. The freelancers were not too career-driven and were interested in self-employment. They were also into arts and journalism, showing similar backgrounds. Becoming self-employed is not an option available to everyone. People will still need part-time employment to fit it around care and it will not always be available. Which takes us to yet another limit: is maintaining a one-and-a-half model really desired?

In the long term, I would answer no, but in a transitional phase like this one it might encourage men to take up care, elevate its status, queer the binary of care and work (see also Doucet, 2016). For women, the one-and-a-half means an unequal footing in the world of paid work – for men this was rarely a problem, indicating their more privileged position. But for men who do it, it also means initiation into the world of care. The findings show it acts as an equalizer, albeit it retains some of the breadwinner/homemaker binary distinction. This is why insight from the parental leave dads and the full-time working dads has been small, but crucial. Dads on parental leave represented exactly this transitional phase, while full-time working dads were doing the *universal carer*. All three situations unearth specific worries and struggles, as well as

lessons to be learnt, but all contribute to a dismantling and re-constructing of our daily realities. All three are not too far away from one another, but are all facets of the same process, often jumping from one to the other in a truly rhizomatic manner.

Second-wave feminist demands such as twenty-four-hour nurseries would not provide such opportunities and only intensify work for everyone. “I got the best of both worlds,” is how Greg summarized his experience as a full-time dad and part-time freelance journalist. Men doing childcare is key to dismantling the work/care binary and it is reassuring to see how spending time on care actually brings better work-life balance. The problem with work-life balance is still the demands of work. This is by far the biggest and most important limit in male primary caring experience: as long as it is not enabled, male primary caring will remain a sporadic practice.

The need to change work and working cultures is pressing. Many of the working dads admitted that without the flexible hours they could not do it from a 9 to 5 job. The 9 to 5 pattern is central to maintaining the binary of care and work (Weeks, 2011). It is already gendered and unsuited to the lives of people who wish to combine care and work. Work-life balance policies are a reasonable start but work will always be prioritized; radical restructuring is needed. This can only start from questioning work’s centrality – and this is what these primary carers do. Fathers who are both carers and workers, using the limited opportunities they have in a world in which ‘carer’ and ‘man’ are so incompatible. *Becoming carer* means they deviated a little, they queered the meaning of work in their lives.

Chapter 5:

Becoming-carer: Unpredictable bodies and parental lines of flight

How does one engage in a *becoming-carer*? When caring subjectivities are thought as inseparable from motherhood, taking up the role of a primary carer means, for men as well as women, constant comparison to that ideal. Motherhood implies certain rules about how gender should be done and getting outside those boundaries can be disruptive to the established gender order (Aitken, 2000). The participants in this study experienced this distance from the ideal as a gap they had to bridge: they were constantly moving between exclusion from a mothering subjectivity (which was assumed to be natural to mothers) and inclusion into a new kind of caring subjectivity (which they were actively carving through their caring practices). This chapter looks at the embodied experiences of male primary carers, their encounters with maternal and infant bodies, and the ways they engage into what I call a *becoming-carer*: a process in which stable identities are undermined through the affirmation of difference.

Stuart Aitken has previously wondered if men can make sense of themselves as caring fathers in ways other than 'Mr Mum'; if they can think of themselves as caring parents without involving essentialist ideas about motherhood and the 'citational practices' of patriarchy (Aitken, 2000, p.589). While motherhood has a set of prescribed expectations and is considered rooted in biology, fatherhood is seen as largely abstract and subject to social forces instead of biological impulses. Thus fathering has been considered an ad hoc practice, drawing mostly from mothering examples (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006; Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2011; Dermott, 2008; Doucet *et al.*, 2009). On the other hand, Doucet (2001) found that although mothering is a set of practices that can be done by anyone, men who 'mother' might still view their practices as fathering (however reconstructed). Indeed, she says she is 'more inclined to see men's effort as primary caregivers as

examples of constructing and reconstructing fathering and fatherhood, rather than as examples of men's mothering' (Doucet, 2001, p.175) since what they do is re-shaping this vague ideal of fatherhood. So, on one hand, men draw from motherhood to understand their caring practices because motherhood provides the *only* script for a caring identity, while, on the other hand, they might emphasize that what they do is fathering, not mothering, in an effort to weave the ambiguous idea of fatherhood into an identity. Both approaches are symptomatic of a thought binary that creates tension, as one must fall either into one category or the other.

In this chapter I set out to explore *if, among these practices, there also emerges a caring subjectivity that emphasizes neither motherhood nor fatherhood – in other words, a perspective that values caring difference, caring in itself*. The reason for this is that the explicit gendering of parenting roles into a binary system of father/mother consolidates gender dualisms and also freezes the images of mothers and fathers into specific sets of expectations. I am interested in finding the in-between spaces, the imbrications, the interstices where gender binaries are queered and challenged. So instead of a mothering or a fathering subjectivity, I sought out the ways that a *caring* subjectivity comes together. A caring subjectivity emerges from practice, and is open and flexible enough to house fluid identities that do not necessarily fit into dual gender binaries. What I call 'caring practices' largely refers to what Doucet and Ruddick call 'the work of mothering' (Doucet, 2001). However, my choice of *caring* subjectivities is strategic: it seeks to value care in itself. A becoming-carer approach can help affirm exactly carework as having its own value that is decoupled from gendered binary systems—as a 'difference in itself'.

Becoming-carer follows the idea of a Deleuzo-guattarian *becoming*, which describes a process of destabilizing the ends of a binary and opening it up to the possibilities of multiplicities: '[b]ecoming other requires the multiplication of affects, not the intensification of a single affect or relation. It is an opening-up to difference, to possibility and to the 'rightness' of the many rather than the few or the one' (Fox, 2002, p.359). By participating in the 'othered' and feminized practices of care, men can engage in a becoming-minoritarian and trace a line of flight. Note that this does not mean that gender is 'undone'. Doing and undoing gender can be considered as territorializations and deterritorializations that occur *within* a becoming. Maintaining fluidity means maintaining the momentum of a becoming, the betweenness of territorialization (when a whole emerges from its parts) and deterritorialization (when internal homogeneity is destabilized

through the multiplication of affects)¹⁴. It is important to keep in mind that '[t]o hit a line of flight means challenging, not totally escaping, disabling strata of society' (Goodley, 2007, p.151) in the same way that *queering* means destabilizing the binaries, not erasing them, thus hoping to make gender flexible enough to accommodate multiplicity. Therefore I am interested in how one becomes a carer *with* gender, not against it. Becoming carer does not mean attaining access to a previously forbidden world of mothers or fixing carer as an identity. It is rather a *becoming-carer*, a process of moving between identities and making lines of flight.

Embodied subjectivities are key in this chapter. Bodies and the spaces they interact with form the quintessential, non-verbal communication of the early years parenting practices that the participants discuss. Deleuze and Guattari, drawing from Spinoza, argue that bodies are not 'discrete, independent entities' but are 'constituted through their relations with other bodies and things' (Coffey, 2013, p.6) – an approach also encountered in phenomenological work on bodies (Longhurst, 2001; Tahhan, 2008; Lupton, 2012) and new materialisms (Doucet, 2013). But Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the *potentialities* of a body, because theorists of the body 'have been asking the wrong question. Rather than considering what a body is they should ask: *what can a body do?*' (Fox, 2002, p.355). Following Deleuze and Guattari, instead of starting from a fixed idea – father, mother, carer – I start from the potential. I look at caring practices and ask: what do they do? I look at how the practices assemble subjectivities that vacillate between the ideas of motherhood and fatherhood and never assume total places in either of them. This could be called a *queering process* as the binary in parenting roles is challenged.

In this chapter I look at specific cases that illustrate the becoming-carer process through embodied and affective, relational practices that often exceed their circumstances. I start my analysis from the participants' feelings of exclusion from a caring subjectivity, which describe the moments when fathers struggle with fitting into pre-conceived notions of a caring subject, and then proceed to the ways of inclusion and re-creation of a caring subjectivity – the moments of becoming-carer. I ask how do we open up caring identities and, with them, gendered identities so that we move away from preconceived notions of motherhood and fatherhood? What can a *caring body* do?

¹⁴ I am using these terms in the way Manuel DeLanda (2006, p.12) discusses them as 'variable processes in which these components become involved and that either stabilize the identity of an assemblage, by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries, or destabilize it. The former are referred to as processes of *territorialization* and the latter as processes of *detrterritorialization*'.

Key findings

5.1 A sense of displacement: moments of exclusion

The barrier of gender essentialism

Participants often described the mother-infant bond as forbidden territory. The ways they grappled with the micro-exclusions from caring included rationalizations around biology, motherhood, gendered difference, and other societal obstacles. Dermott (2008) and Aitken (2000) encountered the same tension in fathers' rationalizations: many seemed willing to recognize that caring is something men too can learn, but the mothers' perceived biological advantage was always an obstacle. Essentialist notions of gender persist, although they are partially undermined.

Feelings of exclusion were more prominent at the beginning, when the baby arrived and spent more time with the mother. This is consistent with existing literature, as other fathers noticed how differences with mothers were acute during the first twelve months, then subsided (Dermott, 2008). One of the reasons cited as central to the inaccessibility of the mother-infant relationship was breastfeeding. During 2013/4, breastfeeding initiation in England was 73.9%, but after 6-8 weeks breastfeeding prevalence dropped to 45.8% (NHS England, 2015). Although breastfeeding rates in the UK are very low, initiation rates are good (McAndrew *et al.*, 2012), so it is possible that breastfeeding might still feature into this early equation that strengthens a perceived biological advantage of the mother. One study participant, Andrew, spoke of his sense of exclusion from a bond with his first child. However, Andrew discussed how the fact that he knew he was going to take over childcare from his partner reassured him that he would be able to build that bond and feel active at a later stage:

I did feel quite excluded for a couple of months, but I knew in two months I was taking over. I was still heavily involved. [...] We fought very hard to have him breastfed [...] I did lots of research and supported her through that. But yeah mum builds that bond very quickly and it takes much longer for dad. And you feel a bit sad [...] I think after mum and

baby time, you just have to accept that [...] You do feel second best to the baby. – Andrew (31, stay-at-home dad to a one-year-old)

For Andrew, being involved helped him combat feelings of alienation, but also simultaneously made him more aware of his place as an outsider to the mother-infant bond. Research and support was the best he could do regarding breastfeeding – a role that could be viewed both as active/positive and as merely supporting/ancillary. Marc described this special bond as something that turned him into a lesser kind of carer. Although he was present all day and did most day-to-day care for his daughter, he always felt inferior to the mother:

She'd be with me all day and as soon as mum walks through the door...On weekends, if there's two of us in the house and she'll fall over and she'll cry, she'll go straight to mum. All the time. And it is difficult to see it because you think oh, what I've been doing for five days a week? I've been doing really important stuff for five days a week. She's her mum. You can't take it personally. – Marc (41, stay-at-home dad to a one-year-old)

Marc believes this happens because of a maternal, biological bond that occurred between them during pregnancy. Because he referenced that bond, and also how the mother works long hours, I asked him to clarify whether he thinks this preference is because of the bond or because his daughter missed the mother:

Little bit of both. This is probably more the fact that she misses her, and she probably misses her more because of that bond. For the first six months she obviously breastfed her as well, she knows her heartbeat, anything. [to her] You can smell when mum's in the house, can't you?

The accounts of this exclusion seem to go hand in hand with the realities of gestation and lactation. Researchers have previously discussed the mediated nature of fatherhood (Doucet, 2013) as 'one becomes father through the relationship with a woman; it is the women's body that changes' (Magaraggia, 2012, p.81). This mediated experience seems to obstruct the developing of closeness through the carers' own embodied practices. Marc's example also highlights the unpredictability of infant embodiment; the non-discursive, irrational, and affective exist in the encounter with the 'othered' body of an infant (Lupton, 2012). This is a destabilizing process that challenges the notion of the autonomous body with clear boundaries (Lupton, *ibid*). It is part of a process of becoming: rigid ideas of autonomous identities are challenged as differential practices affirm themselves, as we start to see the potentiality of bodies, 'what they can do'.

In another example, Ian and his partner had initially planned a fifty-fifty split with six months of leave for the mother and six months for the father. However, as their daughter was breastfed, this kind of split proved difficult:

I tried to do it before, when our daughter was breastfed and my partner expressed milk and she did a keeping-in-touch day at work. It was very unpredictable about whether the baby would take a bottle, even her mum's milk in a bottle. And unfortunately that day she didn't really take much and was very upset. So I had to take her to my partner's work. And that for us kind of really reinforced the need to get the leave sorted. That's when we reduced it for my part to two and a half months. That was a bit of a wake-up call. – Ian (38, on paternity leave for his 8-month-old)

What Ian describes is a common obstacle which, nevertheless, has been juggled successfully by other fathers who took over very early and while their children were still breastfeeding. In this case, although the parents were trying to get the baby used to the bottle, the reaction from her was unpredictable. Ian's incident illustrates even better how bodies and non-rational agents such as infants are independently agentic and have the power to shape caring practices. This unpredictability of bodies, instead of taking away the participants' agency, it rather makes more prominent how 'matter' too can be agentic (in this case, breastmilk against the bottle) and what ways the carers find to work *with* those processes rather than against them. It pushes further the question of what a caring body can do.

Looking at how the carers rationalized this sense of exclusion can be telling of many things. They usually cited a mix of biology and society as to why they felt that mothers were naturally better at care. Eric believes that raising children as a man and raising children as a woman are completely different experiences:

Bringing up children as a man is a completely different thing in my experience than bringing up children as a woman. You haven't got the emotional bond. Your father is not the same because it hasn't come from your body and hormonally it's completely different. I had a couple of friends who had children and asked them what's the best advice and they said there's nothing that we can really say to you other than if you love them enough you'll get by. It's the only thing you have to hold onto. – Eric (48, stay-at-home dad to his two primary schoolers)

Eric feels like there is nothing "to hold onto" except his own desire to parent and the effort he pours into that. By contrast, and in a very essentialist approach, maternal bodies are viewed as

naturally caring bodies. Genetics, hormones, and biological sciences are often part of the rationalization of this emotional bond that was sometimes described as a mystical experience into which men cannot be initiated. Marc describes it in almost this way:

I think it's probably easier with their mums to keep that relationship going because they have that maternal bond, a bond I'll never have with her, you know. I didn't carry her for nine months. She doesn't know *me* like that. – Marc (41, stay-at-home dad to a one-year-old)

Like Eric, Marc feels he has to make an effort to build familiarity and communication while for the mother this is assumed to be a natural process. Charles, although he is aware that this might be essentialist ("it's sexist to say"), he cannot help but agree that mothers are naturally better. However, he is not sure if it is biology or society or maybe both:

It's sexist to say, but I do believe women may be better at it. From a species point of view [for] most animal mammal species it's generally more female-led activity [...] maybe – as sexist as that is – maybe women are better because of either genetic disposition (they birth the child, they feed the child, so they're more attuned to it) or whether just complicitly because that's the way we've done it as a society, men go to work traditionally very much so. It's not something I take too personally naturally, but there are some dads that do [...] It's still something I have to work quite hard to be good at. – Charles (38, stay-at-home dad to his two-year-old)

Both Eric and Charles felt like they were lacking something, that women had a natural gift or at least a cultural advantage for parenting and caring while they had to do additional work to feel or to be deemed a good carer. Even when justified by societal upbringing, mothers are viewed as natural carers while they had to learn how to be one.

However, this assumed naturalness of motherhood likely reflects middle-class ideals of how mothers ought to be and such conceptualisations leave little room for the validation of other types of mothering. Instead, certain practices are seen as 'bad mothering', and certain bodies are seen as 'bad mothers'. Narratives around the 'ideal' mother can thus often marginalise poor mothers (DeBenedictis, 2012). Moreover, research on early motherhood and parenthood shows that learning how to become a mother is a challenge for new mothers. Accounts of new mothers show the same doubts and fears, in addition to which lies the societal expectation that they should naturally know what to do (Miller, 2007). What both the fathers' worries in my study and the mothers' experiences in Miller's work account for is a common view of motherhood as a fixed,

monolithic entity, an *arborified* identity that makes both mothers and fathers insecure about their position in parental subjectivities. What is arborified *has become* and what has become 'has suffered territorialisation, into a territory that cannot easily be escaped' (Fox, 2002: 359). In contrast to the arborified ideas of parenthood, *parenting* practices are *rhizomatic*, they are constantly *becoming*. Goodley says that '[p]arents are rhizomatic. They shift, forever move, along non-hierarchical networks which can be found in all aspects of life. [...] The rhizome has no beginning nor end, it is always in the middle, between things, inter-being, *intermezzo*' (2007, p.149). These rigid identities start to feel shaky, because they are held up against an ideal that is perceived as constant while the practices are fluid.

Miller encountered this shakiness in her research with mothers. She says that 'initial confusion eventually provides the catalyst for the women to engage in more discursively challenging and creative ways with dominant discourses' (Miller, 2007, p.355). Fathers in my study follow a similar line of flight. Although they are held back by essentialist claims, their experience itself means that they are constantly challenging these conceptualizations. Lewis sees some imbrication of cultural and natural reasons behind this perceived exclusion, but he seems less certain:

Probably it's some part of the bond. I don't know because I'm a man what the bond between a woman and a child can be, but they carry it and deliver it don't they? [...] Society looks down on either woman going back to work or man looking after [...] There's still that stereotype, even if it's gotten better throughout the years, women should be at home looking after the kids. Which is unfortunately the way things are. – Lewis (45, stay-at-home dad to his three children of ages 13, 6 and 3)

Here, the lack of experience is what renders this bond mystical. Likely, "biology," although essentialist in its reasoning, is used by the fathers as a method of explaining an experience they have no access to. Fathers talk of societal roles, but mainly discuss their own experiences of overcoming these obstacles and gaining new knowledge. Their narratives begin to show how this essentialism is shaken, how parental subjectivities can be rhizomatic through a process of becoming-carer. It also highlights how important it is for fathers to engage in this becoming-carer and in this back and forth doing and undoing of binary concepts. Indeed, Lewis later says:

I think dads can [do stuff from the very first month], because I did the [nappy] change thing and [was] looking after him. When the boys don't sleep I have to hold him to sleep every night.

What Lewis is hinting at is alternative ways of bonding that are independent from pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding experiences, which I will go on to discuss later in this chapter.

Starting to question bodily boundaries

Albert's account follows the opposite route. He is more aware of society's impact. He talks of societal roles and how their 'queering' is a tricky task. He concludes that caring roles are roles, but gender will always colour their performance. Here is where he reverts to biology as the final threshold that cannot be overcome:

When a woman goes to work and is a manager of people, is that a male role or is that just a woman being [manager]? Is that a manager role? Did Margaret Thatcher act like a man or a prime minister? Did she act like a man being a prime minister? A woman being a prime minister? [...] I see bringing up a child is a role and a man or a woman can do that role. I think a man will do it slightly different. I think women are naturally more protective of their daughters and their sons and there's evidence to back that up. - Albert (38, on paternity leave for his 10-month-old)

Why is Albert following the opposite route in his reasoning? He, too, is engaging in a doing and undoing by both contesting and confirming gender roles. But his route looks more like a line of flight (anyone can do that role) that is reterritorialized (women are naturally more protective). This forms part of a natural flow that confirms the back-and-forth fluidity of subjectivity, although we must be wary: not all becomings take us to a line of flight. We need to follow the fathers' narratives and see where they lead.

Another reason cited was the mothers' own wish to keep care mostly to themselves. Lewis and Greg both held this view even if their own experience differed:

The wife [stops men from doing childcare]. Some of them can get so protective if they've just given birth. You know it's there, they want to do it. You want to try and help out and do anything and they're like 'no'! - Lewis (45, stay-at-home dad to his three children of ages 13, 6 and 3)

I don't think it's a case of men forcing the women, I think in a lot of cases the women quite enjoy it because they want to cherish the time with the baby and they physically

need time to recover from the childbirth and the pregnancy. [...] I guess sometimes women are quite keen at having that role, being the primary carer, that's a kind of status they are keen to have and my wife's not particularly like that. She wasn't like, 'I am the mum, I need to be, this is what I do, I need to be in charge'. – Greg (44, stay-at-home dad for his two children, ages 6 and 3)

It is interesting how, for both Lewis and Greg, this is an observation they made for other people and not about their own families. Their accounts resonate with what some researchers have called maternal gatekeeping (McBride *et al.*, 2005). As women might want to hold onto their maternal role and thus be unwilling to cede caring activities to others, this 'gatekeeping' is considered one of the reasons that men still find it hard to have a more active role in childcare. Although maternal gatekeeping as a concept to frame this issue has been criticized, the tense negotiations it tries to describe are worthy of further exploration.

Maternal gatekeeping might actually be more symptomatic of the cultural status of motherhood – a position that brings both privilege and marginalization, as well as pressure and increased expectations that mothers want to be in charge of the children. Mothering is, among other things, one way of doing gender and mothers might not want to relinquish that role. This was particularly prominent in maternal spaces, where the father's bodies were in the spotlight and continuously contrasted with mothers' own. In these spaces, mythologies of motherhood play out and exclusion magnifies. Eric described early interaction in baby groups, where questions around maternal bodies were deemed as intrusive:

I said to a couple of women before how was the birth for you? And they were looking at me like 'what the hell are you asking me? You don't give a shit, you just got to stand there!' There was an element of that, but after a while they got to know me and it was fine. – Eric (48, stay-at-home dad to his two primary schoolers)

Eric's description of asking mothers about the birthing experience resonates with the invisible barriers the carers described in places which assumingly only mothers would visit and therefore the presence of a male body was treated as an intrusion. There is more discussion about place in the next chapter, but at this instance I would like to draw attention to the places created by birthing practices and, consequently, the exclusion of non-birthing subjects.

Colin described his experience of the maternity ward as an unwelcoming, unaccommodating place that was exclusionary for fathers. According to him, the whole structure, geography and operation of the maternity ward were designed with mothers as the sole focus.

Here geography co-operates with stereotypes to create spaces of exclusion (Sibley, 1995). While it seems like mothers are privileged and fathers are marginalized, what creates this exclusion is the same patriarchal binary that privileges men in other spaces. Colin described how he experienced the maternity ward as unfriendly to fathers:

If you look at how maternity leave is set up and how maternity wards operate, in my experience you may as well put a gigantic sign outside the wall saying 'fathers are not welcome'. On more than one occasion I was completely ignored by hospital staff, not even looking at me, not even saying hello. That's before the child is born. Once the child is born you have to go to a ward where there are no facilities for fathers at all, so if you want to use the lavatory you have to go through security gates to get in and out [...] This sends out the message that even before a child is born 'don't worry about it, it's not your role'. That is really a mindset that has to change. – Colin (42, stay-at-home dad for his two children, ages 6 and 2)

In this interview Colin claimed that he understands that mothers and babies should be the priority, but was categorical that he is

not actually convinced we will ever achieve complete equality on the caring front, but society's changing. [It depends] on the single biological fact that women gestate and lactate. And men don't.

His experience raises the issue of how can a male carer be encouraged to participate if carer equals mother? A few of the new fathers in the study had a different childbirth experience that took place in a different space: at home, with a midwife. They described how the birth of their child was far from an alienating process. Instead, it was one of direct inclusion and they were proud of their involvement in the delivery. The following passage is from my field notes after my walking interview with Pete, when he nappy-changed his son in the living room. Look at how Pete's experience weaves into his caring and the spaces of home, birth, and childcare fuse.

The nappy-changing mat is on the floor, between the barred fireplace and the dog. First he lifts him (he mentioned he likes doing that) then puts him on the mat and changes the nappy. Toys hanging from the fireplace safety bars keep the baby busy. He says his partner gave birth to him on this exact same spot. And that he was happy for it because he was able to participate, while at the hospital he couldn't.

This is another hint on how obstacles can be overcome. The pregnant body can be perceived as a shield that excludes everything outside it. The maternity ward operates as a sterilized bubble that

takes parents' agency away. Here, parenting identity is fixed, seeing only what the pregnant body supposedly *does* and *becomes* instead of what bodies *can* do and how they are *becoming*; the maternity ward is territorialized, rigid, arborific. The security doors in the maternity ward solidify this striation and create re-territorializing lines. Yet an at-home birth, with the father actively participating in the delivery of the child, can be an empowering event that challenges the perceived contours of bodies and spaces, breaks down the separation of home space and birthing space, and makes visible the imbrication of elements previously thought as separate. It is a rhizomatic experience, a becoming that challenges the dichotomy between birthing subject and non-birthing subject.

Margrit Shildrick (2010) writes that human corporeality goes outside the self at any moment, but this becomes more evident with motherhood. Elizabeth Grosz wrote how 'flesh is being as reversibility, being's capacity to fold in on itself, being's dual orientation inward and outward, being's openness, its reflexivity...' (1994, p.44). By contrast, male bodies are assumed to be autonomous, impenetrable and clearly bound, in contrast to the bodies of women that are viewed as penetrable and vulnerable (Longhurst, 1995; Lupton, 2012). Men engaging in caring practices can cast a rupture to this, because caring practices are inter-embodied: they challenge bodily boundaries. Inter-embodiment means that 'apparently individuated and autonomous bodies are actually experienced at the phenomenological level as intertwined' (Lupton, 2012, p.39). According to Lupton, 'such intermingling is a direct challenge to the valued concept in western society of embodiment' (Lupton, 2012, p.47). For fathers, interacting with infants can challenge the bodily autonomy that men are assumed to have. Colin's view of gestation and lactation as the ultimate obstacles might have been highly dependent on his negative view of the maternity ward. His experience could have potentially been shaped differently with a home birth, where the embodied, geographical experience of childbirth would have been entirely different¹⁵.

At this point we can see our carers glimpsing at the potential of bodies and 'what they can do'. Eric admits he can bond, but the bond is different to the mother's. He describes it as *bonding from changing nappies* and *bonding from breastfeeding*:

As a man you're not necessarily equipped for this. Should I be doing this? What should I be doing? I clearly love the kid but I don't really know what I need to do. It's really difficult. [...] To an extent playing with a child that can't respond is difficult when you're a

¹⁵ Cf. Becky Mansfield (2008) who warns of the nostalgia around 'natural' childbirth. According to her, childbirth at hospital can be as or more intimate than childbirth at home.

man. It's easy when you start getting feedback from the kid but when you're not getting feedback and you haven't actually given birth it's not the same sort of bond. You've bonded because you've nappy changed [...] but there's not actually that chemical bond [...] there's definitely something lacking. And you have to learn that as a man. You can't ever replicate that because genetically is just not the same. [...] I learn to play with them and I learnt from spending time with the kids. – Eric (48, stay-at-home dad to his two primary schoolers)

Again, motherhood is viewed as naturally caring, while the father has to struggle, to learn how to become carer. As this seems deeply connected to embodied difference, it is a case of men apparently failing because they lack the 'necessary accoutrements' (Aitken, 2000, p.581). Eric, despite his assurance that breastfeeding fosters a different type of bond than caring tasks do, adds an extra dimension to the above. It is not *just* biology, but a culture of motherhood that does not exist for fathers; the cultivation of certain skills and networks that prepare women to mother yet there is nothing similar for men:

As a woman you've probably got friends who have children, you've probably spent time with women with children. [...] You've all gone through the birth experience so you can all compare how it was for you. Again as a man this is another issue. You've not done that.

There is no 'culture of fatherhood' and, as researchers have previously found, fathering is very much an *ad hoc* practice (Branen and Nilsen, 2006; Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2011; Dermott, 2008; Doucet *et al.*, 2009). No matter the nature of the obstacle, biological or social, for Eric it gets down to one thing: that as a man it is very difficult to bond and be a primary carer.

Yet becoming-carer is about following the obstacles and seeing where they lead, instead of following the well-travelled way of fixed identities. What Ian says below about bonding takes us beyond the limit of binary gender difference:

She was breastfeeding particularly at night and there were times when she would be very upset and my partner exhausted and I'd say 'I'll try' and I could not console her because she wanted one thing that I didn't have. But now we're on the solids and I don't think that is an issue. It's quite nice that I can, at night or during the day if she's fallen over and crying, pick her up and calm her down. I think she accepts the bottle as a comfort now. So yesterday at the playgroup she was a bit scared at the bigger children running around so I took her off quietly and we had a bottle. That calmed her down and she was much more confident. – Ian (38, on paternity leave for his 8-month-old)

Ian describes a different kind of bonding which, however, can be as intimate as the perceived maternal relationship. Feeding time with a bottle becomes the means to develop a comforting relationship and bond in a way that lacks nothing when compared to the breastfeeding mother's (this is, after all, the way mothers who don't breastfeed bond). When Ian got past his initial disappointment because he couldn't breastfeed and thus not be as good a carer, he discovered his own way of bonding.

It seems like the construction of motherhood forms obstacles which, however, are not insurmountable. The 'mothering only' period of care is, actually, quite short, especially in the UK where most mothers stop breastfeeding within four weeks post-birth (McAndrew *et al.*, 2010). The male carers engaged in a back and forth negotiation of a caring subjectivity: it is a subjectivity that emerges from bonding in ways that could be viewed as 'maternal', but without having maternal bodies. However, it is worth asking: are the ways they found to bond distinctly paternal, emphasising fatherhood? The answer is both yes and no; it illustrates the inherent complexity in making sense of caring practices without femininity. In the remainder of this chapter, a Deleuzian approach aids us in discussing this topic from the actions, not the identities – it helps us start from the caring practices themselves and later on glimpse what sort of shifting identities might emerge.

5.2 Navigating territory: ways of making place

Dissolving boundaries through touch

As discussed in the previous section, the very situations of exclusion can give the tools to inclusion, a simultaneous doing and undoing of gendered caring subjectivities. Here I find crucial the carers' own experiences with their fathers. They often mentioned that they either had fathers who were very active by necessity, because the mother was ill or away, or fathers who were absent for long hours during the week or even away for months at work. In both cases, this impacted the way they reflected on their positions as caring fathers and the kind of father they were becoming. For those with active fathers, it presented them with a role model that they could look up to, and for those with absent fathers it gave them the urge to fill that gap in their own

children's lives. Here the questioning of gendered caring roles has been a process that started much earlier and in which doing childcare is part of their own becoming.

In search of ways of carving out a (fluid) position to call their own, they either draw from fathering discourses (doing or territorializing gender) or they craft new ways of thinking one's self through the encounter with an infant body and caring practices (undoing or deterritorializing gender). Both happen at the same time, but the intensity that an immersion in care causes pushed them more towards the undoing of the gender-coding of care while retaining a gendered subjectivity. In the first instance (doing or territorializing gender), fathers sometimes seemed to attach certain qualities to their caring that were assumed to be different from the mothers' (such as being more laid back and not worrying as much). This goes hand in hand with the rationalization of mothers as natural carers that was discussed above, because if mothers are naturally good at caring, then a father learning how to care must be able to bring into it something he is naturally good at.

A few carers thought they did certain things differently because they were fathers, not mothers. Marc believes he has a more laid back attitude, something that researchers have previously connected to fathering styles (Brandth and Kvande, 1998). During the interview, his daughter who was learning how to walk and played in the room we were sitting in, tripped and fell. Marc grabbed the opportunity to justify how mums and dads are probably different:

[to the child] Are you okay? [to me] See, that's the difference, probably, between dads and mums. My wife would have been straight up, ask if she fell over, making sure she doesn't fall over. Dads are a bit...I'm a bit more laid back. They were built to fall over. That's how they learn to walk. – Marc (41, stay-at-home dad to a one-year-old)

His views sound like a 'pure' re-territorializing of his experience, as it seeks to sustain the homogeneity born from categorizing parenting practices and attitudes according to gender. Eric, who believes strongly in the fundamental differences between mothers and fathers, talks clearly about a different, gendered skillset which, however, can be channelled into his caring duties:

Really, without wanting to sound sexist, women have different skills, are much more nurturing than a man. And even still my wife is much better at [the] comforting business than I think I am, while I'm much better at being organized. – Eric (48, stay-at-home dad to his two primary schoolers)

This is a view shared by other carers, such as Charles who in an earlier quote thought women are genetically predisposed to care and he has to work hard to reach the same level. This makes us

wonder: what are the possibilities of challenging gender order and queering care, when some of the participants make such gendered and essentialist claims? Doucet wrote that ‘the perceptual weight attached to gender differences may at times supersede practices’ (2001, p.174). While this is a sign that gender order persists, it does not undo the transgressiveness of the gender work done by these carers. Engaging into a becoming means opening up to possibilities – which does happen. Moreover, previous research on stay-at-home fathers and on fathers on parental leave found that men view their parenting as having a special, fatherly style (Brandth and Kvande, 1998); this was actually reiterated by only a couple of my participants, cited in these few quotes. Feelings of emasculation and the corresponding compensation in masculinity were rarely an issue they discussed.

On the other hand, Lewis gives us a both territorializing and deterritorializing view:

I’m still the dad, I’m still the disciplinary [...] there’s no such thing as masculine and feminine anymore as such. It’s only what people think if they want to think it’s different. – Lewis (45, stay-at-home dad to his three children of ages 13, 6 and 3)

On one hand Lewis retains the “disciplinary” quality associated with father figures, but on the other he accepts the fluidity of the roles. Although he uses the language of binary gender, he proceeds to dismantle and deterritorialize it. Lewis recognizes the association of fatherhood with discipline, but he deems it not important to his masculine or fathering identity.

Returning to Eric, this fundamental difference in capabilities made him feel like he was lacking something, so the way to combat this was to pour himself into all sorts of activities to receive feedback, reassurance and recognition that he was doing it properly:

You just have to own it in the end. There’s no point in being annoyed. I just want to make sure I’m doing a damn good job so that people can say ‘that’s just fantastic’. So I threw myself into it and did everything for both [children] and still do.

Eric is, perhaps, feeling an attack on his male privilege: for the first time people get to question his competency in something, and this judgement is made based on his gender. His reaction seems to want to re-affirm his mastery over this, to confirm that men can do anything, but at the same time he is essentially pouring himself into the doing, not the being; he focuses on the practices and in “doing a damn good job”. The moment subjectivity seems to be pinned down into something fixed, it is again deterritorialized.

Sam and Andrew had similar reactions to Eric's and they tried to be very active in groups and even leading them at some point (their experiences are discussed at more length in the following chapter). Greg seems to divert a little. He retains the concept of "natural parent" but he believes that at the end of the day it's a matter of who has more information, who spends more time on learning how to be a parent:

It's probably harder for her, going back to work from being with the children. Because the one who is with them the most becomes the expert regardless of how natural a parent you are or how good at it you are. You just have more information and it changes, the children are a bit keener on who they see the most. So it's probably harder for her. – Greg (44, stay-at-home dad for his two children, ages 6 and 3)

Greg's belief is that if there is some natural affinity, it can be overcome by proximity, interest, and practice. This is something carers discovered gradually, as they performed the daily practices of care and began to experience dissolving bodily boundaries. They grew more confident as carers and their *becoming* unfolded. Ian, who compressed his leave at two and a half months because his daughter did not like the bottle, described how she eventually learnt to accept comfort from him:

I: Being able to go in when she's crying and sit with her and she calms down is really nice, because the first six months she didn't want me.

E: How do you think this transition happened?

I: Probably just familiarity. I guess she knows she can get comfort from me without the boob. – Ian (38, on paternity leave for his 8-month-old)

At this stage, we see a transition happening. Everyday touch provides a new kind of knowledge, a non- or more-than-representational understanding of the world (Dixon and Straughan, 2010). Touch is essentially the medium through which the participants transition from fathers to carers, as it constructs relational, haptic, embodied, more-than-representational knowledges. Shildrick writes:

[O]ur common – albeit largely disavowed – maternal origin could ground new forms of the imaginary in which subjectivity was marked not by an inflexible reflective interval that locks the binary of self and other into the model of the selfsame, but by the closeness and fluidity of that first embrace which speaks to the contiguity between subjects. (2010, p. 2)

Shildrick is pointing to the ways touch and the maternal experience it carries can disrupt the rigid distinctions between self and other, and link corporealities in a pre-discursive, affective manner. Max, a stay-at-home father from Bristol, took up care early on and found how activities that encouraged touch helped him with bonding:

I did several things like baby massage course with my baby and was great from quite a young age to do something just the two of us. So, through that, bonding was good and over time, gradually, when you get involved you just bond naturally. And I'm fortunate because I could be around so much. – Max (39, stay-at-home dad to his nine-month-old)

This is, in part, what we can call a creation of 'autonomous spaces' (Magaraggia, 2012, p.86), in which fathers can learn communication in unmediated ways, without the mother as a reference point. The carers were slowly making those autonomous spaces as part of a becoming-carer.

Breastfeeding encounters

This territorial navigation around touch and bonding seems to have breastfeeding at its centre. Although breastfeeding rates in the UK are very low, many of the fathers interviewed belonged to the minority of households that continue breastfeeding up to six months and beyond that. This is most likely related to the class, education, age, race and ethnicity of their partners, which are factors that powerfully shape the decision to breastfeed or not (Boyer, 2012).

Breastfeeding was often described as the ultimate barrier. At this stage, it is worth looking at the cases in which it was disrupted. This is often due to the child's own agency: in the same way that Ian's leave was reduced because his daughter didn't like the bottle, Jordan's daughter didn't like the breast. Her parents soon changed her feeding to formula. Jordan said his only concern on equal care was that he couldn't breastfeed, but this unexpected development actually made the transition easier:

She was breastfed for a bit, she didn't really take to it. So [...] if she was still breastfed and then come off of it that would probably be a bit of a challenge. But I think it's equal really. Nothing that I can't do that she can't do. – Jordan (34, on paternity leave for his four-month-old)

What Ian's and Jordan's cases show when juxtaposed together is that nothing is inherently 'natural' in breastfeeding as a process attached to motherhood. An infant can agentially prefer one or the other. But in Ian's case, the 'naturalness' of motherhood caused him to doubt his caring role as always second-best to the mother, at least at the very early stages.

In Ron's case the opposite happened: his daughter couldn't breastfeed at all during the first ten days so she was bottle-fed with expressed milk.

She had major problems so my wife had to express and then I bottle-fed her for the first eleven days. So I got used to feeding her then, anyway. Obviously I didn't see a lot of her afterwards when I was working so it's very hard to bond if you don't spend much time with [her]. – Ron (39, on paternity leave for his ten-month-old)

Being able to care at such an early stage was particularly helpful in building a haptic relationship and becoming accustomed to touch between father and infant. For Ron this was an opportunity other male carers did not have and, consequently, they often viewed the proximity shared between mother and child in the first days as catalytic to a bond they could not develop. However, Ron recognizes that going back to work afterwards would have been a problem, as the baby would build better rapport with the mother.

Earlier research has confirmed that after going back to work it is possible that fathers 'fall back into gender' (Miller, 2011, p.1094). What made Ron's transition smooth was a seven-eight weeks crossover period, during which both parents were full-time caring. His partner would leave him for a few hours with the baby, which helped them to get used to each other and to even out the possibly abrupt transition. Effectively Ron is describing a state in which both parents are equal carers despite breastfeeding time and this arrangement might be key to overcoming 'falling back into gender' patterns. In the current parental leave regime such a crossover period seems nearly impossible in the UK as paid leave requires at least one of the two parents at work. Ron's decision meant he was willing to take some unpaid leave and lose money, but also means his household could afford to make this choice. This is currently an option available only to a few people.

These examples push the bodily boundaries and challenge fixed identities, provoking them to shift, to see *what a body can do*. The question of what bodies can do goes beyond the breastfeeding assemblage and beyond touch and affect, to occupy an almost cyborg ontology through material cultures and technologies. Key to this are non-bodily apparati: breast pumps, practices of nipple care, expressed milk in a bottle are all parts of the breastfeeding assemblage that is fluid and extends the limits of bodily practices outside the body and into the world. Breast pumps have been discussed for the liberatory and empowering potential they have for mothers

(Boyer and Boswell-Penc, 2010) and expressed breastmilk is now a mobile substance that is able to '[stretch] care across distance' (Boyer, 2010, p.16). Colin describes below how breastfeeding can be shaped into a practice that is inclusive for fathers:

Men can't breastfeed. That doesn't mean they can't be involved in the breastfeeding process. In fact if you speak to breastfeeding specialists they will tell you one of the biggest elements of breastfeeding success is having a supportive partner. So there is no reason why men can't find out about the breastfeeding process. There's no reason why men can't find out about cracked nipples what will alleviate it, figure out how to build, dismantle and clean a breast pump. There is nothing stopping a father from giving his child expressed milk so there's actually quite a bit that men can do. It goes back to that point that from before the child is even, men are given the message 'keep out, it's not your business, you don't have to do it'.

Indeed, research seems to agree with Colin's view that breastfeeding time is not actually a barrier as it has no causal relationship to the contribution of paternal care (Magaraggia, 2012). Vinny also reflected on the role of breastfeeding in his own caring experience. He accepts it sets a barrier and a limit, but this is no reason enough to not become close with the baby. "I told my friends [that] their job is to sterilize everything and make things ready for that," he said. Like Colin, he highlights the dad's role in breastfeeding. In the following quote, Vinny retains an explanation of "nature" and a doubt regarding care provided from a man at the very early stages, but the mother-child relationship is not idealized. Participation is empowering and encourages him to develop more contact with the baby.

My partner wanted to breastfeed and still breastfeeds. It's really important for the baby to have mum and dad, but needs that sort of closeness of the mum thing. I don't know how that would work if a male had to look after a baby straight away. Obviously, it can be done and probably has been done [...] I always wanted [him] to be breastfed, but my partner had to express to get as much milk as possible and then give it to him [...] So dads feel like they got something to do then and I felt really close to my son when I gave him the bottle.

E: Did you get to bond like this?

Yeah definitely! Feel like you're able to help as well. Possibly some dads when it comes to the early stages of birth feel a little bit helpless cause the baby is attached to the mum and ah you know, what can I do? At least I've heard from other dads that you want to help as much as you can. ... – Vinny (34, stay-at-home dad for his one-year-old)

While this highlighted role of fathers in the breastfeeding process could be considered as merely an adjunct role, there seems to be more to it. The reason is that this process is experienced as part of a bonding process based on touch and, consequently, part of a becoming-carer. It challenges the ideas of who should and could be a carer, undermines the avowed 'naturalness' of motherhood, opens up possibilities, shows us what bodies can do.

The last vignette on breastfeeding is from Charles. His daughter could not breastfeed at all, and because of serious health problems early on she had an increased need for care. So not only Charles, but other formal and informal carers had to take turns:

I guess because it was so different it was in a way more equal. [...] When she was tube-fed while we were in hospital the staff in the hospital tried to get the parents as much as possible to provide for her care needs. Also because she was born by caesarean, so my wife post-op was in quite a lot of discomfort. So 3-4 days after, I had to go with our daughter to the hospital [...] I could maybe bond more, being able to spend that time. I don't think like I missed time on anything [...] Also both of us used formula [...] so I was able to be more involved in her night feeds.

What Charles describes is a de facto democratization of care. Because of his daughter's additional caring needs, things were pushed outside their 'natural' course and proved how the mother is not irreplaceable. Here we see subjectivities forming clearly from the caring practices instead of from identities. The possible answers to the question 'what can a maternal body do?' might be limited (and limiting), but the possible answers to the question 'what can a caring body do?' are endless.

Adoptive same-sex fathers becoming carers

Here I would like to draw attention to gay dads as the best example of alternative ways of bonding and caring practices that re-evaluate gendered concepts and further push the 'what can a body do?' question. While we cannot entirely decouple parenting from mothering, we can try and think about it without a maternal presence. By removing gestating and lactating bodies from the equation, we are left with the bare bones of caring. This does not constitute a 'purer', transcendental caring experience; after all, the scripts of motherhood and patriarchy can be repeated. It is rather an opportunity to make a new place, to carve 'autonomous spaces' (Magaraggia, 2012, p.86) by deterritorializing the very meanings of parent, father, mother and

care, and by thinking about them in new ways through immersion in practices. The vocabulary we have is still limited by binary and gendered notions of care, but gay dads have to necessarily rethink them, re-evaluate them, and sometimes queer those concepts, exactly because the lived experience is much more challenging, protean, multiple.

Ben has an adopted son of six for whom he cared for a year on his own, before his partner Nick moved in with them in North-East London. He reflects on how he does not identify with other dads, but he does not consider himself a 'mum' either:

Even more pronounced it's with other fathers at school. Because they're all fathers. And I am something more than that. I do the things that their partners do. And the things that they do. And yet what I must say is that I am not mother and father. There's two of us but that doesn't make us father and mother. It doesn't even make us father and father! – Ben (40, formerly a single carer for his six-year-old)

Notice how Ben starts from the practices, "the things their partners do", to talk about how he views himself, a view that fits with neither of the two options for parental identities, father/mother. With Nick they have no split roles of one being the father type and the other the mother, but neither are they both fathers. Ben says he is more than a father, but eventually he is more than a mother too. He has no vocabulary to describe this movement between identities, exactly because it is fluid, a process that resists being pinned down. He engages into a becoming that challenges the fixed identities of mother and father.

Yet he still grapples with motherhood. It reappears as a ghost in the form of social control that questions the quality of care which is not provided by maternal figures. Here he narrates how people demand explanations on why his son has no mother:

One of my son's friend's [mum], she cornered me and she was like 'why doesn't he have a mummy?' And the first thing that comes to my mind is 'because he doesn't need one'. I've said that to a couple of mothers and parents and they never respond. That is a highly charged thing to say and I don't mean it in a controversial, highly charged way. But if he did need one, then we would have an inadequacy going on in this household. And we don't! So it is true to say he doesn't need a mother. [...] But this cult of the mother is huge. And I'm not against mothers at all, but it's almost just like you can't, the mother is that figure in religion and everything you know, this mother, powerful thing.

Ben perhaps gets to question the mythologies around motherhood more readily than other participants because he was on his own as a single parent from the beginning. There was no

comparison with the mother nor a point of reference. What was most isolating and disconcerting to Ben was how he had to build closeness and affection with a child already five years old and essentially transition from strangers into becoming family. This is where he felt lost, as biological parents seemed to have an advantage of time he could not have.

They've had their kids for five years, I've had mine less than two. [...] I went to one of the mums and asked do you need to bathe them every day? [...] Some of the parents I thought our values were similar, I'd go to them and ask questions. [...] I try to get a sense of what other parents do and kinda pick and choose from that. And a lot of stuff you make up as you go.

Ben is not simply trying to find out how to be a new parent, but how to be a single, gay, adoptive parent, all at the same time. This becoming-minoritarian was catalytic to making new ways of bonding that involved touch, to carving out his own practices that did not have to fit pre-given notions of parent-child relationships:

My son and I are super, super physically affectionate with each other. And he loves it. And I instigated it from the beginning and I told other male adopters [to] touch the child from the beginning. Because I rubbed his back and he was stopping me, in the very first days. And I did [stop] at that moment, of course. But I always returned to doing these things. And he came to quite love hugs and kisses and he's super affectionate with Nick.

He described the following deeply affective experience during which both of them watched a friend breastfeeding. His son reacted as if he was breastfeeding himself, after relaxing on Ben's body. He remembered it so vividly he joked about it:

[A friend] was breastfeeding and my son laid down on me and watched her breastfeed and his whole body became relaxed and it was really beautiful [...] It was kind of weird and mystical. And ever since then as a joke (he'd do it in a joking way) he'd lean over to me and be like [suckling sounds] 'I'm having milk from your boob!'

Here Ben takes touch and bonding into the spaces bodies move and in particular in relation to other bodies. What was an experience of simply observation of breastfeeding time, became a moment of affective bonding, showing how 'human corporeality always goes outside itself, enfolded in and enfolded by the indeterminate flesh of the world' (Shildrick, 2010, p.1).

Giovanni described a similar experience with his adoptive son, who was six at the time he came to live with him and his partner. He understood that touching and cuddling were necessary to their bonding and took a year off work because he knew they needed "that intense time

together.” As he said, “I guess it’s the equivalent of the time you have when breastfeeding a baby where they’re just always in contact with you and they need that”. Below he describes how he helped his son manage his emotions through affective experiences of touch and physical comfort:

At the beginning he really struggled with managing his own emotions so we instituted this. Whenever he got worked up he had to sit on my lap, in some cases me restraining him, until he could take three deep breaths. [...] The whole tactic was that I had a calm heartbeat, I’m breathing slowly... Use my energy to kind of calm yourself down. And much later I read this is actually like a therapy you can do with kids, make them listen to your heartbeat and I came up with that on the fly and that became my thing with him.

Giovanni, who as a gay adoptive parent was situated further away from the experiences of the first-time fathers described earlier, was able to understand better that the breastfeeding experience builds a relation based on tactile sensations, not on biology. Here he “came up with that on the fly”, he produced from below, rhizomatically, caring practices that engage with the world as it is, and as it changes.

5.3 Conclusion

What can a caring body do, then? A central issue seemed to be not that the participants were men, but that they were *not-mothers*. This is an inherent problem in the binary thought in which mother equals carer. We can ask then, how do we open up caring identities and, with them, gendered identities so that we move away from preconceived notions of motherhood and fatherhood?

By assuming the minoritarian place of the carer, men deterritorialize, engage in a becoming – a process that challenges gendered caring binaries through practices that question fixed identities, through embracing uncertainty and fluidity, through valuing what has been marginalized. Becoming-carer requires bridging a gap that, at first, seems impossible to cross. The process of becoming-carer is exactly how this distance is transversed, with no end goal other than immersion in the practices. Identity emerges naturally, exactly because there is no prescribed identity to work with and try and fit into. What seems to work particularly well here is the very exclusion that gives them the tools to work with: you cannot ever be a mother, so be something

else! By disassociating care from motherhood, it opens up to other meanings and, at the same time, motherhood and fatherhood open up to new gendered parental identities. Although I talk about inclusion and exclusion, there is no enclave of identity to infiltrate; I rather refer to the patriarchal construct of motherhood and how hard it might be to overcome, especially when taken to the limits of embodied difference of “women lactate and gestate”.

Another key aspect, especially when a mother is present, seems to be the involvement in care at the very early stages, when gendered difference is most pronounced (although in the cases of single or same-sex adoptive fathers bonding came later, so it can be done, but ‘mothers’ were not present then). In both cases, fathers carve their ‘autonomous spaces,’ as immersion in practice is the tool to challenge any notions of what a parent or a carer should be. The last crucial concern here is the participants’ doing and undoing of masculinities. Almost none of them had strong masculine identities, so it rarely was an obstacle for them. For Brandth and Kvande (1998) this might be because the participants actually associated with hegemonic masculinity strongly and were thus comfortable in it. As a consequence, they did not feel threatened by spending time to care for a child. It is important to notice here that Brandth and Kvande justified this strong association to hegemonic masculinity through a good connection with paid work (their participants were high earners) which, as seen in the previous chapter, is not always the case with the participants in this research. However, their class positioning, educational background and location might indeed account for more comfortable relationships to masculinities that did not produce much tension. It is also worth recognising that a strong connection to fixed/majoritarian ideas of masculinity likely is a major obstacle for other men, who might feel that engaging in caring practices is a threat to a stable sense of identity.

Is care decoupled then from narrowly gendered identities of father and mother? It seems that myths of motherhood persist, particularly through the reiteration of essentialist ideas, but these are shaken and deconstructed – immersion in practices is key to this. And by not doing a specific ‘male’ or ‘fatherly’ type of caring, the fathers do not borrow from masculinity’s prestige to raise the status of care; they are changed by the experience itself. At the small scale of the male primary carers of the social, economic and educational backgrounds that I interviewed, this seems to work well. It is hard to predict how it would fare on a wider scale.

The carers seem to navigate the muddy waters of identity in a fragmental – though not fragmented – way. During this journey they negotiate father identities as they know them and as they think they are supposed to be, but the radical experience of care steers them away from that direction and into uncharted water. They form rhizomes, lines of flight, make place without

taking root. Because the caring needs of very young children are more inflexible and agentic in their own way, the fathers must adapt to the needs, not the opposite. It seems indeed very hard to care for infants in a distinctly 'paternal' way when faced with the hard reality of feeding time, sleeping problems and nappy changing. The fathers retain a sense of gendered self into their caring, but they cannot afford to take such identities as a starting point – they have to move between the points. The question *what can a body do?* is merely the beginning.

Chapter 6:

Male bodies in female places: Difference and queering the carer

Becoming-carer is a two-fold process, which, on one hand, challenges the meaning of paid work and on the other introduces new meanings of what caring bodies can do and who can be a carer. In the previous chapter we followed the becoming-carer into the relationships with the children, as well as with the mother (both as an idea and as a physical presence). This time we examine these bodies in places of childcare outside the home. Doucet (2006) first studied male carers as embodied subjects in caring places. She noticed how aspects of embodiment can be fluid and changing. For instance, embodiment for the male carers was 'less salient in spaces and times where gender marking is minimized and heterosexual meanings are avoided' (Doucet, 2006, p.712) and she cited several factors due to which embodiment might be important or negligible (e.g. having a woman to act like a 'bridge,' connecting with mothers in extra-domestic spaces, the passage of time). These factors are often highly dependent on space and time. Fathering is 'an event in space' (Aitken, 2009, p.7) and the spaces of fathering are 'awkward because defining the context of embodied practices is never completely comfortable' (Aitken, 2009, p.4).

Place matters. Carers and parents are *of* places and places are made of events and encounters; as such, they are always works-in-progress (Massey, 1994). Urban geographers have studied how urban places can be both exclusionary and inclusionary to marginalized bodies (Scrutton and Watson, 1998; Tyner, 2002). Some geographers might say that places codify one's proper place in terms of gender, race, class, age, sexuality, and easily, bodies can become 'out of place' when the social boundaries of places are transgressed (Cresswell, 1996; McDowell, 1999). Despite the hierarchical relations of power they reproduce, places are also fluid, contested, and

with permeable boundaries (Massey, 1994). Scholarship that has explored the geographies of *encounter* has also discussed how contact with ‘different’ bodies can challenge spatial concepts and binary logic through negotiating with difference in the moment (Valentine, 2008; Matejskova and Leitner, 2011; Schuermans, 2013; Wilson, 2016). Difference is not simply inserted into places, which act as scenery, but is constructed *through* these geographies and through lived practices (Pratt and Hanson, 1994). In this chapter, we look at male bodies entering feminized places of care. I argue here that the attitudes towards and interactions with difference in the places of childcare all contribute to the shaping of differential *becomings*. I add a geographical dimension to Doucet’s work and a study of the *potential* of these encounters to destabilize binary logic. In this chapter I ask *how do male primary carers shape places of care and what is the role of place in these processes of becoming?*

To answer these questions I draw on the carers’ accounts of other people’s reactions to them in various places the participants used, occupied, or moved through with their children. These places include the street, parks, public transport, cafes, supermarkets, National Childbirth Trust groups, mums’ and dads’ groups, specific activity groups, schools, parties, and NHS services. The carers’ experiences resonate with Doucet’s findings (2006) about the presence of a male carer in these spaces and how it is likely for it to cause reactions, some more direct, others more subtle. In this chapter I additionally offer an understanding of male primary carers as *becomings* that happen in and through spatial practices, as *rhizomes* who challenge binary logic by never completely fitting in a single identity. I seek to understand the extent to which spaces can be queered through the practices and performances of male primary carers looking after their children.

I start with other people’s attitudes towards the carers (as narrated by the latter) during encounters and discuss their shifting ideas around their identity. Insecurity and empowerment happen at the same time, causing them to question and challenge established identities. This becomes more prominent in the second part of the chapter, where the dynamics of childcare spaces are discussed. Becoming-carer in places of childcare can sometimes queer these geographies, challenging what is perceived as caring and motherly—yet this negotiation can also generate problems. Carers become aware of their own bodies as supposedly non-caring bodies, encountering isolation both on the mothers’ side (because they are not mothers) and on the fathers’ (because they are not like other fathers). Through this, they engage in a becoming *with* the world that might not dismantle gender, but challenges, queers, and deterritorializes.

Key findings

6.1 Caring Encounters: negotiating identities

What happens during the moments a male primary carer engages with public life? When participants entered the public realm with their children and pushchairs, they were visibly *male primary carers*. A male body in the role of a carer can upset gender roles in certain places and shake up expectations of what carers should look like. But can a man who is simply crossing the street while holding a baby make a change on how we think about care? Albert, a father on paternity leave from Bristol, touches upon this, saying that we cannot expect people to assume the father is the primary carer simply because we see a man with a child:

A man with a kid is commonplace enough so it's not out of the ordinary. But I'm not sure if just a man with a kid promotes the father being a primary carer. We must think what people would know or think of that. [...] It's different to say I'm the primary carer, but not out of the ordinary to see a man with kid. – Albert (38, on paternity leave for his 10-month-old)

Literature around fatherhood has drawn attention to 'involved fathering', a term which describes the habits of more active fathers who, however, are usually far from primary carers (Dermott, 2008). Being a primary carer involves what Doucet (2001) calls 'mothering practices' in her study of men who 'mother'. *Involved fathering* is actually more aligned with approved, hegemonic and non-threatening fathering masculinities, while male primary caring can pose a greater challenge to normative assumptions about masculinity and care. A man with a child might raise questions about these normative roles, or he might not, but it is *making the carer visible* (in a similar way that gay and lesbian communities gain visibility in public spaces, see Podmore, 2006) that bears the potential to queer places, shift the image of a carer, and initiate becomings. This is where *geographies of encounter* can offer valuable input in understanding these events. In this chapter, I am interested in what happens during the moments when the carer becomes 'visible'.

One interesting point to make here is how men have been traditionally linked to the public and the outdoors (McDowell, 1999). In a way, men walking down the street with children re-positions a 'normative' body (man in public) in a queer(er) manner (man holding baby)—a

direct challenge to the public/private divide and to its gendered, binary logic. This is an encounter that *creates* difference. In Ahmed's words, difference emerges from encounters as 'it is the processes of expelling *or* welcoming the one who is recognised as a stranger that produce the figure of the stranger in the first place' (2000, p. 4). This dynamic serves to illustrate the potential for becomings and lines of flight amongst the participants.

Place matters

When intra-acting with the world, location matters; it shapes as much as it is shaped. Ian had a little awkward experience in his neighbourhood in Knowle, Bristol. It must be noted here that parts of Bristol have a history of gentrification (Boddy, 2007) that seems to have intensified recently (Harris, 2015), and is a place that attracts artists, activists and a 'new breed' of artists-activists (Buser *et al.*, 2013), something that could signify a place that is more fluid in terms of normative gender and parenting roles. These elements make it a potentially friendly place to male primary carers, but also quite homogeneous in terms of class. Ian thinks there is a gradation of places within Bristol, with some feeling more comfortable than others:

You probably don't see many single dads in this area. I probably very rarely notice any other dads besides myself, perhaps compared to some of the other areas in Bristol [...] I went to a playgroup yesterday [in Southville], there were lots of dads there. So it's probably a socioeconomic thing. It's a little bit poorer over there and it's not perhaps as accepted so I did feel a bit uncomfortable but nothing obvious. I'm sure it raises a few eyebrows but no one has said anything. – Ian (38, on paternity leave for his 8-month-old)

Ian, who is a middle-class engineer living in one of the better-off areas of Bristol, describes an apparent contradiction: in Southville, which he describes as a poorer area, dads were more visible than in his own neighbourhood, yet he as a father with a child felt more uncomfortable. Southville has been a traditionally working class area in Bristol which has been gentrified since the 1980's (Boddy, 2007). We can say that if socioeconomic situation has an impact on the number of men who are primary carers, as they might become primary carers because of necessity, it does not



Figure 6.1 Bill Gilding, A portrait of the community: Easton, in Bristol. Detail from the Stapleton Road Station mural, Bristol 1999. It depicts thirty life-size figures waiting for a train. Photo by Eleni Bourantani, 2015.

mean that a shift in attitudes follows. But this event might also be indicative of a different attitude towards fathering masculinities: although Ian was surrounded by more fathers in Southville, perhaps he felt more disconnected to his surroundings exactly because he was a middle-class father walking in a poorer area.

Incidentally, Ian lived in the same area as stay-at-home dad Vinny, who used to work under short-term contracts in the private sector while his partner is a teacher. Both lived on opposite sides of Redcatch park in Knowle, yet their experiences have been different, as Ian felt quite isolated and Vinny (also because he had been a carer for a longer time) had befriended other male primary caring fathers. This example in Bristol is only an indication that neighbourhoods can be dramatically different from one street to the next, colouring one's caring experience in crucial ways that might depend more on local childcare cultures rather than class differences (Holloway, 1998). Since many of the interactions that follow happened on streets, parks, supermarkets and local baby groups, it gradually becomes evident how different places shape different events—and also how different events shape place.

Dad, the accidental carer

Participants described reactions from people as varied, although mostly positive. The negative comments were rarely intentionally hurtful, but could come across as a little rude or ignorant. People often invoked the stereotype of the silly or incompetent dad as a way to handle the awkwardness that was born from the presence of a man who was also a main carer. Because the two are deemed incompatible, if a man does childcare tasks then they are probably not done right, even if he has the best intentions.

“You don’t know how to do this”

Ron, a father on parental leave from Bristol, explains the *“you don’t know how to do this”* attitude, both on the street (first quote) and from a senior female co-worker (second quote), when he announced he was taking parental leave:

When we’re out with my daughter and my wife and [my daughter] cries, other people will say ‘what’s wrong with her’? Interestingly, when she cries with me they’ll often make comments such as ‘what have you done, daddy?’ [...] If it’s with the mum there must be something to do with the baby. If she’s with her dad it’s probably something dad’s done, like he hasn’t changed the nappy.

She said ‘how will you know how to look after her?’ Which was interesting. Sort of implying I won’t be able to look after her. Because obviously mums know exactly what to do! – Ron (39, on paternity leave for his ten-month-old)

The latter quote echoes the patriarchal myth of mother as the quintessential, natural parent (Badinter, 1981) – what mothers know ‘naturally’, fathers have to learn. This belief, as discussed in the previous chapter, is also prevalent among the carers themselves. It was also illustrated in the previous chapter how their deterritorializing experience pushed them to reshape ideas around care and their own identity. Here I discuss how this questioning happens through a lot of insecurity and uncertainty about the sudden destabilizing of fixed identities.

Comments like those reported by Ron above did affect the participants, making them worry for some time about their image and wishing to prove themselves as capable carers. Albert, for

example, another Bristol dad on parental leave, explained how he was concerned that people would think him incompetent and draw from the television sitcom stereotypes of dads who don't know how to dress their children. So, for a while, he spent quite some time co-ordinating his daughter's daily outfits before leaving the house to ensure she appeared well looked-after. We could say that this challenge to his perceived identity pushed him to try out *what can a body do?* Refusing to fit into a pre-made identity, he questioned it and experimented, though we must not fail to notice here that for Albert this was one of the few instances he experienced a loss of privilege as a man, so he wished to compensate for that in a masculine way (proving he could do it). This de- and reterritorialization, the doing and undoing of gender, is quite common. Deleuze and Guattari write that deterritorialization 'is the movement by which "one" leaves the territory. It is the operation of the line of flight' (2004, p.591). It can take many forms, such as *negative* deterritorialization, which is immediately followed by a reterritorialization and can stall a line of flight. When thinking about male primary carers, discussing male privilege is important as it can affect any becoming by re-asserting masculinity and valuing care not by itself, but as part of masculinity's status. As Brandth and Kvande (1998) noticed, strong identification with a masculine identity can actually provide the confidence needed to 'do' gender differently.

However, as long as carers engage in practices and doings that can elicit becomings, there is always the potential for destabilization of identities and the creation of lines of flight. When these agents and practices *intra-act* with places and people, they can queer normative spaces and their meanings. Work on the geographies of sexualities (Bell and Valentine, 1995a, 1995b; Binnie and Valentine, 1999; Valentine, 2002), has extensively discussed such instances of fluid and negotiated space and bodies. Encounters with the 'different' make places and places are made of encounters. Encounters are not simply a coming together of different bodies; they *make* difference and they make *a* difference (Wilson, 2016). As we saw, the participants' encounters have a transformatory potential that demands from us to rethink bodily limits and capacities. In some cases, this deterritorialization carries the potential to engender a becoming and a line of flight.

"You're just babysitting"

Another often reiterated encounter happened through the assumption that the participants were not the primary carers, but just dads on their day off, "*babysitting*". Tony, a

single gay dad living in Brighton, had to explain over and over to strangers on public transport how he does this every day and it is not simply his day off. Eric mentioned supermarkets as a place where such questions were asked whenever he went for shopping with the baby in the pushchair in the mornings:

I used to get this a lot at supermarkets where I used to go shopping. A bit like ‘oh you’re out doing the shopping are you?’ I’d be like no, I do it every day. I’m a househusband. Just because I’m a man doesn’t mean I can’t do stuff. – Eric (48, stay-at-home dad to his two primary schoolers)

The participants unsettled the expectations of people, who assumed that men would only care occasionally and for the children of others (Doucet, 2006). Those places were supposed to be made of certain ‘events,’ but the encounter with a male carer disrupted the order of those anticipated events. There is also a tacit temporal acceptance of male carers as long as they are only there from time to time (when they are “babysitting”); more frequent encounters are disruptive. Thus a ‘regular’ male carer raises questions, makes the carer *visible*. Eric attempts to impose this visibility and regularity by asserting a non-normative identity: “I’m a househusband”. He effectively borrows from the minoritarian identity of a housewife to confirm the disruption of the expectations of people he encounters. This taking of a minoritarian identity returns us to the beginning, to *what can a body do*, to a becoming that can destabilize relevant identities.

Place matters not only in the geographies of streets and parks, but in the people and structures one encounters in specific caring spaces. Many dads had negative experiences with National Health Service staff in care settings and government employees such as registrars. In the same way that Colin, in the previous chapter, described the maternity ward as an architecture hostile to fathers, the GP’s practice is also a place that creates inclusivity and exclusivity, a place where mothers are identified with carers more rigidly, thus fathers are viewed as outsiders. Colin cited three different occasions during which he received such comments. Two of them were with medical staff and government employees:

I was told once by a female GP that I was a babysitter [...] A bit of a surprise.

Once I was in a cafe bottle-feeding and a woman came up, congratulated me and took the child in her arms, and then very loudly, repeatedly declared that I was babysitting. This woman’s adult daughter was with her and looked horrified and said no, no, he’s just being a dad!

When I registered the second daughter's birth [...] the registrar told me I was very brave taking my daughter out unaccompanied. [...] I grew up near the Royal Air Force base [...] So I used to see women in military uniform all the time. I've never thought of going to them and say you're really brave! But a man with a baby is.

– Colin (42, stay-at-home dad for his two children, ages 6 and 2)

As seen in examples throughout this chapter, women might get defensive in their encounters with male carers who have transgressed, entering 'women's territory'. Colin's comparison about brave women and brave men is telling of our ideas around masculinities and femininities and what is deemed acceptable. In this example, childcare is feminized, so it implies a loss of status for men, making them "really brave" in risking their public image when they present themselves as carers. So, oddly, in certain contexts, this courage might be perceived as an expression of masculinity.

Eric, however, seems to share this idea that a man with a baby is brave, albeit for different reasons than the registrar's:

You seldom see any of the men anywhere. It's usually with a partner. It takes real guts or stupidity to go as a man into a female environment with a child. Because if you're not competent you think you're being a joke, everybody's looking at you and think 'it's the bloke'. – Eric (48, stay-at-home dad to his two primary schoolers)

His approach hints, again, at the pervasive insecurity that male carers have to deal with. Eric's different reasons lie not among a loss of masculine status in public, as the registrar might assume, but in the radically different world he has to enter, a world that has been tailored to accept only women. Eric talks about being there more, becoming *visible*. While it can be hard to navigate the rigid rules of place-making, this is one way to disrupt and re-assign meanings. Entry into this 'woman's world' might initiate a becoming, as it is a deterritorializing experience. But it can also re-assert privilege and emphasize masculinity through an economy of gratitude, as seen below.

The economy of gratitude

There is another side to encounters with male primary carers: that of receiving appreciation instead of suspicion and surprise. Andrew called this "being a novelty"—a phrase that captures both the excessive admiration and the slight distance that is created with it. Both good and bad

reactions came primarily from women, whom the participants were more likely to meet in the places where they presented themselves as carers. Eric offered some insight on the comments he receives:

One thing I was told by one of the women was ‘why are you looking after the kids? What’s wrong with you? My husband wouldn’t do it. You must be crazy’. But again I think it’s younger generation mums [who say this]. Older generation mums tend to think ‘God, I wish my husband did this so I could go out to work’. Women in fifties, sixties think you’re very weird because their husbands very seldom interacted with their kids. [...] They’re the ones who will patronize you in ‘let me show you how to change a nappy’ and I’m like, darling, I could do it with eyes shut and one hand. – Eric (48, stay-at-home dad to his two primary schoolers)

Carers described the reactions they received as overwhelmingly positive. It is likely that the reason for this was that the people they encountered in baby groups and similar places were predominantly women who belonged to Eric’s “older generation mums” category and who were in a position to understand how men doing childcare could affect them positively. These are usually the women who are currently in the workforce and face difficulties in reconciling work and care. Ron said he also received positive reactions from women who refer to themselves as feminists. This experience, both of caring and of appreciating it, as well as of becoming the recipient of people’s comments, made the participants acutely aware of certain things.

One of them was the realization that the praise they received actually formed an economy of gratitude. Arlie Hochschild (1989) described the *economy of gratitude* as the disproportionate appreciation (especially by women) of men’s participation to childcare and housework, however minimal the latter might be. Although the theory of the ‘economy of gratitude’ primarily refers to the female partners’ reactions, it can be applied to societal expectations more broadly. When I spoke with Maria, George’s partner, she had experienced this as a form of pressure, since everyone was praising George to her for doing things she did with no praise from anyone:

Isn’t he *amazing*? [...] You are married to a *saint*! Sorry, I didn’t hear that when I had [the children] or any other woman in the street. And there’d be a phase when [George]’d say ‘well, no, I just like it and they’re my children, I’m not looking after somebody else’s for some altruistic reason’.

Male carers found themselves in the position of both watching their female partners closely, but also of becoming carers themselves. Steeped into day-to-day realities, they were able to value care, but also to notice a difference in people's reactions: while the participants received praise, women, for doing the exact same work, received none. Giovanni described how prominent the difference was between his own and his female co-worker's treatment:

Now that I'm back at work I get so many accolades for leaving early or having to go during lunch to do a childcare thing. You get so much credit. Like 'oh you're such a great dad', 'oh it's so wonderful that you're so involved in your child's life'. [...] There's no mum to do this, it's just me! That's one thing, and two, I'm very aware there's tons of women in my office who need to leave early or come a little bit late and they don't get any of that. They just get crap! 'You're not really committed to this job, I don't know if we can take you seriously for this role since you can never be here on time'. – Giovanni (34, used to be stay-at-home dad for his six-year-old adopted son)

Giovanni lives in London and works in the banking sector. On the other hand, Lewis, who lives in a small community in Hampshire and used to work in sales on the lower end of the pay scale, mentioned how he experienced "sexism" when looking for jobs that would allow him to fit the job around the children. Lewis is in a much less privileged position than Giovanni, and a job that "fits around children" is harder to find when one is not a mother. This is revealing not only of the importance of location and class differences, but also of how a queering of those spaces (in this example, the workplace) cannot happen unilaterally from the carers, but depends on wider structural issues and workplace policies; it is an event, an encounter, a becoming to which others participate by contesting and re-thinking those spaces.

Greg lives in London and identifies as a stay-at-home father who also does some freelance work. Here he talks about the difference in expectations from him and from his wife:

It's a lot easier in some ways because having children challenges your identity and your sense of who you are. And even though I do more caring than most dads and more than my wife, I still think that changing identity is a lot more challenging for her than for me. Partly because, it's like my wife says, if you're a dad you kind of get a thumbs up for doing anything. Any childcare you do there's no standards you're being held to, you're not judged as much. But if you have two weeks paternity and then go back to work, come and kiss the children goodnight in the evening, taking them to the park in the weekend, that's much less of a loss of identity. But you're also missing out, I think. – Greg (44, stay-at-home dad for his two children, ages 6 and 3)

Greg describes an identity struggle when one enters a novel realm like parenthood and primary caring. This questioning of identity is part of a becoming which, however, he thinks is harder for his wife because of an economy of gratitude towards fathers and impossibly high standards towards mothers.

He also makes a point about fathers who have not been primary carers: they do not experience this loss of identity, but also are missing out on something. These fathers might experience the benefits of an economy of gratitude whenever they appear involved, but do not actually engage in the deterritorializing experiences of a becoming-carer. The dangers of the economy of gratitude lie in how it creates a myth of equality when reality is actually unequal. One thing to keep in mind is that it reproduces masculinity as the norm, because ‘in the name of equality the mother gives masculine care higher status than her own maternal practice’ (Brandth and Kvande, 1999, p.305). In the primary carers’ case in particular, it also does not recognize the carers who actually do the work of caring, as they would receive gratitude for even doing half of what they do. While on one hand, male carers are seemingly recognized, on the other they are easily misunderstood. Eventually, the praise they receive is part of the gendered binary equation, of masculinity’s privilege: they receive praise for doing what women do *because* they are men.

Can this initial destabilizing of the norm lead to differential becomings instead of re-assertions of masculinity? In these expressions of gratitude there is a concealed appreciation for doing childcare—after all, it was predominantly other mothers who were the most enthusiastic. I would argue that by making the male carer more *visible* and less of a “novelty,” patterns of gratitude can be subsumed. The key here is experimenting with becomings, challenging ideas of who can be a carer so that expectations are no longer rigidly defined. In the rest of the chapter I follow some examples of the participants’ experiences in places of childcare and look closely at the carers’ own shifting perspectives and what might be the beginnings of lines of flight.

6.2 “Alien in a mums’ world”: isolation and connection

Childcare spaces can be transgressive spaces for men, challenging rules that dictate who can enter a certain place, what kind of body is allowed there (McDowell, 1999). In this section I seek the ways in which male carers in childcare places challenge the normative expectations of what kind of body may be allowed in which place and how these events, encounters, and becomings make

us re-think the gendering of those places and practices. I am looking for the ways in which the process I introduced earlier in this chapter—that of questioning identities during encounters between male caring bodies and the world—evolves through and with spaces.

The notion of bodies as transgressive and ‘out of place’ features here, as do non-verbal intra-actions, pre-discursive and affective experiences. This unspoken uncertainty was present even when the participants relayed good experiences, were able to make friends and felt included. George shared a very positive experience in Bristol: he did not feel particularly isolated, and was able to make and maintain friendships, something with which other carers struggled. However, he was still aware of his difference:

There’s also a sense that you’re different. And I guess if there was any kind of bars or tension where we went to... It was initially that kind of response. But then again you’re not another woman. You *are* something different to everybody else. Effectively [it’s] a female enclave that you’ve been allowed into. – George (46, father of three, alternated caring/working with his wife)

George uses a geographical term to describe his experience: “enclave,” a space with limited access to which he is only “allowed into” with the tolerance of those who clearly belong there. Geographers have previously discussed how, for bodies that do not fit certain categories such as female and queer bodies, some places are forbidden, dangerous, and exclusionary (Namaste, 1996; Browne, 2004; Doan, 2010; Longhurst and Johnston, 2014). Male bodies are usually privileged and allowed everywhere. In this study, we see this being contested in subtle, unspoken ways.

Andrea Doucet (2006) has previously noticed how men have to initially watch their footing when entering such spaces, but also how bodies sometimes seem to matter in certain spaces and sometimes they do not. This feeling of caution was something mentioned by the participants even when the reactions towards them had been good overall. Although George did not view this as an obstacle to socialization, others found it isolating. Eric, who also had a good experience in the sense that he felt valued, noticed how standing out affected him, leading to isolation and difficulty in making friendships. He decided to visit every local baby group to combat isolation, where people jokingly called him ‘Token,’ as he was the only man. He says:

As a man it was fine to begin with, but soon you know nobody else is in the same situation as you are or very few people. And it’s extremely difficult so I made a thing to

join as many groups as I could because isolation is dreadful when you're a parent, particularly new parent, and even worse when you're a man.

Despite the bright side of receiving recognition, he offered a nuanced approach to this experience. Standing out helped him receive praise, but also kept him at a distance:

The thing you get from a lot of people is isn't it lovely that a guy's doing all the main caring, and that is very true. But, because perhaps of sexual tension, women would come up and chat to you but they'll never go 'would you like to go for coffee?' or 'would you like to come round the children play together' [...] It's very difficult to actually make friends in a neutral setting as a man. You speak to any women and they think it's great that man does the thing but when it comes down to socializing with then it's arm's distance. – Eric (48, stay-at-home dad to his two primary schoolers)

Distance here is only felt, not communicated verbally. As we will see later, silences, raising eyebrows, and passive ignoring by others were as felt as other forms of social encounter. Subtle, non-verbal signals are central to the shaping of parenting experiences in public, as spaces are created through embodied experience (Thrift, 1996). The simultaneous affirmation and destabilization of the masculine norm in Eric's example is what renders those encounters ambiguous, unnerving, but also full of potential.

Isolation is probably the best example of this loneliness for which one has no words. From their accounts, it could be argued that there are three degrees of isolation: first, a carer's or new parent's isolation; second, the isolation of a man in a world of women that makes it difficult to communicate and make friends; and finally the isolation of a male carer in a world where 'carer' or 'parent' is shorthand for 'woman' and makes it hard to navigate normative assumptions on what a carer should look like. All three are particularly prominent in the lives of participants who called themselves stay-at-home fathers and consequently the need to navigate these obstacles was more urgent for them. Colin explained the gendered dimension of isolation:

One of the biggest things all stay at home fathers face is social isolation. I want to be careful when I say that because it's an issue there's no question stay-at-home mothers face. When you are a stay-at-home father however, the informal social networks that women have at their disposal are non-existent. And the formal networks that exist especially in my experience in the early years, they are pretty much exclusively set up for women and therefore being male you've got to really be quite confident to walk into that type of thing. – Colin (42, stay-at-home dad for his two children, ages 6 and 2)

Colin talks about the existing social networks (which come from women's socialities and cultures) and the new parents' social networks (which are usually structured by women and for women). Colin, who was surprised at the registrar's comment that a man with a baby is brave, in this account he agrees with Eric that it takes confidence to walk into baby groups. This is not because walking around with a baby is an attack on his masculinity, but for the same reason Eric cited earlier in this chapter: that these are places and structures that are set up for women and thus can feel exclusionary to male carers.

Using the example of groups organized by the National Childbirth Trust (NCT), the UK's largest charity for parents, Colin alludes to the exclusionary feeling of places and puts to words the unsaid:

You think about the way NCT groups operate. In my experience that type of group is 'fine'. There's no concrete barrier in your way, is it? But they're not exactly open. – Colin (42, stay-at-home dad for his two children, ages 6 and 2)

Not closed does not mean open: something is not clear, is left unsaid, can only be felt in that place. There is a threshold that cannot be crossed. Eric describes it in terms of belonging that revolves around two experiences. The first one is birth, which is, as discussed in the previous chapter, a common point of reference that mothers use to bond. The second is, as Colin also explained, women's networks and a culture of motherhood which is, effectively, a culture of care to which men have not been introduced to due to different rearing and socializing:

As a woman you've probably got friends who have children, you've probably spent time with women with children. It's a very female atmosphere so it's not uncomfortable. You've all gone through the birth experience so you can all compare how it was for you. Again as a man this is another issue. You've not done that. [...] What's really challenging as a man in a female environment is that it's so easy to feel like you don't belong or you don't have a right. There's an awful feeling that you don't have the right to belong because you've never given birth. – Eric (48, stay-at-home dad to his two primary schoolers)

These accounts indeed reflect Doucet's 'estrogen-filled worlds'. Eric's words remind us one of Doucet's participants: '[h]e sometimes feels as if he is standing outside an immense *'kind of culture'* which is run by women and he feels 'there is this huge *gulf* between me as a male carer and women ... who have a sort of ready-made context that they're attuned to, that I *haven't got*' (Doucet, 2000, p.176).

How does this enquiry go beyond Doucet's work? Here I attempt to look at how male primary carers occupy a liminal space that makes them different from other fathers, but also different from mothers. This in-betweenness is part of a *becoming* as they realize that whatever identity they thought of themselves as fixed is fluid and changing, propelled by the surfacing of this difference in public. Greg uses a powerful metaphor to describe this. Even though he did not allow this sense of exclusion to affect him negatively, he recognized that every time he enters this caring world, he is an "alien":

There's a definite sense that there's a kind of mum's world. And you're kind of alien in mum world, when you're out with the kids in groups and stuff. [...] You get a sense that mums maybe don't make a massive effort to include you when you're there maybe they don't quite know what to make of you or react to you, but it's never got me down, never bothered me. – Greg (44, stay-at-home dad for his two children, ages 6 and 3)

As with the participant in Doucet's work, who described the world of childcare as an 'estrogen world' (2006, p.701) and George (my own participant) calling it a "female enclave," here Greg speaks of a different world to which the father can only be a guest that is extremely aware of his difference. Ahmed (2010) has written about *affect aliens*, when one is feeling the wrong thing. As this alien-ness is, in effect, a deterritorialization, I seek the *ways to embrace the alien* in the interstices of such moments. This is, by no means, an easy and linear process, but it is characterized by the folds of a becoming: the simultaneous affirming and destabilizing of what we thought as fixed.

Safe spaces, unsafe bodies

Childcare places are bound to place-making rules. They must be "safe" spaces for children and, sometimes, for young mothers too, as anything threatening will not be tolerated or even allowed entrance. This is something I encountered myself as a researcher, while contacting schools and Sure Start centres in order to find participants. Without a child with me, I was always stopped at the reception and was reassured that my call for participants would reach the parents, whom I was never allowed to meet. This 'woman's world' (which is actually a mothers' world, in which childless women-presenting people such as myself were still not allowed into) the participants talk about has specific rules on who is allowed in it – rules that are based not only on gender, but

also on specific types of womanhood constructed around age, class, ethnicity, and fit with ideas of good motherhood (DeBenedictis, 2012).

Bodies entering such places are scrutinized; not everyone can enter. Men with children will most often be allowed, although there are moments when access might be forbidden. Pete cited such an event happening in Bristol. He had a good experience socializing during his paternity leave, as he already had friends from his partner's mums' meet-up that was organized by the NCT. He was one of the dads who were not very interested in interacting with other parents in the groups and focused instead on activities with his son. However, he was stunned when he tried to join a baby yoga group and was not allowed to enter. Suddenly, there was a forbidden geography. Because Pete sought to join the baby yoga class as a parent and a carer, he did not realize that he was perceived as a man in a place safe for women who were just recovering from birth. Even when fathers do enter, these are still 'transgressive' places for them (McDowell, 1999). Their bodies generate anxiety and stand out as something destabilizing, in ways that pregnant bodies might generate anxiety in different contexts (Longhurst, 2000).

For some, this might be the first time in their lives that they encountered a forbidden geography, the first time their right to be in a certain place was questioned. Marc described a very uncomfortable experience, where no one openly rejected him yet he felt excluded. For the first time, he was aware that as a man he could not walk into childcare places as easily:

I went there a little bit early and it was all empty. I sat in the middle of a row, and nobody sat within three seats of me. There were four people standing but nobody [sat near me]...I was the only dad there and pretty much everywhere I'm going I'm the only dad there. [...] You go once and I think everyone assumes oh he has the kid for the day. But then they keep on seeing you and I doubt if they think of you – probably not a threat, probably 'why is he doing that?' And then people don't ask. – Marc (41, stay-at-home father to his one-year-old)

Earlier in this chapter, we discussed isolation as an impression, a pervasive feeling of loneliness. In this instance, isolation is a physical, material experience. It is produced by the movements of bodies in space in a way that creates this isolating arrangement, and also produces certain *immaterial* sensations that are felt *materially* by Marc. This ambiguity engenders and is engendered by the contested place of those male caring bodies, this challenge and fluidity of their 'proper place'.

At first glance, people might assume that a caring dad is not there on his own, but he is in a relationship with a mother who happens to be nearby. Ron mentioned that “first comment in groups would be about her mum. Is that her mum? [Then] point at random person”. Ian, too, said he stands out a bit in groups, so people will assume he is with one of the mothers. George was good friends with a mother whom he would see almost daily. His wife Maria recalled what their mother friend told her:

When the two of them were out, ostensibly they would be the traditional sort of family but they couldn't quite do the math with the children [...] She could feel that they couldn't get their heads around the fact that they weren't all their children [...] They wanted you to be a family. They wanted to make the shape fit what their thing was, really.

This immediately assumes women as the default carer, as man and caring identity are incompatible, and that men normally have no access to childcare places except in company of their female partner. In the previous chapter, we also discussed how gay dad Ben was questioned on why his son does not have a mother: somehow, this was deemed threatening and wrong. Easily, the male body becomes “safe” in this way, reinforced by a heteronormative family framing, as in Maria's example. The out-of-place body is reterritorialized in this way, rendered safe, re-affirming binary logic.

Despite the misunderstandings caused by having a mum friend nearby, walking into childcare places with a mum friend might actually be helpful in opening up those places that “are not exactly open”. Not only because presenting as a heteronormative family immediately feels safer, but also because socializing becomes easier. Ian and Chris for example, who described themselves as more reserved, were able to fit in more easily in the places where they already knew some of the mothers. Ultimately, fathers too can benefit from this re-affirmation of binaries, as it is safer for them to move around those circles in this way. But when a dad is alone this can be much harder.

Unfamiliar places and public space pose a bigger challenge. Lewis said that at the beginning he felt like he was being looked at in the playground, but progressively, as people got to know him, it was better. Previous research has shown how fathering in public can be uncomfortable, especially for working class fathers (Braun *et al.*, 2011) and fathers of low income and low status occupations (Doucet, 2009) as ‘there remains a recurring thin thread of public suspicion about the proximity between male bodies and children, especially the children of others’ (Doucet, 2013, p.288). Doucet mentioned her participants' own observations of other men

lingering near childcare places (2006), a suspicion my participants mentioned as well. Even though they are carers themselves, they, too, view male bodies as threatening.

These ‘threatening male bodies’ also show some gradation as to what is deemed safer and what not as much, and reflect expectations of what a carer should look like. Sam felt this suspicion directed towards himself as he walked around Bristol, but also realized he thinks the same way:

Sometimes if I’m pushing a pushchair, that’s a great visual cue for people to look at you funny. Or if you’re wandering around a lot. And there’s always this air of suspicion. Even I do that! If a bearded man walks into a group that I’m running, depending on how they’re dressed, there’s a little sense of ‘this is a safe space for babies, I want to keep them safe. I want to keep them away from bearded scary men!’ – Sam (29, stay-at-home dad to his three-year-old daughter)

Sam himself considered male bodies, and certain male bodies in particular, as unsafe for his own child and the children in the groups he was running. Charles gives us more information, as he had a friend who was a male primary carer and stood out more than usual. He discussed how he encountered more problems than Charles did:

He’s this big stocky guy, bald head, beard, he looks not aggressive, but quite domineering, he’s quite a tough-looking, scary man. So he struggles a bit more. He went to a group his partner used to take his daughter to and he felt quite conscious that people were looking. Because he’s a big, tattooed, kinda tough-looking guy. – Charles (38, stay-at-home dad to his two-year-old)

These perceptions of large, bearded men as inherently scary and unsafe to children are telling of what kind of masculinities we link them to and how unsuited we find them to spaces of care. Charles’ friend sounds like he fits to images we associate to ‘macho’ and more marginalized masculinities that do not fit ideas of hegemonic masculinity as a kind of middle-class and upper-class ‘corporate’ air of authority (Connell, 1995). Here too, isolation is a deeply felt, material experience for Charles’ friend, whose mere presence challenges the order of those places.

Colin’s comments below shed some light on this. He also described his experience of trying to fit in in the playground that was near his eldest daughter’s school. The school was a few miles away from their home, so he knew no other parents:

I felt completely like a fish out of water. [...] Had she gone to a school nearby I would have probably known the mums and dads there. A lot of dads do the schoolrun but unlike me

they don't do it twice a day. So what you find is quite a tight mixed networks of mums who basically know each other already and are already socializing. – Colin (42, stay-at-home dad for his two children, ages 6 and 2)

Colin said he “went out of his way” to prove that he was the main carer and so that others would have to get used to him, particularly by being very active and volunteering, which is something Eric, Andrew, Sam, Giovanni all mentioned as a way of establishing themselves in those networks. Making themselves more *visible* meant, eventually, acceptance, perhaps as a reterritorializing of their environment through a distinctively masculine approach to claiming space. Colin thought about fitting in at the playground as a process of being accepted, a process of becoming normal when one is anything but:

From what I see in the playground there is a model of parent that you are supposed to fit into. If you are slightly out of that you're going to have a tougher time out of it. So it's not necessarily just because you're male. Possibly people who are not British, people who are exceedingly heavily tattooed, whatever, you might have a bit of a tougher time fitting in there. – Colin (42, stay-at-home dad for his two children, ages 6 and 2)

His words remind of Doucet's observation that ‘men who face structural disadvantages based on class, ethnicity, and/or sexuality, can feel surveilled and scrutinized by onlookers as they move through community settings, such as parks and schoolyards’ (Doucet, 2013, p.288). Colin powerfully describes what seems to be at the heart of the “alien-ness”: only certain bodies are allowed to present themselves as carers in those places.

What determines those rules is a binary gender logic. Whatever resembles “feminine” and otherwise non-threatening bodies is deemed okay, but anything that deviates—such as the big, bearded men—starts receiving suspicious looks. In Deleuzian terms, one is allowed to be one or multiple (one or its opposite), not ‘multiplicities’. Thus the mere presence of a male primary carer disrupts ideas around care because a man does not fit our idea of how a carer should be. A queering of caring identities begins, also posing questions on intersections of class, race, ethnicity and sexuality. By making others accept him, Colin engages in a becoming, a disruption of the binary logic that might open up to multiplicities. Both Colin and other people there are invited to start from the question *what can a body do?* instead of starting from a fixed identity.

Navigating women's groups and connecting to other men

Some fathers found that caring made them *less* isolated and helped them socialize. This was especially the case for Nathaniel and George, whose caring periods coincided with moving to a new city. In this case, socializing through childcare was an opportunity to build networks from scratch. Baby groups and other meet-ups can actually offer social places for carers, especially those who feel more isolated, precisely because they are there to help new parents. But the problem with baby groups seems to be that they are perceived as '*mums' social places*,' not simply childcare places. Consequently, they often reflect or accommodate the ways mothers bond around shared experiences of pregnancy and childbirth.

As male primary carers occupy this in-between space, they do not feel they are the same as mothers. Ron said he did not wish to spend the entire time in the company of mothers because "you're not exactly the same as them". In terms of how the participants deal with this, Charles offers an illuminating example when, in order to be included, he deliberately excluded himself:

If someone's having a particularly hard time and they're having a cry quite often I'll pull away and try and get the kids with the other kids and the mums will group up and support and sometimes they go off into the kitchen [...] and I'll get all the kids together. Which is fine. I wouldn't feel comfortable going through to the kitchen as well and go like, 'oh, I understand'. Because I'm a man, I suppose, and that interaction between men and women is less common. [...] I think they might feel more comfortable if just don't join the conversation. I'll just play with or read a book to the kids. – Charles (38, stay-at-home dad to his two-year-old)

Charles, by separating himself spatially and at the appropriate moment, managed to navigate the awkwardness created by his difference. By shifting space, the childcare place that is also a mums' social place split in two: in one room, women discussed their own issues, and in the other Charles did childcare.

However, male primary carers are not the same as other fathers either. Doucet has mentioned that dads might create their own groups in order to overcome exclusions, since in this way 'fathers find a social setting where masculinities and care coalesce rather easily' (2013, p.299). But connecting to other fathers in groups was actually described as more difficult than connecting to mothers. Eric said it is harder because men "don't talk". According to Andrew, "men

are funny creatures. Women talk to each other in groups, but [the men] go off and sit by themselves”. This might reflect how other fathers also encountered childcare places as mums’ social places and felt excluded and uncomfortable, so did not interact much and focused instead on the activities. Jordan said:

Surprisingly the women are more friendly. Like, there was a dad today and he didn’t say hello to anyone. But the women will chat to you more. [...] Often they see a man with a baby and of course they’re like a mum, they wanna help you. Like, ‘do you need a hand changing?’ and stuff. [...] The main thing that surprised me was that they’re really, really helpful, but the men they’re just men, really. I find it is mainly women there, which can be pretty good because they’re extremely friendly. If it was seven blokes then I don’t know if it would be as good. – Jordan (34, on paternity leave for his four-month-old)

This simultaneous alienation from both other mums *and* dads is interesting as the participants seemed to position themselves *between* mums and dads, not identifying with either. When it came to dads’ groups in particular, they were often disappointed. The reason was that the focus in these groups tends to be on working dads who have a free Saturday afternoon, thus making no difference to stay-at-home fathers. Eric described them as “awful, sad, miserable men”, seeing no connection to them at all. His words sound like a real line of flight: he has moved so far away in his experience that he is entirely disconnected from non-primary caring dads.

Perhaps a group specifically made for male primary carers would be ideal, but it is hard to find. In my research, I only discovered one meet-up of this sort in Bristol, to which stay-at-home fathers Vinny and Sam participated. Vinny understands that dads’ groups are an opportunity for working fathers to bond with their children, but he agrees that they have little to offer him. He was lucky to meet a couple of other male primary carers during baby swimming, and since then they have grown into a social circle of stay-at-home dads that meets up every week. He described this as a source of great support:

Almost reassuring they’re there, helping. There might be insecurities of not knowing how things are and you discuss it and realise you all worry about the same thing possibly and it’s okay to do that. And actually you’re doing a good job.

Took off the pressure of feeling like you’re the only one and realised that you’re not [...] Becoming a stay-at-home dad was exciting, but wondering who else is out there? It’s not uncommon in Bristol anyway. – Vinny (34, stay-at-home dad for his one-year-old)

These meet-ups were reassuring for Vinny because he was able to connect with people exactly in the same position, a similarly liminal, in-between place as he was. The dilemma of not being a mum, but not being like other fathers either, seems to turn into a veritable line of flight through connecting with others who are also in-between, who challenge binary oppositions. This is about making alliances in a rhizomatic way: occupying multiple positions at once or, rather, treading between fixed identities such as man, father, carer, mother, and making connections while expanding horizontally in unexpected, tangled manners.

6.3 Embracing the alien? Uncertainty and emerging difference

Praise and suspicion were two conversational attitudes that the participants encountered, both originating in their *difference*. This difference made the participants acutely aware of another issue – that of “losing identity,” as Greg described it. This uncertainty is part of a process of deterritorialization. Insecurity is precisely the feeling of flux, of realizing that identities are not fixed. However, we need to keep in mind that not everyone can be comfortable with it. As geographies of encounter have confirmed, these events can strengthen prejudice. Heightened insecurity might lead to strengthening traditional gender roles. A state of flux by itself does not necessarily create a line of flight.

Becoming a carer was an opportunity for the participants to think about themselves and what new subjectivities they occupy. Ian started wondering if he behaved differently in private and differently in public, and whether masculinity was at the root of this. He asked his wife whether she was as affectionate with their daughter in public as she was at home:

I’m probably a bit shy as a person anyway, but when I’m here with her we’ll act in a certain way, kisses and cuddles. But there’s this slightly bloke part of me that when we go to a group I’m slightly more hands off and part of me thinking ‘I don’t need to be hands off’. [...] What I’m trying to get from my wife is whether that’s because I’m a bloke or whether she is like that as well. I think it’s probably a bit of both. – Ian (38, on paternity leave for his 8-month-old)

Ian is aware that there might be a tension between his caring ‘identity’ and his masculine ‘identity’, which manifests only when he is in public and thus will be judged. He concludes that it

is both his character and the “bloke part” of his identity that restrains him, and that he both does and undoes gender. This is exemplary of how the simultaneous reification and challenging of bodily boundaries is part of its potential, just like deterritorialization and reterritorialization are both parts of a becoming. As Wilson writes, ‘by focusing on the simultaneous making and unmaking of borders, a site of potential, politics and pedagogy comes into view’ (2016, pp.7-8). Challenging the norms in those spaces can be hard, so for Ian and others it is easier to retreat into normative gender roles. However, Ian notices this duality of roles; how both sides are part of him and part of a continuous negotiation between identities that try to remain fixed.

For the participants who struggled most and were uncertain if they were “doing it right”, receiving attention and praise was used as a way of reassuring themselves that they were living up to the expectations of what a carer should be. Both Eric and Andrew, who lived in small communities in Hampshire, combatted this fear by becoming very active in their communities so as to prove “they could do it”. However, receiving praise among baby groups has been easy and did not require much effort:

Mums love me. I think it gives them a window into men they’ve never had before. [...]

What do you mean you feed him? My husband would never do that! – Andrew (31, stay-at-home dad to a one-year-old)

Here we are faced with a contradiction. On one hand, carers might say it takes a lot of effort to impose one’s self in a “female place”, but on the other they do receive praise easily (as seen with the economy of gratitude). This contradiction seems to point out that a way to cope with losing identity at a first stage could be by re-asserting masculine privilege: using an economy of gratitude as a source of self-validation that counterbalances the loss of status when walking into a place where male privilege is questioned.

Yet there are multiple layers to this unraveling of identities. In the process of becoming, deterritorialization and reterritorialization take place. Carers are deterritorialized, but then make new territory. Both are part of a becoming which might or might not take us to a line of flight. Sam also encountered this uncertainty in Bristol. In this quote he realizes that this is not a process of “losing” identity, but a grappling, negotiating with, introducing and letting go of identities; it is part of his own process of becoming:

One chap he said [...] ‘oh you can’t find work that must be really hard’ [...] To begin with, I was a little bit insulted or taken aback, but he was just being really honest with what he thought. [...] A lot of it comes down to what I have in my head about their thinking. [...]

Stuff you make up because you're insecure, the role that you're in, because you stand out and you're different. – Sam (29, stay-at-home dad to his three-year-old daughter)

Sam's way of combatting this was by becoming very active in social activities—a tactic employed by Eric and Andrew too, all three stay-at-home fathers. These social activities could be read as an effort to impose their presence, make it acceptable, and prove they are as capable as anyone. The result was that, as the only dad who was always there, *visible*, they became a “novelty”, in Andrew's words, or a “commodity”, as Sam noted. This contradiction between feeling like an outsider that has to impose one's presence to become accepted, but also of receiving special, positive treatment, is evident in the following quote from Sam:

When I go to a place where I know everyone I feel very confident, very secure. It's just like the equivalent of walking into your local cafe or bar, you just know everyone and that's usually how I feel. And part of that is because reverse discrimination, when people give me special treatment. If I was a mother I might have to do more effort to be friendly. – Sam (29, stay-at-home dad to his three-year-old daughter)

Sam is describing a process of reterritorialization: making new territory his own. For Deleuze and Guattari, de- and reterritorialization characterize a constant process of transformation. We could say, though, that these new elements of becoming a carer in the public eye are reconciled with a masculine identity, stretching the meaning of masculinity to accommodate something else, forming new, non-hegemonic masculinities. Thus, from a Deleuzian perspective we ask: does this becoming create a line of flight? In other words, can we get to the point where change happens?

Sam's example can lead us to some early thoughts about this. He believes that people's kind reactions stem from a need to value male carers. Since he was able to make a positive influence, this felt like a valuable part of his identity:

I think it's a positive part of my male identity being a carer and because it's a commodity due to its scarcity it's something that we as a society begin to value more...male carers. And in that particular role a lot of people felt it was good and important to have men in early learning as part of a balanced development for children. I always felt that as a positive thing, positive part of my identity. – Sam (29, stay-at-home dad to his three-year-old daughter)

We begin to see how the initial awkwardness can transform and help identities emerge from a fluid becoming-carer. For Sam, the value he receives returns to care and to making a

transformation in the world—it does not reinforce his male privilege, but elevates the status of care. Other carers also described this feel-good factor that, eventually, has to do less with receiving approval and more with finding a sense of purpose.

Vinny also faced the insecurities other dads described. His own strategy involved drawing strength from other parents, and other stay-at-home dads in particular, since he was lucky to find a few around his area in Bristol:

You don't know initially what to do and where. I'm not saying everyone, but people might look at me. Am I doing it right? But that all goes when you realise [that] everyone's like that. You had a bad time swimming [...] then another parent, a mum's saying 'ah I don't think it's gone well' and you say 'oh, I thought you did really well actually'. This sort of encouragement.

Vinny is making connections—like a rhizome. He also reflected on identity, emphasizing on the positive things this experience gave him and how there is no clash with his masculinity:

It's given me a completely different outlook on looking after kids. [...] A lot of male carers would say the same, but a lot of fathers would almost think it's a kind of de-masculine? Less manly sort of thing. But it's silly, it's just an archaic way of thinking.

For Vinny a becoming-carer has changed him and his view on care, and believes male carers think the same because of their unique experience. Vinny is tracing a line of flight towards the possibilities of becoming. Andrew struggled more, as he drew his sense of self from roles which he had to give up:

Before having our son I was very involved in the community [...] I had those roles and a very clear identity of who I was. But now I've given up those roles because I need to focus [on childcare]. – Andrew (31, stay-at-home dad to a one-year-old)

Losing those roles challenged what he thought about himself. But understanding the fluidity built into his identity was a way to grapple with this:

So identity is me. I still have an identity but it's shifted significantly. I have a whole new group of friends in terms of mums. Spend a lot of time with other mums and babies and children and I love that, but the identity I had is gone.

Through this deterritorializing experience, Andrew derives identity from what he *does* instead of what he *is*. The sense of clear identity is gone and replaced by a sense of shifting identity that he still owns and that is moving with him.

Perhaps most striking of all is Jordan's enthusiasm in the following quote. Jordan is so immersed in a becoming-carer that he feels like he has "turned into a mum" – deriving identity from exactly what he does, thus starting to queer the carer and embracing the between-ness, the "alien-ness":

For me, personally, I think it's brilliant, really. I just feel like a mum. I've turned into a mum. [...] I picked up an iron the other day! – Jordan (34, on paternity leave for his four-month-old)

6.4 Conclusion

In Doucet's terms (2001), the 'mothering' dimension of primary caregiving (tasks such as feeding and changing nappies) can be done by anyone. However, the mothering aspect that involves building networks and navigating social life can present male carers with certain obstacles. In this chapter I added to Doucet's study on the functions of 'mothering' by looking at how engaging with people and places as a male carer shapes a becoming. I also add to Aitken's work on the 'awkward' places where embodied fathering takes place, the places that are specific and move us away from universalizing tendencies by looking at how identities of difference are produced, how a line of flight can be traced when navigating these uncharted waters. In other words, I look at how these obstacles shape the caring experience in particular ways and help us question preconceived notions of identity and difference.

This is thus a story about how men learn to be carers in public, laden with insecurities and awkward moments. In the back and forth between positive and negative experiences, certain issues stood out. One was how fathers, regardless of the variations in their experiences, all mentioned their difference and how they stood out. The "alien in a mum's world" points us to how impactful the lack of fathering culture is. The debate around safe bodies did make male carers uncomfortable, but was also a starting point for the queering of those places. 'Good'

bodies will always seek to be affirmed, but the presence of 'bad' bodies can push these contested limits towards change. New encounters lead to queerings and becomings.

Are caring places queered during this process? In this chapter I also sought to expand Doucet's work on the 'estrogen-filled world' of childcare by looking at the potential of these encounters to destabilize those places' own binary logic. While we cannot answer whether those places were effectively 'queered' or not, we can certainly see 'disruptive possibilities' (Bell *et al.*, 1994) and the beginnings of becomings. For Braidotti, becoming is 'a question of undoing the structures of domination by careful, patient re-visitations, re-adjustments, micro-changes' (2002, p. 116). Wilson also writes that

whilst fleeting encounters have been dismissed as having little meaning or little ability to transform values and belief, it is possible that encounters accumulate, to gradually shift relations and behaviour over time – to both positive and negative effects (2016, p.13).

It is a becoming with the world: places and other people are becoming with the carers in these exchanges. The carers came across a lot of unwelcoming moments, but every time they corrected misconceptions of being "just babysitters", challenged assumptions, and showed up every day – all these are daily, cumulative practices make incremental micro-changes. It is a process of de- and reterritorialization that is characteristic of becomings.

This simultaneous affirmation and questioning of binary logic was something the carers themselves grappled with, particularly during moments they drew from their privilege as men. Both are expressions of the position they are in: a between-ness that shakes up expectations and pre-given notions around gender and care. While it is important to be watchful of how these becomings and encounters can re-assert fixed identities, it is evident that they are brimming with possibility for change. I would argue that one way to increase this potential would be by increasing numbers. The carers were there every day, as visible as possible, but still "novelties" and "tokens" because they were usually the only male parent in a group. More male primary carers means more performative intra-actions that shape the world, more chances for encounters, more opportunities to make places through practices. Making place for these fathers depends a lot on building a sense of community. More carers means more opportunities like Vinny's: to join a group with others in liminal positions, the daily practices of which will enable rhizomatic bonding and lines of flight. Eventually, these beginnings of becomings and lines of flight are about embracing the alien-ness as a becoming itself, as a rhizomatic in-between.

Chapter 7: Conclusions: Work and care at the edge of time

In Marge Piercy's 1976 science fiction novel *Woman at the Edge of Time*, reproduction is decoupled from sexual difference. In this future society, babies are gestated in brooders, they are later raised by three parents, men breastfeed, and the traditional meanings of 'father' and 'mother' do not exist anymore. According to a character in the book, there is a 'price' for the gender equality born from these societal arrangements:

It was part of women's long revolution. When we were breaking all the old hierarchies. Finally there was one thing we had to give up too, the only power we ever had, in return for no more power for anyone. The original production: the power to give birth (2016, p. 105).

Piercy, echoing her feminist peers and inspired by Shulamith Firestone's (1971) calls to embrace technology as a liberation from the mythologies of motherhood, knows that the price to pay for breaking hierarchies is to step down from all kinds of power. This is, in part, what I tried to do in this project: to explore the moments when hierarchies can be dissolved. This, of course, both for the women of *Woman at the Edge of Time* and for us—men, women, and the rest of us—comes at the cost of relinquishing certain privileges that derive from fixed identities, because these identities are, in the first place, limited, limiting, and part of a *patriarchal bargain* (Kandiyoti, 1988) that grants some power in the hierarchy in order to uphold the latter. Becoming-minoritarian entails a risk; contesting identities is a dangerous behaviour. It is a kind of uncertain territory that takes time to tread.

Echoing Piercy and Firestone, this study began from a similar feminist worry regarding the realms of biological production and social reproduction; a worry concerning the seemingly inescapable constraints that gender puts on us and which appear to dictate how bodies and spaces are made; and a worry regarding how labour is organized hierarchically within those spaces. It was also born from the ontological knowledge that practices contest these conceptual, ideological

and institutional constraints, which are contingent and malleable and can be tampered with, and from the need to explore these possibilities more fully.

The philosophies I engaged with provided me with a toolset to re-think these concepts and to study these practices—a toolset which, I hope, tries to dismantle the master's house while doing its utmost to not belong to him. Starting from a feminist perspective, I argued that care and paid work are gendered in a dichotomous manner and that the apparent marginalization of men in the field of care is also a symptom of patriarchal binaries. Because studying men in this context could easily portray them at the mercy of women-dominated spaces, I chose the powerful concept of *queering* to denote deviations from normality (in this case, caring men) while being aware of normality's hierarchical privilege (in this case, men in general).

In all their diverse experience, men who do primary care have one common point: they deviate from normality in certain ways, transgressing gender rules. Rather than fathers becoming mothers through this process, fathers engage in a *becoming-carer*: they find themselves in this in-between position that allows us to challenge the idea that only mothers can be carers, or that carers must be mother-like. In this way, *difference* and, in particular, the difference that practices of care produce, can be valued for what it is, *in itself*. The transgressions, the returns to the binaries to re-affirm them, and the ways these transgressions and re-affirmations (the deterritorializations and reterritorializations) open up new possibilities are among the things I set out to explore. Deleuze and Guattari's work, as well as the broader, highly experimental field of new materialist thought guided me to a way to think about these possibilities. The rigid, arborific identities of mother, father, parent, worker, and carer engage in a dialogue with the affective and embodied rhizomatic experiences of the undulating work of parenting and caring. I sought the ways of *becoming-carer* and the beginnings of valuing difference.

In the field, I tried to capture moments of becoming. The findings of this study do not gear towards being generalizable, but towards exploring possibilities and becomings. While I initially set off to explore male primary caring in all its possible expressions, the challenges of research led me to participants that seem to represent quite specific masculinities in terms of ethnic, societal, educational, and financial backgrounds. They were largely middle-class and either British or from a well-educated non-British background. Although the experiences of fathers who are differentially situated might provide us with additional insights, even among my participants my aim has not been to generalize by treating them as a static category. Every interview was unique, each a moment-in-becoming. My approach consists not of drawing universal conclusions, but of

drawing out the differences and from there, as I said, the possibilities. What can a caring body do? The answers are as many as the possible becomings.

7.1 Navigating the work-care continuum in neoliberal times

Drawing from my interests and previous research, my study used the intimate relationship between work, care, and gender as a starting point. What I set out to do was to examine if men entering the feminized world of care could help disrupt the perceived binaries and the built-in hierarchies of the latter, and thus help us consider difference based on multiplicity instead of dyads. This process is what constitutes the *queering* and hopes to disrupt dualisms by exposing them as monisms: what is considered to be out is already in, since without it, the spaces of *in* and *out* would not be able to form (Namaste, 2013). Care is constructed as the *outside* of work, as non-work, and consequently as having no value. Assuming binaries are de-constructed, a path opens towards considering difference as something positive instead of a lack, and open it up to multiplicities (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004).

Recognizing the strong ties between masculinity and work, I wondered if the experiences of male primary carers have the potential to challenge these binary identities and thus contribute to a breaking down of the hierarchy that privileges work versus non-work. While this seemed to be true, it is also possible that this questioning of gender roles had started for these carers long before they took up caring, something that was reflected in their attitudes on family and children, their ideas of gender equality, and their relationships to their own parents. Doing childcare could be part of a becoming, not necessarily the beginning of a becoming – and certainly not the end. Becomings, after all, are caught in the middle, without beginnings or ends.

“I got the best of both worlds”, was how Greg summarized his experience. While this illustrates the in-betweenness of the participants that can engender becomings, having the ‘best of both worlds’ also conveys the idea that men can have it all while women in the same position struggle with balancing work and care, as well as with feelings of guilt and failure generated by exceedingly high expectations around motherhood. Considering not only these participants’ more privileged societal position, but also men’s structural advantages compared to women, it is possible that only certain bodies have access to this beneficial kind of in-betweenness.

Many fathers discussed childcare as part of an opportunity to reconsider paid work, often by becoming self-employed. This feel-good independence of self-employed stay-at-home dads is, however, perfectly aligned with a neoliberal capitalism that rewards entrepreneurial individualism. Although traditional models of paid work are shaken, what seems to be a new, emerging mode of capitalist production might be re-affirmed through these arrangements that become more and more appealing to parents due to the failure of employers and state to 'reconcile' work and family life. In this case, the 'problem with work' becomes a different one: it is not paid work as opposed to family or care, but labour as a practice colonized by capitalism, which transforms with it as the latter captures and re-territorializes any disruptive, 'war machine' forces (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004).

This is only one reason why I argue, as Doucet (2016) does, that male primary caring and stay-at-home fathering are beneficial practices, but only as parts of a transitional phase. The goal of this transition is a deterritorialization, to engender a becoming-carer through which work is decentred, care is valued more, the gender-coding of work/non-work shifts, and new arrangements become possible. Becoming is about the possibilities, not about solidifying a new order of things. Because, in the long term, stay-at-home dads might actually perpetuate a binary between work and non-work spaces, the 'queering' of those spaces through the presence of a male carer can only work as an in-between, as a rhizome seeking connections: if it stops, it arborifies. Without movement, hierarchies can be consolidated all over again. Challenging work's centrality does not end with leaving the corporate world behind and becoming something akin to an entrepreneur, which is also rewarded in the 21st century's capitalist transformation. These experiences mark only the beginning; where they take us is yet to be seen.

One of the possible paths these practices seem to point to are familial arrangements that tend to follow the rhythms of childcare instead of 9 to 5 workdays. George and Maria, as well as Giovanni and Matthew, Will and his partner, and Robert and his partner were a few of the most interesting examples of arrangements that alternated work and care in time-bound and geographically bound ways, which are not always by choice but respond to quite complicated work-care situations. Chris, George, and Lewis sought part-time jobs with time available for care specifically in mind, and many fathers chose to work from home for this reason. While part-time work is intimately connected to current financial and occupational precarity, it leaves open windows for experimentation and directly challenges the association of masculinity to breadwinning identities. The 9-to-5 pattern is a breadwinner-homemaker day (Weeks 2011), so the arrangements the carers created were better suited to a universal carer experience. Universal

carer days are diverse and open to multiplicities, moving away from daily realities that are structured around (work and gender) binaries and moving closer to daily practices we can call *rhizomatic*, that are non-hierarchical, non-binary, and can embrace multiplicities.

7.2 Caring bodies as knowing bodies

This potential that is nesting inside male caring practices made me ask the Spinozian question ‘what can a body do?’ and follow the identities that emerge from practices, instead of the opposite. I sought the caring subjectivities that are caught in a becoming and that can challenge given ideas of motherhood and fatherhood. The concept of becoming-carer accompanied me, as I was attuned to the moments when fathers experienced this breaking down of pre-given identities and experienced care as a difference in itself.

Much like the characters in Piercy’s novel, my study participants found biological constraints a major problem that could never equalize them to mothers. Like the characters in the folktale *The Man who was to Mind the House*, referenced at the beginning of Chapter 1, they understood that their differences were a result of a lack of knowledge, although this knowledge was, sometimes, a deeply embodied and biological one. Despite their reiteration of essentialist ideas on the nature of motherhood, they discovered ways in which these barriers can be overcome through touch and bodily bonding. Caring bodies are knowing bodies.

Breastfeeding featured prominently as one of those barriers. This is also indicative of the limited demographic of the research, as breastfeeding rates in the UK are quite low overall, yet somewhat higher among middle-class parents. While it is important to remember here that breastfeeding featured as a problem among these participants, the results of this study can also give us a good view on how breastfeeding might impact male primary caring in different contexts. Given the efforts to promote breastfeeding, it is essential to remember that it can be one of those essentialist barriers that can further consolidate mothers as natural carers. As the case studies in this thesis illustrated, only through hands-on experimentation can this be continuously challenged and dissolved.

Another thing to notice here is how the participants described a life-changing experience which made them appreciate mothers and value care. While this answers the question ‘what can

a body do?’ in an exciting way, as valuing care is part of the key to the destabilizing of binary approaches to the work-care continuum, it is wise to keep in mind that this might not be a life-changing experience for other fathers. Plantin (2007) described working-class fathers’ approach to fathering as something more natural, and found fathering as a ‘life-changing experience’ to be very much a middle-class thing. I insist, however, on the possibilities found in primary caring. Part of the transformative experience of the participants was not simply the upheaval of first-time parenting or the exploration of fathering, but complete immersion in the daily practices of caring, including the need to steer through mother-dominated spaces. This potential remains as a seed in all men who have the opportunity to get actively involved with caring for children.

In this project, I focused on childcare given how closely connected it is to gender inequalities stemming from embodied difference. Despite the participants’ enthusiasm and respect for care, childcare is only a small portion in what is a vast landscape of caring practices that are invisible, unrecognized, and unvalued. Moreover, caring for children can be among the brightest aspects of care, compared to caring for the ill or the elderly. The enthusiastic responses from the participants, who asserted that they now can value the work mothers do, could be part of a reproductive futurism that values care still not in itself, but as something that contributes to raising the next generation. Yet this does not put a limit on ‘what can a body do’ in other caring contexts, as this approach is, precisely, open to experimentation. Research in other kinds of caring practices can explore more of these possibilities.

For the same reason, I long for more research on communitarian approaches to care that are less centred on the nuclear family, as this project was. Gibson-Graham (2006) draw attention to childcare practices that reformulate the labour of childcare into less capitalist arrangements. Our tools to de- and reconstruct the work-care continuum are already there. Looking further ahead, although time for childcare is necessary, family is not the only thing outside work. As said, it is not a dichotomy. Questioning work can come after finding time for care, but finding time for care is not the issue at stake; the issue at stake is to dismantle work. As long as we form rhizomes, we can move in a non-linear way between things – perhaps between the opposite ends of a binary.

7.3 Re-gendering the spaces of care

Along with their approaches to work and care, I asked my participants about their experiences in childcare spaces. This was where binaries became more apparent, and their malleability more prominent too. At those moments, it was evident that the becomings of male primary carers involved not only themselves, but engaged with the world they were part of. A contradiction lay at the centre of this journey – a contradiction aligned with the position the participants found themselves in: the both privileged and disadvantaged position of men in a world of childcare. On one hand they were novelties, on the other they were outsiders. This meant a plethora of moments to both re-assert gender and also to challenge it, to continuously deterritorialize and reterritorialize through contesting practices.

Their experiences confirmed that only certain bodies are allowed to present themselves as carers: that caring identities are so closely woven with mothering identities that it seems impossible to rip the fabric and stitch new seams. The mere presence of those fathers, as well as the reactions and discussions that occurred in public spaces and spaces of childcare, contested these rigid identities and engendered becomings. The key to moving away from an economy of gratitude, which will forever view male carers as a novelty worthy of praise, is found in making male primary caring as common as possible, in changing both the dominant masculinities and the places of childcare. A re-gendering of care can occur through practices and encounters and, with it, new places can be made and remade.

It is interesting how my participants did not report feelings of emasculation, which is rare compared to previous research, although more aligned with recent findings. The reasons could be many, including their socio-economic backgrounds, as well as recent shifts in dominant masculinities. Another reason could be that they asserted their masculinity in other ways, sometimes within the realm of childcare. The tactic of visiting every single parents' group is something mentioned by a few participants as an effort to make themselves more visible. This is, again, where the contradiction becomes more prominent: the only way to make different caring bodies accepted is to make them visible, to queer those spaces with their presence, but at the same time this is a masculine way to combat isolation, relying precisely on the privilege men have when moving in public space. Infiltrating the 'women's enclave' could be one more instance of entitlement.

With this in mind we might wonder again if only certain bodies have access to a kind of beneficial, privileged in-betweenness. Colin mentioned that when one deviates in any way at the playground, not just in gender but in terms of ethnicity, sexuality, and other visible markings that set them apart from an invisible norm, then one will receive suspicious looks. I find this observation acute and I wonder, myself, if research with fathers from more diverse backgrounds, or even mothers that deviate from a certain norm, would tell us more about how bodies move and how they are perceived in those spaces. Ultimately, any deviation from the norm can help queer those spaces; it just becomes a question of who can benefit more from it, how new ways of making place can inherit already existing hierarchies.

How does an 'embracing the alien' occur? The example of uncomfortable feelings both in mothers' groups and in fathers' is, I believe, representative of their in-betweenness and indicative of how these carers have no name for their practices. This ultimately pushes them to make new connections in a rhizomatic manner. Jordan said 'I've become a mum!' using the gender-coded language of patriarchy to indicate his transformation. He embraced the alien, but 'becoming a mum' or becoming-carer is not a project that is teleological. The goal is not to domesticate men, as there is no finite subjectivity that ought to emerge and consolidate into an identity. Becoming-carer is about the potentialities.

7.4 To the future

Piercy's novel *Woman at the Edge of Time* reminded me of one more crucial issue I came across when talking to my participants: matter matters. When it comes to childcare, embodied difference sets the tune to dance to. Luciente, a character in the novel, continues:

'Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we'd never be equal. And males never would be humanized to be loving and tender. So we all became mothers. (p.105)

Three thoughts emerge from each sentence of this passage. First, the 'biological chains', which we could easily dismiss as mere constructions yet which return to haunt us in every possible transformation and imbrication with societal limitations. Following the vignette of Charles and how, in his case, childcare was de facto democratized because of his daughter's additional caring needs (that caused him and other relatives/professional carers to do childcare from day one), it

becomes evident that there are no barriers that are impossible to overcome; the question is, how to extend those special circumstances so that they become the norm? Echoing Piercy and Firestone, Colin suggested in his interview that working knowledge of breastfeeding paraphernalia has the power to make men included in the breastfeeding assemblage. The 'biological chains' are there, but their grip also depends on how much power we give them.

Second, 'humanizing males to be loving and tender', despite its crude language and how it seemingly posits biology as the problem, actually goes to the heart of what is a non-essentialist approach to gender: the possibility of an ethic of care as accessible to all of us, from which we can all benefit through a dissolution of patriarchal binaries that dictate care and tenderness as women-only features. Daily practices of fathering disprove the binary (Aitken, 2009); moving on from 'awkward' spaces of becoming to spaces that consciously welcome those becomings is a choice aligned with the politics of an ethic of care.

Third, 'we all became mothers' takes us back to issues of identity and the language of patriarchy. In my study I used *becoming-carer* to denote what Doucet (2001) more narrowly refers to as 'mothering'; I did so in an effort to de-couple it from the binary language of patriarchal identities. *Men who mother* assumes that caring *is* mothering, leaving no space for fathers and mothers to become something else, to queer these parenting identities. Is *carer* yet another fixed identity? *Carer of children* is very much conflated with mothering identities. Yet men who do childcare challenge that through their daily practices, through repetition that produces not the same as mother, but multiplicities. Parenting is, effectively, made of practices. *Carer* and *parent* turn into a becomings with no beginnings or ends. The ideological baggage of *carer* becomes flimsy as rhizomatic practices make us rethink who can be a carer. I hope that, through the experiences I studied in this research project, as well as through related practices occurring daily everywhere, we are able to move towards non-binary approaches to gender and beyond a man-woman dyad too.

Given current realities, where do we go from now? In this study, I focused on fathers, although informal primary carers might not be parents but, for example, other members of the family (e.g. Tarrant, 2013). These carers will still draw on motherhood and fatherhood discourses when they do the work of caring, as these are our only conceptual frameworks to think with. Therefore, future research on male carers could benefit greatly from a study on the intimacy of care that develops without the sanction of a parental link and outside the benefits society bestows to parent-child relationships. Research on male carers who are not (biological or

adoptive) fathers or biologically related in any way (e.g. professional childminders, friends who babysit) has the potential to be radical and truly challenge our ideas of who can be a carer.

Regarding opportunities for fathers to contribute to this change towards new, emerging caring identities, Shirani *et al.* briefly sketched a vision of the future:

Increasing male unemployment in light of the economic downturn is likely to prompt changing circumstances in relation to earning and caring. This offers a potential opportunity for the transformation of fathering practices in the longer-term, although continuing emphasis on fathers as economic providers and lack of choice over these altered circumstances pose barriers to achieving this. Instead, such a transformation would only appear possible in relation to changes in the moral scripts which underpin parenting. (2012, p.287)

I undertook my own research in the UK a little later than Shirani *et al.* and I agree that moral scripts that underpin parenting stand out among the factors that can signal a transformation in the work-care arena. However, I would argue that scripts are impossible to change without queering the work-care continuum, challenging the scripts of parenting in the first place, and making male primary caring look like a viable possibility. This is why I believe that the work that my participants do on a daily basis is valuable to the rest of us: little as it may be, they make an alteration to the landscape, drawing new maps.

And this is the reason why I also argue that promoting opportunities for male primary care is crucial. My participants belonged to a fairly homogeneous demographic group, possibly because only a few groups have knowledge of, access to, and can afford parental leave (especially those with a high-earning partner). Recent research argued that parents in the UK do not take parental leave due to working hours, not because of traditional gender ideas (Fagan and Norman, 2017). Although patriarchal gender ideas can, indeed, prohibit men from taking parental leave even when it is available, structurally enabling everyone to have this experience is a *sine qua non*. This study illustrates precisely this: that experimentation and deterritorialization can lead to becomings and lines of flight. My participants urged other men to try it; their final comments were always about how more people need to see what it is like for themselves.

The landscape of work and care is an ocean, constantly in motion. The stories in this study emerged like driftwood, the different shapes telling different stories. The messy experience of caring resembles the messy experience of doing research and dealing with data—both are becomings. As a researcher in the field, and later during analysis, I engaged in a becoming with

the data. Every encounter was a deterritorializing and writing down was re-territorializing the research. Like Deleuze and Guattari say,

contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an appparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can) (2004, p.10).

I hope this is the case with this thesis too.

Appendix A Participant Information Sheet

Re-gendering Childcare in the UK: the Experiences of Male Primary Carers

Participant Information Sheet

We would like to invite you to participate in a research project about the experiences of male primary carers in the UK. This leaflet explains what is involved.

Please read this information carefully before deciding to take part in this research. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?

Childcare is a task traditionally carried out by women but lately it appears that men take up primary caring more often. We are interested in discussing with them their experiences as main carers of children.

This research project aims to investigate:

- The caring experiences of male primary carers as gendered subjects
- The experiences of place and mobility during the caring process
- The importance of networks and social surroundings in which male primary carers are involved
- The change occurring in the gendered institutions of care, family, and parenthood.

The research includes interviews with male carers such as you, who are or have recently been the main carer of a child, as well as with your partners if available and interested.

This research project is part of attaining a PhD qualification at the University of Southampton and is funded by the University of Southampton. We hope that the findings from the research will add to our knowledge about informal childcare practices and gender difference.

What is involved in taking part in the research?

We would like to talk to you about your experience as a man practising informal care.

The interview can take place when and where is most convenient for you and it can be conducted in the spaces you care or while walking through common everyday routes to you. We would be delighted if we are able to discuss your experiences with you in the places in which that experience takes shape. It should take around 30-45 minutes of your time.

If you have any concerns about your child being present during the interview we can ensure that the interview takes place without your child's presence. This will be explicitly addressed in the consent form you will be given.

Will my participation be confidential?

We will be audio-recording the interview but this material will only be available to the researcher and supervisory team. No information about you will be shared with anyone else. Your interview material will be stored securely on password-protected computer in compliance with the Data Protection Act and University of Southampton policy.

When we publish any material from the project we will make sure that your identity is protected. We will use pseudonyms instead of real names, and will take all other necessary steps to disguise the identity of all who participate in our research.

What happens if I change my mind?

We will ask you to sign a consent form when we come to interview you, which says that we can use the material from your interview. You can, however, withdraw from the project at any stage and we will not use your interview, up to the point of writing and publication (approximately 12 months after your interview).

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions about the research project and your participation please contact us using the email details below. We will be happy to answer your questions, either by email, phone, or by arranging to meet you if this is convenient.

We can let you have a summary of the findings if you are interested.

Eleni Bourantani, University of Southampton E.A.Bourantani@soton.ac.uk

In the unlikely case that you have any concerns or complaints about this study, please contact Head of Research Governance at the University of Southampton (02380 595058, rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk).

Study ethics number: 11907

Version 2 / 18.02.15

Appendix B Sample Interview Schedule

When did you start looking after your baby?

How did you come to be the main person looking after your baby?

Could you describe what a typical day of caring is like? Where do you go, what do you do, who do you see?

Are there any places you feel awkward?

Do you get reactions from people you might not have had before?

How does being an active dad feed into your identity as a guy?

You're taking a break from waged work; how do you find that?

Do you think it would be good if dads did more childcare?

What changes do you think have occurred to you in how you experience family, care, yourself and others? How do you feel about them?

What is the best thing about caring?

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