

**Workplace barriers to involved fatherhood:  
can fresh theoretical perspectives help  
to explain gendered take up of parental leave  
and flexible working?**

**Jamie Atkinson – Manchester Law School,  
Manchester Metropolitan University**

*International Network on Leave Policies and Research,  
Annual Seminar 2019*

# Research question and context

- Why do working fathers generally remain reluctant to take extended periods of parental leave and/or to work flexibly?
- Crucial role of employers as mediators of parental leave and flexible working - Haas, Allard & Hwang (2002); Holter (2007); Hobson (2013); Kaufman (2017); Kaufman & Almsquist (2017); Moran & Koslowski (2019)

# Use of Sen's capability approach in work-family research



- It has highlighted the “agency and capabilities gap” (Hobson, 2013:1) between rights that are available to parents ‘on paper’ and their ability to utilise them in reality
- Greater focus needed on everyday experiences of working fathers

# The importance of the time-space context



- Time and space are not static or neutral backdrops (Lefebvre, 1991)
- Use of measured time to organise work
- Three types of time-space (Toyoki et al. 2006)
  - Practical-phenomenal
  - Planned – apparent
  - Lived-imagined
- Predominance of the first two dimensions in working life

# What are rhythms? Lefebvre (2004)

- “Everywhere where [sic] there is interaction between a place, a time & an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm” (2004:15)
- What are rhythms? “a cyclic yet changing dynamic” (Toyoki et al. 2006:108) which agents experience as “recurrent cycles in behaviour” (Warner, 1988:64)
- Cyclical and linear rhythms
- Eurhythmia and arrhythmia: harmony versus discord

# Butler's theory of gender performativity applied to potential 'caring' or 'involved' fathers

- Butler argues that gender “...is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed...it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint” (2004:1)
- Gender identity is implicitly regulated by cultural / societal expectations
- Tyler and Cohen (2010)
- Working fathers might be reluctant to articulate a 'caring' masculinity at work

# The importance of paternal agency

- All 3 theories provide for the exercise of agency and therefore there is the potential for change
- Factors that negatively influence paternal agency: (1) their lower sense of efficacy as parents relative to mothers (Sevigny & McAuslan, 2016)
- (2) their lower sense of entitlement to exercise work-family rights relative to mothers (Lewis, 1997; Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper & Sparrow, 2015; Gatrell & Cooper, 2016)
- Aspirant involved fathers need to possess a combination of agential factors in order to feel able to access rights

# Conclusion

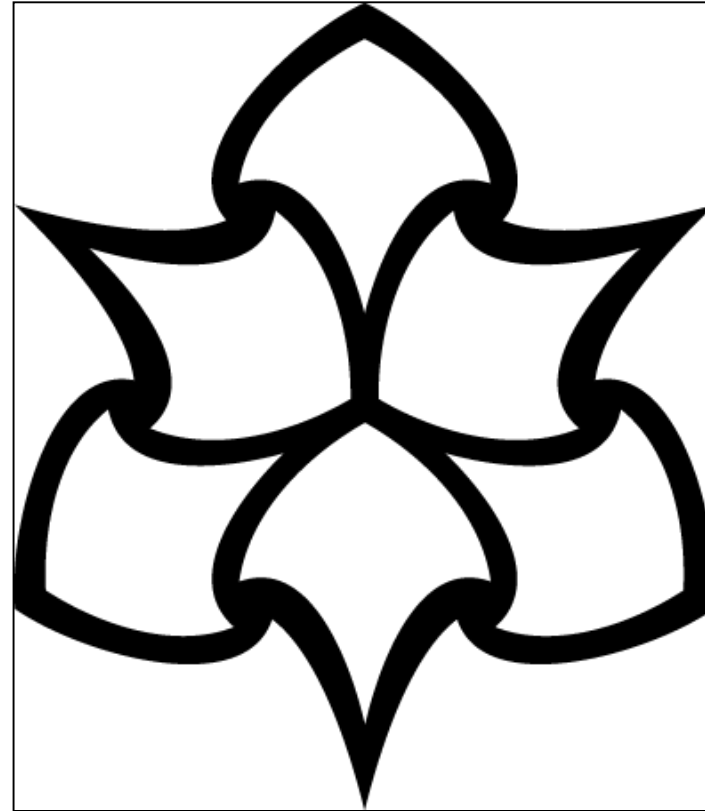
- **Employers need to recognise that policy provision on its own is not enough: more active encouragement of working fathers is required**



Contact details:

- [j.atkinson@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:j.atkinson@mmu.ac.uk)

- @atkojl



# References

- Burnett, S., Gatrell, C., Cooper, C., & Sparrow, P. (2013). Fathers at Work: A Ghost in the Organizational Machine. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 20(6), 632-646.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. London: Routledge
- de Montigny, F., & Lacharite, C. (2005). Perceived parental efficacy: Concept analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 49(4), 387-396
- Gatrell, C., & Cooper, C. (2016). A sense of entitlement? Fathers, mothers and organizational support for family and career. *Community, Work & Family*, 19(2), 134-147
- Haas L, Allard K, & Hwang P (2002) The impact of organizational culture on men's use of parental leave in Sweden. *Community, Work & Family* 5: 319-342
- Hobson, B. (2013). Introduction: capabilities and agency for worklife balance—a multidimensional framework. In B. Hobson (Ed.), *Worklife Balance: The Agency and Capabilities Gap* (pp. 1-31). Oxford: OUP
- Holter, O. (2007). Men's Work and Family Reconciliation in Europe. *Men and Masculinities* 9(4), 425-456
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Lefebvre, H. (2004). *Rhythmanalysis: space, time, and everyday life*. London: Continuum

# References contd.

- Lewis, S. (1997). 'Family Friendly' Employment Policies: A Route to Changing Organizational Culture or Playing About at the Margins? *Gender, Work and Organization*, 4(1), 13-23
- Moran, J., & Koslowski, A. (2019). Making use of work–family balance entitlements: how to support fathers with combining employment and caregiving. *Community, Work and Family*, 22(1), 111-128
- Sevigny, P., & McAuslan, P. (2016). Development and Validation of the Fathering Self-Efficacy Scale. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 17(1), 92-102
- Toyoki, S., Spicer, A., & Elliott, R. (2006). Beyond old horizons: theorising the rhythms of social reproduction. *TAMARA: Journal of Postmodern Critical Organization Science*, 5(5), 96-115
- Tyler, M., & Cohen, L. (2010). Spaces that Matter: Gender Performativity and Organizational Space. *Organization Studies*, 31(2), 175-198
- Warner, R. (1988). Rhythm in social interaction. In J. McGrath (Ed.), *The social psychology of time: new perspectives*. London: Sage