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Men at work and at home: Managing emotion in telework

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Men at work and at home: Managing emotion in telework

Abstract

Home-based telework is one of the flexible working options available today and is unique in its ability to physically and emotionally blur the boundaries between work and home. This paper explores how men experience working from home, how they construct their identities as workers and as parents in this ambiguous location, and how, as fathers, they manage the emotional work of reconciling family and career in this context. Our findings suggest that in order to manage the emotional aspects of telework men will, at times, focus on either the professional or parental part of their identity in their narratives, and at times attempt to 'have it all'. We conclude that telework can provide a space where men can adopt emotional discourses and practices traditionally associated with women, and particularly working mothers.

Keywords: fatherhood, emotion, telework, identity, masculinity

Introduction

Our aim in this paper is to explore the ways in which emotions ‘play a central role in contributing to our sense of self’ (Lupton, 1998, p5-6) looking specifically at the emotions involved in the expression and experience of fatherhood and career by men working from home. We identify a gap in the literature regarding men and the management of emotion at work more generally, and the emotional management of the dualist demands of fatherhood and working life specifically: a gap that is in direct contrast to the wealth of literature which focuses on the ‘dual’ roles of women in work and family life. Through adopting a social constructionist perspective we explore here how 7 men (a sub-set of a larger study) construct their identities as workers and as parents within the indeterminate context of home working, and how as fathers, they manage the emotional work of reconciling family and career in this environment. We do this through the presentation of 3 case studies.

We begin the paper by discussing the context of home-based telework, examining how this might be a useful location in which to explore how men construct their identities. We see emotion as key to our understanding of identities because we view the discourses of emotion as one of the major routes through which identity is produced. Furthermore, these emotional discourses are often gender orientated, leading us to discuss how masculinity and emotion have traditionally been theorised and ask: Is there emotional work involved in men working from home, and if so, what form does it take, and how do men manage it? We explore this question and describe the research methods we employed, before presenting our interpretations of our findings. We conclude by exploring the significance of these findings in the final sections.

Telework and Identity Work

The increasingly popular trend of home-based telework provides the context for our study. Townsley (2003) states that, whereas normative or mainstream studies of organisations tend to focus on ‘‘an’ organisation or ‘a’ place or ‘a’ group of organisational members’ (p634), the advent of telework has meant that the usual method of research i.e. focusing on a sole location, is no longer appropriate. She points to telework as a key catalyst in changing the way we think about and try to understand organisations and the idea of work more generally. We have chosen to explore emotion in this context, because, as Tietze and Musson (2002a, p330) suggest, ‘working at home brings to the forefront important questions about the formation of human characters and identities’ and this, we propose, involves substantial emotional work.

Mann et al (2000) considered the emotional impact of teleworking via computer-mediated communication (CMC) and called for further exploration of this area. One key finding from their work was that the reliance on CMC, a key feature of home-based work, might weaken emotional bonds with work colleagues, but they stop short of considering the bonds of family life. We have chosen to focus on fathers because the issue of parenting and its direct impact upon working lives is rarely acknowledged in the organisational behaviour/management literature, and in particular the role of the father is largely unexamined (see Halford, 2006 for an exception). Ribbens (1994 in Bernardes, 1997, p167) observes the ‘centrality of childrearing for the identities of women’, yet there is very little evidence in the literature of any attempt to examine how fatherhood impacts on men’s identities. We agree with Bernardes (1997, p187) who concludes that ‘the single clearest inequality

between the genders in contemporary society relates to parenting'. It is crucial therefore, not only to focus research on exploring how women might become more integrated into the world of work, but also on how men might find legitimacy in their parental roles. From this perspective it is important to explore how the parental roles of teleworking fathers might be influenced by their spending more time in the home. Men's greater inclusion in family life, we suggest, is not only likely to benefit children and allow fathers to mediate a new sense of self, but may also enable mothers to compete on more equal terms in the labour market, as their role as primary carer becomes less rigid.

Flexible working policies, such as home-based telework, could then be important devices in bringing men physically and emotionally into family life. Fineman (2003) distinguishes between emotional 'upsides' and 'downsides' of telework – the promise of liberation and balance versus the potential invasion of previously private space. Working from home contains the capacity to maintain equilibrium between work and family, but it is a matter of dispute whether the lived experiences of teleworkers come up to these idealistic aims. Indeed it is claimed that in this context, traditional gender roles, far from being weakened, become more pronounced (Wilson and Greenhill, 2004). Exploring the experiences of men as parents who work from home will shed light on this debate and allow discussion of how emotions are managed and identities are constructed and performed in this context.

Social constructionist ideas lead us to see identity as a continuous casting and recasting of our 'selves' through discursive practice (Humphreys and Brown, 2002). We see identity as something that is presented through narrative accounts, and we define these broadly, as encompassing visual performance and interaction, as well as talk: so identity is embodied and performed physically as well as in language. In line with a social constructionist perspective, we see identity as being created largely in reference to hegemonic discourses. Hegemony refers to Gramsci's notion that 'people are not normally forced to concede power or control to another group or groups; rather they are convinced that their best interests will be served by that group being in power, or that one group is naturally superior' (1986 in Tietze, Cohen and Musson, 2003, p148). Discourses make certain ways of thinking and acting possible, and others impossible or costly (Phillips et al, 2004); defining acceptable and intelligible ways to talk, write and importantly conduct oneself (Grant and Hardy, 2003). But it is always possible to resist these hegemonic tendencies, at least to some degree (Grant and Hardy, 2003). The meaning of a text is not pre-ordained, no matter how powerful the producer or how seductive the text appears (Hardy, 2004). Therefore our analysis seeks to uncover these discourses and examine how they are employed in the narratives of our participants, and to what effect. Examining how identities are constructed through discourse allows us to glimpse the previously unspoken rules that may dictate the boundaries of certain roles and reveal the behaviours and emotions which are permitted within them, along with the characteristics of the people for whom such roles are considered legitimate.

Researching Men and Emotion

Fineman (2000) suggests that research into emotion has historically been 'imbued with biological and psychological determinism' (p3) and Kidd (1998) observes that organisational studies have been underpinned by the assumption of 'rationality in behaviour at work' (p275). Here we consider emotion from a social constructionist perspective as 'inter-subjective, a product of the way systems of meaning are created

and negotiated between people' (Fineman, 2000, p2). We are interested in accessing and understanding the messages that people hear in specific settings, and how these might contribute to their ideas of what is appropriate or legitimate in a particular role; the implications for how people construct their identities; and how they express these through the medium of emotion.

Emotion has historically been thought of as a feminine issue, particularly when considering paid work and 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983), which Fineman (2003) describes as 'the effort we put into presenting and re-presenting our feelings; scripting them to be fit for external consumption. It is also the effort we put into feeling what we ought to feel' (p20). This necessitates the undertaking of 'emotion work', which is 'the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling' (Hochschild, 1979, p561). Studies have focused on how women manage the guilt of their multiple roles, of wife and mother, with paid work and/or what can be legitimately termed a 'career'. Men's emotions in work have been all but ignored, though a notable exception is Mann's (1999) work on bouncers and lawyers, which explores how emotions may be suppressed or disguised (Mann, 1999).

This could be due to what Lupton (1998) calls the 'unhelpful archetype' of 'emotional woman' and 'unemotional man'. She continues 'there is no single dominant representation of masculinity that defines how men should behave in emotional terms' (1998, p133) and yet, we argue, emotion is central to understanding men's behaviour, at work and at home. We choose here to specifically focus upon the emotional 'work' involved in men reconciling these two realms, though as social constructionists interested in how people present their feelings in the creation of realities, we would argue that to differentiate between rigid and mutually exclusive definitions and displays of emotional 'labour' and emotion 'work' is unhelpful.

Again our social constructionist backgrounds, in particular ideas of dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959 in Branaman, 2001) and performativity (Butler, 1990), inform our ideas of what gender is. The following insight from Butler (1990, p25-26) draws together our views of identity, gender, and the expression of emotion: 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results'. Hearn and Morgan (1990, p4) point out that 'just as feminist scholarship has demonstrated that 'woman', 'women' and 'femininity' are socially and historically constructed, and thus problematic, so too has it demonstrated the problematic nature of 'man', 'men', and 'masculinity''. Lupton and Barclay (1997, p2) reflect upon the role of men in society, how they are still today expected to act as the provider for their families and 'are encouraged to construct their self-identities as masculine subjects through their work role.' Whilst some consideration has been given to how identity can be constructed through career, which Grey (1994) describes as 'a project of the self', less attention has been paid to men's self actualisation through their role as fathers. Lupton and Barclay (1997, p22) explain that 'in their focus on rationality, neither psychologists nor sociologists appear very much interested in the emotional and embodied dimensions of fatherhood; that is, the way in which the discourses, meanings and practices of fathering are experienced by men themselves at a visceral, sensual and affective level'.

Lupton (1998, p105) describes how telework has the potential to shake up gender dichotomies, as 'the distinction that is routinely drawn between the 'private' and the 'public' spheres is also an integral dimension of the ways in which emotion is gendered'. Surman (2002) echoes this point when she discusses the dualistic construction of work and home, and its impact on the way we make meanings about

our lives. We would argue that this dualism – or binary opposition of meaning making (see Tietze, Cohen and Musson, 2003) – is also reflected in the ‘public’ structures of career and the ‘private’ structures of parenthood. By bringing work into the home, therefore, teleworking fathers are not only inhabiting a gendered space, but also an emotional context which has previously been held to be largely ‘women only’. It is therefore important to question how men deal with this emotional landscape, in order to address this knowledge gap.

Thus far, we have suggested that emotion and identity intertwine in two ways: firstly emotion is one of the key ways by which identity is expressed or ‘performed’ (Butler, 1990); secondly emotional ‘effort’ (Fineman, 2003) or ‘work’ (Hochschild, 1979) is demanded for the construction of identities, especially in ambiguous settings such as home-based telework, (when frustration, guilt, relief, or joy may all be experienced). Emotion, then, can be seen as both an input, during the process of construction, and an output, during the process of interaction. These meeting points of emotion and identity are undoubtedly less clearly distinguished in practice and talk, than in this theoretical framework. We therefore focus our analysis around the following broad research questions:

1. What kinds of emotion do men working from home express as part of their identity ‘performance’?
2. What is the emotional work required by men working from home, in order to construct their identities, and how do they manage it?

Method

Fineman (2004, p721) stressed that ‘emotion’s potential multifacetedness suggests that any one approach to understanding ‘it’ will be just that – one approach. It is necessarily partial, meaningful only in terms of the philosophy that informs it, the medium through which it is conveyed and the receiving audience’. He also proposes that ‘a phenomenology of emotion in organisations will portray lived experiences, honouring actor’s perceptions, justifications and accounts, bearing in mind that the investigator is now part of the interpretive setting’ (2000, p14). With these comments in mind we adopt a social constructionist approach, which provides the basis for our decisions about what constitutes data, how this can be collected, and how it can be analysed.

More traditional paradigms and perspectives on these topics can be considered ‘realist’, in that they assume that ‘our knowledge is a direct perception of reality’ (Burr, 1995, p6). In contrast, the social constructionist stance is that there is no one ‘truth’ to discover, but that multiple realities are experienced by each of us subjectively. From this view, Collinson (2003) explores the insecurities and ambiguities of producing workplace ‘selves’, arguing that conformist, dramaturgical and resistant survival practices are common. El-Sawad et al (2004) take up a similar argument in their account of contradictions in discursive activity. In the same vein, Burr (1995, p7) argues that it is only ‘when people talk to each other, the world gets constructed’. For this reason we selected interviews as our research method: as a semi-structured form of talk, they capture subjective narratives, which are in themselves constitutive of the formation of people’s identities. But it is pertinent to point out one key limitation of this methodology: that the performances of emotion and identity we encountered are ultimately the products of the participant’s interactions with ourselves in the context of these interviews. We wholeheartedly accept that emotions (and emotional work) are only a product of the way systems of

meaning are created and negotiated between people in specific situations. As such, the semi-structured nature of the interviews, in guiding the participants to consider their identities in the specific terms of father and professional, has of course introduced a specific slant in our data.

Traditionally, visual methods have been ignored in organisation studies (Strangleman, 2004) but we believe that to only record the language of the interviews is to 'disembody' the text. This is why we chose to supplement the collection of audio data with visual images, because we feel it important to challenge the conventions of what counts as useful data. We sought a method that could 'get close enough to behaviour to show how people wittingly or unwittingly build and maintain their social worlds' (Barley, 2006, p17), and video provided this intimacy and immediacy. This approach allowed us to effectively examine the performative nature of identity, which after all includes physical and material elements. We conducted the interviews in the homes of the participants to get a feel for what their routines are and how their work is practically organised within the home; video was an essential tool in recording this. In a practical sense, it removed the need to create inventories or researcher-mediated descriptions of artefacts, items of clothing, incidents etc. by allowing them to be reviewed at a later date. One drawback in using video was that it might have deterred potential respondents because of the fear of identification, and the method does intuitively feel more intrusive than straightforward interviews - though it is impossible to know if this was indeed the case. The self-selected participants were made aware of our intention to videotape, and appeared to respond well to this method. They understood the need to capture the meeting points of work and home, by recording images both of themselves and their working spaces.

We did not consider it necessary to restrict the invitation to take part in the study to certain kinds of organisations or professions because this is not pertinent to our intent. We sourced participants by conducting an initial web trawl to find organisations that had home-based telework policies, then sent letters outlining our aims. We also found the need to supplement this sourcing approach with adverts on parenting and telework websites; through trade organisations (such as the Chamber of Commerce); and in business literature (such as 'Professional Manager' magazine). Throughout our trawl we specifically sought teleworkers who were the parents of children under sixteen - who were still legally, if not practically, dependent upon their parents. These participants should, therefore, have 'hands on' parenting roles to some degree.

The sample group for this paper is part of a larger study exploring both men's and women's experiences as parents and as professionals in the context of home-based telework. The group on which we focus here consists of seven men - the male respondents from the original project, which attracted seven male and seven female participants in total. This male sub-group includes three IT consultants; a Marketing consultant; a Telecoms consultant; a Business Relations Manager; and a Chartered Electrical Engineer; all of whom work from home for between 50% and 100% of their working week, and are reliant on information and communications technology to support their work.

Analysis

Discourse analysis is most effective when exploring 'lived experience'. It reveals how people construct realities as they talk about a subject, through the use of discourses. The definition of discourse we have used thus far has been of legitimised ways of talking about subjects, which is Foucauldian (Foucault, 1984) in that 'the

concern is more a matter of discerning the rules which ‘govern’ bodies of texts and utterances’ than in the detailed analysis of language (Fairclough, 2003, p123). This is due to the simple fact that we are not linguists but management academics, and so favour a definition which allows for insightful social commentary. There are several discourses relevant to our study, particularly discourses of gender, career, and family. We chose to analyse discourses because we did not want to simply compare men’s experiences (with each other and with those of women), but to analyse and make sense of each individual’s story in the context of their wider roles as social beings. We conducted the practical analysis of the videotaped interviews by drawing out data related to the themes of ‘career’ and ‘fatherhood’ and together, made our subjective assessment of how emotion played a role, both in the actual language use and also wider performative aspects of each participant’s response. In particular, we observed how broader social discourses associated with these two themes, had been drawn upon by the respondents in the construction of their narratives, and the emotions – such as anxiety, love, fear and pride - expressed in this process.

Initially we found ourselves largely in a vacuum in terms of how to analyse the visual elements of our data, particularly because in the organisational behaviour field the collection and analysis of visual data has been largely overlooked, leading to a certain degree of ‘visual illiteracy’ (Strangleman, 2004). Our cautious solution has been to employ a semiotic framework (see Tietze, Cohen and Musson, 2003) to examine the captured images, revealing how symbols of professionalism, fatherhood and masculinity for example are materially and physically manifested by the respondents in their home-working spaces, and through their performance of identity within these spaces.

The emotional management of teleworking fathers

From our analysis we generated three categories of ways in which men talked about and ‘performed’ working from home and managing emotion. These categories included a privileging of a professional identity, a privileging of a parental identity, and an attempt to ‘have it all’. It is important to state here that the men’s views did not fit neatly into these categories throughout the interviews. Although each person generally articulated and expressed a preference for one approach over the other two, they did draw on them interchangeably at different times, sometimes stating what appear to be contradictory positions within the same interview (El-Sawad et al, 2004). We chose to present empirically based cases to represent each approach and, due to constraints of space within this article, decided to focus upon just three out of the seven men from the sample group who we felt provided the clearest example of each approach. In writing such cases we constructed accounts to render meaningful what would otherwise remain unintelligible flux. As such they are our chosen ‘coping strategy’, because they provide us with a solution to the vexed problem of presenting qualitative findings in a concise and ordered manner.

What follows are our interpretations of the stories of three of the participants, using their words selectively, which we show in italics. The first two represent the divergent strategies of, in Gary’s case, focusing on career, and in Dan’s case, focusing on fatherhood. The final case, that of James, represents a participant who attempted to assimilate the two.

Case 1: A focus on being a professional

Gary responded to our advert in ‘Professional Manager’ magazine. He works for an IT services company as a Business Relations Manager and has worked from home for

a year and a half, spending 90% to 95% of his working time at home. He lives with his wife Kath, who works full time for the same organisation and also works from home for around half of her working hours. We interviewed Kath for our larger study and she presented herself as very committed to her professional role, which she portrayed as more important to her than being a mother. Together they have two children of school age who attend a private day school. Paid (female) employees assist with childcare and perform virtually all of the domestic work. Gary's parenting is formally arranged through family meetings and timetables. He described doing occasional school runs as '*frustrating*' and an '*interruption*' to his work. Vague organisational jargon proliferates his narrative about his work, and perhaps more surprisingly he talks in a similar way about his family, telling us about having to '*schedule*' time with them. He also employs dry humour and cynicism: when asked what he has learnt since becoming a parent he replies '*don't have children*'.

When we ask what his career means to him, Gary replies '*quite a lot*' and tells us that he has been studying for an MBA, which he describes as '*an investment we made* [eyes dart out of room to indicate his wife] *to further the career*'. Gary articulates a traditional concept of career, describing his own as '*a progression through various jobs within the same organisation*' and in terms of financial reward so that he can provide for '*the*' family: '*whether you believe in the man as the breadwinner or not, there's still the need to bring in as much salary as possible to look after the family*'. He states that he made the decision to be home-based because he believed it would allow him to be a more focused and efficient worker, and he could also see the benefits of cost savings for himself and the organisation: '*it works for me – I don't have to travel as much - and it works for the company*'. He does not mention being closer to his family as a factor in his decision to telework but describes the upside of teleworking as the chance to further his career by completing his MBA earlier than he might in less flexible circumstances, and the flexibility it offers for him to work when he likes and accommodate deadlines.

Gary explains how he has always attempted to keep his work separate from his home life, and he and Kath have their own office on the ground floor of their home, which they actively discourage their children from entering. Gary talks about his children in terms of managing them or keeping them out of his working space: '*they know that when Kath or I are in the study that they shouldn't really come in and ask questions about "can I have a lollipop?" cos we're more than likely to have an ear piece in, so we just hold our hand up or push them out the door*'. The visual data corroborates this strategy of detachment. The home-office has a dominantly professional aesthetic, emulating what might be described as a conservative male office environment. It is constructed using traditional office furniture - a black leather chair dominates the floor space; a large white board entirely covers one wall; a brass 'G' shaped paperweight on the desk; a model of a red Ferrari sports car on the bookshelves. Very few items of a domestic or personal nature appear in this working space.

Case 2: Being a Dad: focusing on parental issues

We sourced Dan through an advert on the website '*fathersdirect.com*', where we offered toyshop vouchers in return for interviews with home-based working fathers. Dan has worked from home for 2 years, after being awarded sole custody of his 4-year-old son Henry, with whom he now lives as a single parent. He is an IT Security Consultant and is based at home 50% to 70% of his working hours. Until recently Dan managed childcare by hiring an au pair, but she returned to her home country only

days prior to the interview, and so he is currently taking some leave whilst he finds a replacement. His au pair also performed half of the domestic work in his home, with Dan doing the remainder himself.

Dan actively approached his organisation to allow him to telework, specifically so that he could spend more time with his son. He works in the dining room, so is available to him when he is at home (he attends nursery school part time): *'I don't shut the door, I don't keep Henry out, if he wants to come and see me he can. I don't want it to become this isolation zone where nobody's allowed'; 'if somebody needs me I'll be there, I won't just say you can't talk to me I'm in work mode now'*. Our visual data shows that his work tucks neatly into the corner of this family room and is assimilated into the domestic aesthetic. Some notable artefacts with a 'heroic' theme were present during this interview: a 'Back to the Future' car; a 'Spiderman' mug; and a 'Matrix' screensaver. In addition he was wearing a 'Super Dad' t-shirt from the father's rights organisation 'Father's for Justice', about whom he talked at length, describing his active support for their policies.

Dan describes his career as a low priority compared to his family and talks about providing time for his family, as well as supporting them financially. He sees telework as allowing him to physically *'be there'* for *'everyday things'*, for example, he says *'hopefully Daddy won't be just someone who popped to work in the morning and came home at night, tucked you in bed'*. He describes the kind of parent he feels he is as *'hands on, loving, affectionate, you know, a mentor as well'*.

He talks passionately about the positive impact of telework on his home life, stating that it has allowed him to become *'more of a father'*, and when asked what he has learnt since becoming a parent he replies *'I guess the extent of unconditional love that you can feel for a person'; 'the complete commitment you feel for this little person is extraordinary'*. With regard to the reaction of Henry towards having his dad around he comments: *'he loves it cos he's always got the opportunity to have his knee kissed better'*. Indeed, the video record shows his son running in with a cut finger during the interview, which Dan kissed better and, when the child went back outside to play, he commented: *'that's what you get to be able to do working from home'*. He is certain that if he did not work from home *'the bonds wouldn't be as firm'*. In this regard, he talks about telework as a privilege and an opportunity: *'I know that I'm probably in a very privileged position to be in a job which allows me to have flexible working'*. But he also thinks that other people, for example his neighbours, might make negative judgements about him: *'I've got a nice car on the path and it never goes anywhere and they see me here and also see young ladies entering the house, when I get a new au pair, so they probably think I'm in some kind of dodgy industry (he laughs)'* but he deals with this by stating *'who cares what they think as long as my son's happy'*.

Case 3: 'Having it all'

James is a Chartered Electrical Engineer, who has worked from home for just over a year and spends roughly half of his week working from home, and half travelling and meeting with clients. He lives with his wife Helen, who has also recently begun working from home, though on a part time basis, and their 2-year-old son, Thomas; another child is also due in a month's time. It was Helen who responded to our advert in 'Professional Manager' magazine and we interviewed her separately as part of our larger study. Childcare arrangements are described as *'unsatisfactory'* at present, as a nursery place fell through, and, as no alternative has been found, Helen is currently the primary carer of their son, performing her paid role whilst he naps.

Currently James works in a small lean-to room, which is accessed from the downstairs living room. One of the beamed walls is partially open to the kitchen/dining area where Thomas plays during the day. James does not see this as a satisfactory working space: *'working arrangements aren't ideal'; 'I guess some people manage to get a very fine divide but for us the work comes into the living space, there isn't really work space'*. When asked if he tries to segregate work and home life he states *'I find it difficult to keep them separate'*. The room is richly decorated with deep red wallpaper and oak units, clashing with the occasional item of a more organisational nature, for example a beige filing cabinet.

Nostalgia peppers talk of James' career. He looks back and remembers his early ambitions as *'setting off into engineering and kind of changing the world a bit'*, but describes this now as in tension with family life: *'as time goes on you're making more and more trade offs between what you're doing in your work and the overall sort of lifestyle that you're trying to balance with it'; 'over time the balance becomes more towards actually earning a living'; 'a means to an end'*. When he talks about parenting and his work career, he says that *'the two jobs are obviously different but equally important, so I try to devote as much time as I can to both'*. But he describes this as creating tensions that have to be managed; he talks about how there are *'sometimes clashes'*; having to *'juggle'* and *'managing the situation'*. He states that *'the two are always in conflict, I don't think I'm doing as well in either role as I'd like to'*.

James talks about *'selling'* his time: *'there are only so many hours in the day, and if I've chosen to sell so many of those hours to an employer then that's less left to spend with Helen and Thomas'*. He describes his desire to be a more involved parent: *'if I hear Thomas having fun I'd love to go and see what he's doing'; 'I want my kids to have all of the things I didn't have, I didn't see my parents, they were working all the time'*; and he talks about having the chance to be around for his children more as a privilege: when asked if he sees himself as a professional or as a parent he states *'bit of both, I do see myself as a father, I'm glad I've got that opportunity'*. He discusses that ideally he *'would like to get to the stage where working from home doesn't impinge on family life'*, yet at the same time he feels that *'as a father I'm much more conscious of the conflict'; 'I think it increases the conflict partly because it increases the immediacy'*.

Commentary and Implications

Here we present our comments on the cases, focusing the discussion on the broad research questions identified earlier.

1. What kinds of emotion do men working from home express as part of their identity 'performance'?

Gary presents his parental role to us as formalised and corporatised, with much of the care involved being performed 'by proxy' (Hochschild, 2005). He rationalises the detachment he strictly enforces between work and home life, both in terms of physical space and emotion, by focusing upon his role as a provider of the financial means to sustain his children. Any *'interruption'* to his work is experienced as *'frustrating'*, perhaps because he presents his main goal as a father to be to provide maximum financial input. His success as a professional therefore informs his measure of success as a parent. His approach to furthering his career is structured, as he strategically invests in additional qualifications, and the artefacts present in his working space: the leather chair, Ferrari, and brass paper weight all signify his achievement of material wealth and professional prestige. They are symbols of his

cultural capital and strong masculine identity. His confident and relaxed demeanour throughout his interview suggested to us that he felt proud of the success he had achieved in both his professional and parental role, and we found little evidence of anxiety or struggle to reconcile the two in his talk. His employment of dry cynical humour may point to unresolved, or even disguised and conflicting, emotions, but we have no way of knowing if this is so. But we acknowledge that this facet of his identity performance was of course co-constructed through his interactions with ourselves, as interviewers, on this particular day, and therefore may lack broader meaning.

Despite Dan employing an au pair, he describes providing '*hands on*' care himself, as he tucks his child in bed and kisses better his injuries. A desire to be physically and emotionally available to his son is what Dan presents as his overriding aim and his active campaigning suggests dedication to these convictions. The emotions he expresses with regard to his son – those of love and affection - reflect his commitment to the privileging of his parental role. The 'heroic' artefacts and images present in his work space may, perhaps, hint at a struggle to achieve this, or may symbolise a need to maintain a level of machismo whilst expressing what might be seen as emotions and roles more commonly associated with mothers. Overall though, his emotions, as he describes the achievement of being a more engaged father, are often joyous and imply contentment and harmony. His refusal to let work keep him away from his son, which he sees as facilitated by telework, is key to his achievement of this goal, and is evident in both his talk and the physical location of his work.

James presents the meeting point of work and family life as currently '*unsatisfactory*', he stresses that this is particularly due to the unresolved child care issue. This struggle is evident in his constructions of the conflicts between work and home in his talk and in spatial arrangements. Despite his efforts to devote time to both his professional and parental role he describes '*always making trade offs*'; a feeling of being torn; and, importantly, a level of inadequacy in both roles. He presents a desire to be a more engaged parent, looking to telework to enable this, and to some extent he achieves this. But this has clearly not been accomplished without him experiencing significant emotions of frustration, guilt and anxiety, resulting, we suggest, in a crisis of identity.

2. What is the emotional work required by men working from home, in order to construct their identities, and how do they manage it?

There appears to be emotional work involved in prioritising the different identity roles stemming from telework, particularly around the construction and separation of home and work identities. The resolution of this emotional work involves constructing identities appropriate to the context, and this reflects, to some extent, what these fathers see as both desirable and achievable for themselves. Each of the three choices apparently available to them: a focus on career; a focus on fatherhood; or an attempt to unify the two; involve some degree of emotional work. Our data suggest to us that when these fathers clearly prioritise one role over another, as Gary does for example in constructing and maintaining a work identity through language, symbols and 'norms' more commonly associated with the workplace, they appear to experience fewer emotional struggles and enjoy more satisfactory outcomes. In Gary's case, the 'work' discourse provides a unitary framework through which to manage the intersection of the two competing identity domains of fatherhood and career. In the narrative constructed with and for us, he rarely appears to engage emotionally with the father role, preferring to employ the traditional and detached

'breadwinner' discourse, an identity that perhaps feels more familiar and straightforward for him, and also works towards maintaining the social order (Averill 1980, cited in Griffiths, 1997). Gary's use of organisational language to talk about his family reflects Hochschild's (2001) proposal that the discourse of work has come to colonise the domain of home.

Dan, on the other hand, employs fatherhood as his central identifying framework in the interview with us, and presents as passionate in his pursuit of parental identity and the giving of '*unconditional love*' to his child. He is in a privileged position that affords him the flexibility to provide the time, space and financial resources to achieve this, even as a single parent. This financial status means that he can employ au pairs to fulfil part of the role commonly undertaken by female partners and/or mothers, which opens the doors to such choices. In this sense, Dan can draw on the separate discourses that we traditionally perceive to be connected with the role of both father **and** mother –financial **and** emotional provider. Telework in this instance opens up the space for this to happen, but it certainly does not dictate that it will, as Gary's story demonstrates, even though Gary too is in a position to 'buy' care for his children. But another factor peculiar to Dan's domestic arrangements which may be pertinent here is his lack of a significant other, apart from his son. Perhaps having (apparently) no psychosexual pair bond relationship – certainly not a live-in partner – enables Dan to fulfil the father **and** mother roles with greater emotional ease and less potential conflict.

James, the father who presents as keen to prioritise both domains of work/career and home/family - or perhaps, more precisely, to prioritise neither - struggles to reconcile the competing emotional demands created by this conflict. This is resonant of the common belief inherent in the 'having it all' discourse normally employed by/about women, in relation to paid work and motherhood, and probably reflects (and in turn, reproduces) the dualistic work/home divide so fixed in the belief systems of society in general (Surman, 2002). This dualism is also reflected in the gendered structures around the public face of career and the private face of childcare (Lupton and Barclay, 1997), and is evident in the language presented here: James, like Dan, finds it remarkable that he is able to traverse these rigid structures, and describes it as an '*opportunity*' and '*privilege*', aiming to be a '*better father*'. Though we do not present data from women here, we have yet to find such talk appearing in the texts of our (or other researcher's) teleworking mothers. Rather, women in these circumstances seem to see it as a duty, often accompanied by guilt (Tietze and Musson, 2002b), to be good mothers whilst in paid work, and rarely express this past/future orientation in talk about their own or their mother's parenting skills. This reflects ideas about the centrality of childrearing for women's identities (Ribbens, 1994, in Bernardes, 1997), and, we would argue, the 'sacred' talk around mothering.

James seems to be experiencing his two 'selves' in conflict, not having prioritised one over the other in a context where each is appropriate and accessible. This immediacy finds competing identities continually vying for dominance – '*the two are always in conflict, I don't think I'm doing as well in either role as I'd like to*' - and this is what he seems to find emotionally exhausting. The inability to resolve this conflict, a product of the dominant discourses working against men (and women) feeling equally competent in both spheres simultaneously, leads to a level of frustration for James. He is caught up in the nexus between these two identities, in much the same way that women are commonly seen to be. In society generally, the structure of work and the construction of worker identities neglects emotion and life outside work (Kidd, 1998). Paid work is always privileged over its binary opposite of

parenting/home life, as indeed with all dualisms one is always privileged over the other (Knights, 1997; Surman, 2002).

This privileging is evident in the way that received ideas and expectations are challenged by fathers who work from home. The suspicion of laziness or deviance by those looking in is evident in many of our narratives, whether the men recount such stories with humour or concern. Either way, they often profess '*not to care*' about what others think in order to fulfil their caring roles as fathers. We can see this as breaking with the convention of men as uncaring; a taking up of the caring discourse but which necessitates a departure from the cultural models of normative gendered responses and behaviours (Griffiths, 1997). Choosing '*not to care*' about everyday prejudices, in order to focus on family, can be seen as a core aspect of the emotional work (Hochschild, 1979) that male teleworkers might feel obliged to engage in.

Conclusion

Our data show that each of our respondents is caught in a web of interpersonal and material circumstances which influence their ability to connect more or less with fatherhood. It is not simply a question of their desire/need to be more engaged with the father/parent role. But telework, as part of that web, does provide a space where men can adopt the emotional discourses traditionally associated with women, difficult and costly as this might be. Though gender roles by and large are still pronounced (Wilson and Greenhill, 2004) and indeed our data, overall, suggest this to be the case, we might understand these cases where fathers become more emotionally engaged in their parenting role, exceptional as they might be, as small but significant instances of emancipation. We must though sound a note of caution here: those teleworking fathers who 'manage' the father/worker divide with success are clearly able to access and organise the material and symbolic space for this but, more importantly, do so largely with the help of wives or au pairs. This traditional female contribution to domestic labour – the undertaking of 'women's work' by women - is then the ghost at the banquet¹. Nevertheless, the very small steps taken by these fathers *can* be seen as liberating in the wider sense, because as Sartre (1969 in Billig, et al 1988, p153) points out 'freedom is that small movement which makes a totally conditioned social being someone who does not render back completely what conditioning has given him (sic).' Change has to start somewhere, and telework can provide an escape from the routines of traditional employment, a space in which the rebalancing of discourses and identities *can* happen. We agree with Fineman that 'we can begin to think of telework, not as an emotionally impoverished medium, but one where people find different ways of expressing feeling' (2003, p67). Finally, the contrasts, contradictions and challenges found in this small sample of men could provide the framework for subsequent work with a larger group to investigate the liberating potential of telework.

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ⁱ We have to thank an anonymous reviewer for this apposite phrase.