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

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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
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References


References contd.


