Talking to Tom, Dick, and Harry.

Fathers, autism, and class: A feminist analysis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports the findings of a qualitative research project with working-class fathers with autistic children. A feminist focus recognises the socially constructed nature of autism, gender, and masculinity (Connell, 1995; Garland-Thompson, 2005, Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Robinson, 2014). Additionally, an intersectional lens spotlights working-class fathers specifically, displaces the middle-class 'new father' whose voice has dominated most prior research and illuminates the fluctuating nature of power and powerlessness as it affects these men specifically (Braun, Vincent, and Ball, 2010).

The study uses photo elicitation and narrative interviewing (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Harper, 2002) and has a 'practices' focus (Morgan 1996; 2011) which recognises how personal beliefs and structural, relational, geographical, and cultural influences variously enable and undermine participants' ability to act as they see fit in their social roles as working-class paternal masculine subjects (Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Robertson, 2006).

The data collected reveals a complex picture. Some fathers desired to be more engaged with their children and identified barriers, ideological, institutional, relational, and material, which prevented this. Appearing too involved in care invited surveillance from professionals, but, on the other hand, affirming difficulties in 'coping' advantaged some men, enabling the provision of validation, services and support specifically with no loss to masculine status (Link and Phelan, 2014; Goffman, 1963).

Most men used their unusual and unique circumstances as fathers with autistic children to accomplish a successful hybrid masculinity which, on the surface, seems to disrupt gender (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Butler, 1990). This hybridity can conceal the benefits a masculine identity can convey, affording these men increased status as fathers with autistic children specifically (Demetriou, 2001). The data suggests it is the contradictory relationship fathers have with masculinity, rather than autism, which structures their lives as fathers of autistic children specifically.

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This thesis is dedicated to the 97 who died following the Hillsborough stadium disaster in 1989.

YNWA.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Introduction and overview

This chapter introduces what my research is about. The first sections explain the purpose of and the necessity for research with fathers who have autistic children. I then focus on the need for intersectional feminist research with working-class fathers who have autistic children and explain why and how I went about carrying out such a study. The subsequent sections outline the structure of the thesis itself, offer a summary of each chapter, and I conclude with a brief discussion of the main findings.

Purpose of the research

This study is a qualitative examination of the practices of working-class fathers who have autistic children. The research develops debates regarding several issues in relation to this topic. Firstly, there is a gap in the qualitative literature about fathers who have autistic children. To my knowledge, there is no work which has focused specifically on working-class fathers in this context. Secondly, most of the small amount of existing work on fathers with autistic children is, I argue, theoretically weak. In attending to this, I suggest a feminist focus recognises that there are significant inequalities between women and men, but intersectionality also recognises the differences between men, and that gender is not the only issue for consideration in understanding more about these men's lives (Connell, 1985; Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Crenshaw, 1989; Dowd, 2010).

However, Whitehead observes that 'the subjectivity of the male is lived out through a masculine gauze/ gaze, a way of being in and seeing the world which, at its most fundamental, is not female/ girl/ woman' (Whitehead, 2002, p. 209). Men experience 'othering' and exclusion in the realm of parenting and in research which attempts to know more about fathering (Cosson and Graham, 2012; Mc Gowan, 2016) and this point of consideration is an important aspect of the work that follows. In relation to my study, my awareness of the differences between fathers' 'gaze' and mine, emerging from and turned on us according to our intersectional positionings (mine, as a white, heterosexual, working-class woman/ mother/ academic with an autistic child) has informed the methods, and approach I developed to conduct research with these fathers specifically. Therefore, in accordance with these points, I also reflect on the personal and professional difficulties and dilemmas this gave rise to in

relation to the practice of conducting intersectional feminist research with men, feminist research ethics, and the matter of what 'counts' as valid research.

Background to the study

I became interested in researching the experiences of fathers with autistic children for personal, as well as academic reasons. My eldest child was diagnosed with autism in 2012 shortly before I qualified as a social worker. Throughout the long and tedious journey to diagnosis, I was conscious of my husband being positioned in the background by the professionals we met. All questions were directed at me, and, for a while, I seemed to spend most of my time going from appointment to appointment. My husband was not disengaged with this process in any way, rather, he had to go to work out of economic necessity. Further, we could not see how we could both work and manage childcare, after school and in the holidays, for example, and subsequently I never returned to social work practice.

Dermott states that the 'increased visibility of men as fathers is part of a heightened awareness of the role of fathers that provides a rationale for sociological attention' (2008, p. 2). Fatherhood is changing, with men more engaged with their children's lives than ever before (Gabb, 2012). However, it remains clear that the care of disabled children remains a highly gendered matter, and mothers are expected to occupy a key role in this regard (Ryan and Runswick-Cole, 2008). Unsurprisingly, fathers often complain about feeling 'pushed out' or irrelevant in comparison. Their 'role' becomes muddy and unclear. Therefore, the main aim of this thesis is to examine fathers' relationships with autistic children in the light of the contradictory messages they 'hear' about what they should be doing and what their role should be (Kaufman, 1999). In relation to this point, this thesis examines the social processes that push these men out, as well as recognising that this process also allows for specific masculinities to emerge as a way for some men to push themselves 'back in' and thus evaluates why, when, and how masculinity remains an element of men's ontological (in)security (Waling, 2019).

I have written elsewhere about the need for intersectional work with fathers, arguing that 'gender and autism overlap with other social categories, with very real consequences for men's practices specifically as fathers to children with the label of autism' (Heeney, 2018, p.249). This thesis focuses specifically on working-class men as the 'autism literature', broadly speaking, has given scant consideration to how class intersects with masculinity and

fathering, and because working-class parents are sometimes considered something of a social problem, a 'deficient 'social type'…council estate dwelling, single-parenting, low-achieving, rottweiler-owning cultural minority, whose poverty, it is hinted, might be the result of their own poor choices' (Bottero, 2009, p.7). Yet, in contrast to these stereotypes, some research suggests that working-class fathers are more engaged with their children that their middle-class, 'new father' brothers are reported to be (Shows and Gerstel, 2009).

According to Connell's (1995) thesis, working-class men are 'marginalised' as they exist, in. many ways, on the periphery of what constitutes successful masculinity. Disabled people are also marginalised, experiencing barriers to full engagement in many aspects of daily life that most people take for granted (Barnes and Mercer, 2004). Moreover, it has been noted that families with disabled children also experience marginalisation through 'courtesy stigma' (Ali, 2012) with research suggesting mothers experience this profoundly (Ryan and Runswick-Cole, 2008). It has also been suggested that paternal engagement with disabled children specifically contradicts with cultural norms of masculinity (Gerschick and Miller, 1995, 2000; Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson, 2011). Thus, fathers are more likely to be monitored and scrutinised should they engage with some practices of parenting that, broadly speaking, are considered the remit of mothers and women (Aitken, 2000; Braun, Vincent, and Ball, 2010; Dermott, 2008; McGowan, 2016; Rose, 1985; Ryan and Runswick-Cole, 2008). Their participation in some specific practices, such as intimate care, might be necessary but are likely to be considered particularly taboo (Gabb, 2012; Kaufman, 1999, Twigg, 2010). It might therefore be logical to presume that working-class men with autistic children experience multiple degrees of marginalisation as parents and as men.
But, according to Billson:

> marginality, which scholars have treated as a unitary concept, in fact encompasses at least three distinct types (cultural, social role, and structural). The effects of marginality on a person's identity and psycho-social well-being are not absolute, nor are the effects on cohesiveness and identity of groups and subcultures. The consequences of marginal status depend on its permanence, centrality, voluntariness, and whether it is essential or processual in nature (Billson, 2005, p.8)

Therefore, as Coston and Kimmel (2012) remark, men's experience of marginalisation is rarely universal in its effects and so is difficult to define and research. For example, it could be said that occupying what seems a marginalised position has worked out rather well for many men in the arena of parenting specifically. In comparison to mothers, occupying a marginal position allows fathers to retain a degree of choice as to the responsibilities they wish to take up (Vuori, 2009). Therefore, any study which examines men's marginalisation must be sensitive to the ways in which men can 'use' their marginalised position to demand recognition, advantage, or privilege and to advance their power as masculine subjects as well as recognise any disadvantages they face.

Overview of thesis and research questions

The research focus of the thesis is that most prior accounts of fathers with autistic children have not attended to how these men's parenting is structured by 'social and cultural processes which created ideas and systems and practices about gender' (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003, p, 44). Therefore, the focus of this study is not primarily how 'traumatized' these fathers were by 'autism' nor how disability conflicts with masculinity (Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson, 2012). Nor is the focus how fathers' involvement might improve outcomes for autistic children specifically (Day and Lamb, 2004). Rather, my study is feminist and so is primarily concerned with gender inequalities (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). But an intersectional focus which takes into consideration how paternal masculinities are shaped by the subjective experience of social class, amongst many other social divisions, encourages reflection on the variable nature of power available to the men in the study (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Coston and Kimmel, 2012). This allows greater understanding of how fathers themselves perceive and interpret gender and define and practice paternal masculinity within the specific contours of their individual lives as working-class men with autistic children (Bourdieu, 1984; Morgan, 2011; Skeggs, 1997). Accordingly, the research questions underpinning this thesis are as follows:

- What can the practices of working-class fathers with autistic children tell us about how fatherhood, gender, and masculinity are constructed in this specific context?
- To what extent is masculinity a barrier or problem, or, on the other hand, a resource for these men specifically?
- How might other social divisions such as class, age, or marital status intersect with masculinity and what are the effects of this on fathers' practices?

- What are the methodological issues that arise when researching working-class fathers with autistic children?

Central to my critical analysis of these questions is feminist and masculinities scholarship which enables a rejection of essentialist models of gender and mothers/fathers and instead acknowledges that there are multiple ways of being a father and a man, but also recognises that these presentations are 'performances' undertaken for a specific audience at a specific moment in time (Butler, 1990; Ridge, 2019; West and Zimmerman, 1987; Whitehead, 2002). To examine this, I focus on fathers' 'practices'. Morgan (1996; 2011) states that a practice approach reflects:

- an attempt to link the perspectives of the observers and the social actors
- An emphasis on the active or 'doing'.
- A sense of the everyday.
- A sense of the regular.
- A sense of fluidity or fuzziness.
- A linking of history and biography (Morgan, 2006, p. 1-2)

As gender is also constituted through practice (Connell, 1985; West and Zimmerman, 1987) as is class (Bourdieu, 1984), so a 'practices' approach allows examination of the ways in which these fathers' actions are structured by gender but also by power/lessness and by medical, social, economic, relational, contextual, and cultural factors which further influence what they 'do' as working-class fathers with autistic children (Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Morgan, 2011; 2006). My study therefore puts a specific group of fathers under the microscope in a very focused way, identifying how these men practice as fathers with autistic children specifically, and deeply interrogating those moments of conflict and tension which arise when men's paternal/masculinity is questioned, challenged, or made problematic, by others and by fathers themselves on those occasions when their role, ability, activity, presence, or lack of presence is questioned.

The chapters that follow can be read in two ways; firstly, they are empirical accounts which disrupt tired stereotypes about autism and fathers. Unlike much of the previous literature I review in this thesis, there is little in the data to suggest that fathers are distressed as a direct consequence of their son or daughter being autistic, or that they struggle to bond with or avoid spending time with their children. Secondly, the data indicates the differences amongst

fathers and autistic people, and, accordingly, the multiple ways in which fathers 'do' paternal/ masculinity. Thus, they provide some empirical points of reflection which help us to develop our understanding of autistic lives, if and how these men are engaging as fathers with autistic children specifically, the barriers to their engagement, and what can be done to enable this still further.

Finally, from another perspective, they are narratives about working-class gender subjectivity and relationality as these experiences affected the practices of my research participants, and my own practices as a working-class feminist female researcher/ mother with an autistic child. Therefore, in relation to addressing my own subjective experiences, I also consider the tensions I have experienced in carrying out this study and the dilemmas I have faced in maintaining a feminist/ academic focus whilst also 'translating [my/ their] working-class knowledge and understanding into a format, structure, and language that was designed to deny our knowledge, experiences, realities, and values' (Barker, 1996, p.104).

Contributions by chapter.

From an empirical standpoint, my research expands work on fathers with autistic children, and adds to the existing literature of fathering, fathers, and families in a number of significant ways. This begins in chapter two where I critically review the existing literature on fathers with autistic children, explaining how such work could be improved by using a more robust feminist informed theoretical framework which recognises the socially constructed nature of gender, masculinity, and disability (Connell, 1995; Garland-Thompson, 2005). I argue that the focus of such studies would be further enriched through recognising that fatherhood and fathering are diverse and complex concepts and suggest an intersectional lens would acknowledge the diversity amongst fathers and autistic children and take into consideration 'the ways in which men are regulated, negotiate and, at times, excuse their responsibilities as parents' (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Heeney, 2018, p. 258). I explain fully how a 'practices' approach enriches studies about parenting and families, drawing on relevant examples (Morgan, 2006; 2011). I draw this chapter to a close by repositioning my arguments in relation to feminist theory and reflect on how approaching the study from such a theoretical position might produce knowledge that goes some way towards addressing gendered inequalities in parenting.

Chapter three develops some points discussed in chapter two and acknowledges the methodological significance of 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and 'doing' class (Bourdieu, 1984) in terms of how these practices/ performances impact on the research process and shape fieldwork relations. In relation to this, I offer an overview of the research methods I used; photo-elicitation and narrative interviewing and justify the suitability of these methods for my project specifically (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990; Harper, 2002). I offer an overview of situational analysis in relation to the data obtained, and I explain its usefulness to my study specifically (Clarke, 2005). I then discuss matters of ontology and epistemology, explaining how my 'working-class feminist standpoint' has developed and influenced the project overall. I then reflect on the realities and difficulties of conducting research with fathers who have autistic children and explain how I responded to the difficulties this presented through the strategic presentation of my own classed and gendered self. This chapter concludes with a critical discussion on ethics and some key points of reflection about the place of feminist working-class research in academia.

This chapter also contains information about the 11 fathers who were recruited to the project. They were all white men, aged between 40 and 60, and had at least one autistic child. However, their family situations were diverse and, as I will discuss, for various reasons, some of these men were not able to make choices about the aspects of parenting with which they sought to engage. Less than half of the group worked outside of the home, identifying instead as full-time carers. One father identified as his wife's carer as well as the carer of his three children. There were three single fathers and one stepfather, and some had sole custody of their child or children as, for various reasons, mothers were no longer in the frame. Others had weekend-only contact with their children following divorce. Further details of the sample and access are detailed in the table in the appendix of this thesis. Chapters four, five, six and seven present the data generated.

Chapter four has a focus on age and the life course. Age was a theme that arose across all the interviews and as such it allowed participants to offer a life story, giving context and background to the chapters that follow (Harrison, 2008). The chapter tracks fathers' narratives of fathering through time from diagnosis onwards, describing fathers' reflections as children grow through teenage years into young adulthood and into imagined futures, using a feminist lens to explore participants' recollections on issues as diverse as services for

children and families, paternal engagement with schooling, embodiment, care, intimacy, sexuality, independence, the future, and death.

The data in this chapter suggests that the process of autism diagnosis, usually in early childhood, marks the beginning of the process which governs the roles that expert professionals, carers, women and mothers, and fathers should take up and play over time (Calasanti and King, 2005; Rose, 1985). Accordingly, fathers begin to experience ontological insecurity as masculine subjects they struggle to understand what their role should be (Kinvall, 2018; Whitehead, 2002). The data suggests that fathers invest in specific age stages and time bound practices to create relevant paternal masculine identities for themselves and their children as they age (Spector-Mersel, 2006).

Chapter five focuses specifically on care and my aim is to understand more about how fathers with autistic children understand and practice 'care' in the light of points raised in the previous chapter in relation to the messages men hear about their role as fathers. The chapter draws on participants' reflexive biographies of *the caring self* (Giddens, 1991) showing that paternal care often reflects risk-averse established social norms (Rose, 1985). The first half of the chapter explores the various meanings fathers give to practicing 'care' and examines how this is governed by concerns to do with matters of gender, sexuality, and age (Twigg, 2010). Fathers accounts of engagement with the intimate care of disabled teenage children are rare; I present some new and original data in relation to this topic and show how discourses of risk pervade fathers accounts and the attitudes of those professionals that scrutinise their involvement (Beck, 2002; Rose, 1985). Following on from this, I address how and why, in some circumstances, fathers with autistic children choose which aspects of care they wish to take part in and examines their motivations for using women/ professional carers to take up those aspects of care they wish or are expected to avoid. The second half of the chapter focuses on care 'giving' examining fathers' narratives of the objects they bought and used with and for their children (Mauss, 1966). I suggest that this providing is much more than a socially validated way for fathers to 'do' fatherhood, and objects discussed are vehicles which allowed fathers to express care through indicating intimate knowledge, father-child relations, and expertise about their children that they are otherwise often denied (Cheal, 1986).

Chapter six has a focus on place. I examine how fathers engage both publicly and privately with their children and showing how these activities are variously shaped by ideologies of disability, age, gender, sexuality, and morality (Hubbard, 2000). The chapter also examines how the contextual meaning of autism is deployed by and imposed on fathers and autistic people (O'Dell et al. 2016) and brings social class into focus as a geographical context wherein fathers and children are emplaced, and as a subjective, relational experience (Zylstra, 2017). I focus on fathers' experiences and responses to experiencing disapproval and 'belonging' with their children as a means to examine how the spatial organisation of disability (Imrie and Edwards, 2007) intersects with the fluctuating and contextual nature of men's power (Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Goffman; 1963; Hopkins and Noble, 2009; May, 2013; Morgan, 2011).

Chapter seven focuses on emotion. It has been argued that the emotional dimensions of fathering and masculinity cannot be separated as the management of some emotions and the display of others is central to signifying a masculine self (Anderson, Adley and Bevan, 2010; Connell, 1995). Furthermore, much previous research has concluded that fathers with autistic children are emotionally harmed because of their child's diagnosis and because of caregiving responsibilities (for example, Allen, Bowles, and Weber, 2013; Gray, 2003; Hastings, 2003). The various stories from research I present here indicate that 'autism' is not the primary cause of paternal distress. Instead, I use the work of Goffman (1963) and Bourdieu (1990) in recognising that emotions are 'performances' or 'practices' which reveal the effects of power and powerlessness on these men's emotional expressions specifically (Cottingham, 2012; Huppatz, 2009; Scheer, 2012; Thoits, 1989; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Accordingly, the stories from research I present here reflect how these men manage the complex emotions that arise they experience various social situations as they go about their daily lives as working-class masculine subjects with autistic children. I revisit points raised throughout this thesis which indicates the sense of uncertainty these fathers feel. Some of these stories reveal the ways in which men's emotional distress is dismissed by others or used against men to infer their instability and unsuitability to parent. Other emotional narratives reveal men's beliefs about their entitlement, status, and power when they are challenged as masculine subjects (Jordan, 2020). This chapter as a whole disrupts old stereotypes about autism, men and emotion, and provides new understandings and insights about these men's emotional lives.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis and revisits the main aims of the project and the research questions posed. I provide a short overview of each chapter and explain how the data presented has contributed to knowledge and debates about fathers who have autistic children. I reflect on the strengths and limitations of my research and discuss gaps that further studies could address. I also reflect on the ways in which my work could be taken forward for example, by policy makers or those that provide services for families with autistic children Finally, I resituate my study in relation to theoretical debates about feminist research with men specifically, considering the contributions my thesis makes methodologically and politically in terms of moving towards goals of gender equity.

With these points in mind, the following chapter presents a review of the literature I variously critique, draw on and develop throughout this study, as a means to discuss and clarify key terms and concepts central to my work and providing a critical overview of previous studies with fathers who have autistic children in order to explain the gaps and inconsistencies that my study seeks to fill.

Chapter 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

According to Whitehead, 'in all Western countries any metanarratives of masculinity that once prevailed have been put under question by feminism, leading to contrasting responses by men' (2002, p. 219). Accordingly, the growing research interest in fatherhood may indicate 'the male masculinity agenda for the next century' (Robinson, 2003, p. 130) and perhaps a contemporary feminist concern given that some researchers have suggested that mothers' and fathers' engagement with children is more 'equal' than ever before (Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson, 2004). This claim is perhaps indicative of progress, that men are changing through readily engaging in care (Hanlon, 2012) and are 'undoing' gender (Butler, 1990). Parallel to or perhaps eclipsing the current research interest in men and masculinities is research on autism, which 'has become a thing-like form within academia…produced, traded and consumed within the social sciences' (Mallett and Runswick-Cole, 2012, p.33). Nevertheless, although there is a growing body of work on mothers with disabled or autistic children (for a discussion, see Ryan and Runswick-Cole, 2008) there is far less research interest in fathers with disabled children.

Although feminist work has dislocated the connection between the social categories of mother and woman and disrupted the idea that motherhood is a women's biological destiny, the study of care has been 'over-gendered' (Morgan, 1996, p.102) in its focus on women. Much of what has been written about fathers with autistic children reinforces ideas about the incompatibility of male parenting and autistic children (Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson, 2012). Yet, previous research with fathers who have autistic children, and which might be considered by some to be 'progressive', does little more than affirm the illusory ideology of 'new fatherhood' (Gregory and Milner, 2011).

Gattrell and Dermott urge researchers to 'reflect on the complexities of how fatherhood research might be conducted so as to better understand the situation of contemporary paternity' (2018, p.5). Whilst the focus of much feminist research has been women's oppression, masculinities theory has emerged from feminist scholarship which in turn recognises that 'old' theories about men and women are inadequate for understanding gendered social issues such as men's involvement in parenting or care (Robinson, 2015). This

work has 'sought to expose and problematize the construction and role of masculinity as part of understanding patriarchy and the dominant positioning of men' (Brown and Ismail, 2019, p.17) and most contemporary studies acknowledge that the meanings attached to the terms 'autism', 'child', 'mother', 'father' or 'family' are socially constructed and temporal and that parental practices are shaped by a multitude of factors including policy, legislation, and socio-cultural influences (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, and Lamb, 2000).

If we use a feminist lens to conceive of gender as a social force rather than as a biological given, we can see that gender functions as an identity and a structuring tool which creates enormous pressures on men and women as parents through emphasising specific stereotypical qualities associated with masculinity and femininity (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). A feminist research project which focuses on fathers with autistic children would therefore be an interesting means through which to understand contemporary paternal masculinities specifically. However, as Mitchell and Lashewicz (2019) note, the theoretical frameworks which underpin previous studies on such fathers is poor, and contemporary theories in relation to the study of gender, fatherhood and masculinities have not been fully utilised in the study of fathers with autistic children. There is a lack of critical analysis in relation to the influence of power as it shapes how men practice as paternal masculine subjects within a patriarchal system that, broadly speaking, affords men dominance over women, for example, by determining what men and women do as parents with disabled children, but, in contradiction, also disadvantages fathers in the process through denying them the ability to form relationships with children and parent in ways that mothers do (Pease, 2002; Whitehead, 2002).

With these points in mind, this chapter critically reviews the small body of work about fathers with autistic children. I consider how future work could be improved upon and expanded-identifying methodological and empirical gaps and opportunities where more work is needed. To do this, I provide an overview of the key theoretical contributions relating to the study of gender, masculinities, and paternal masculinities; fathers, fathering and fatherhood, and families and family practices, acknowledging the importance of these developments. I suggest an intersectional focus on working-class fathers with autistic children can show 'more clearly how male privilege and dominance are constructed [and] can make us see harms suffered by boys and men that we have largely ignored' (Dowd, 2010, p. 416). With these points in mind, this chapter demonstrates the importance of feminist research which can

be used to advance gender equity in studying parents with autistic children (Featherstone, 2009). The chapter ends with some very brief points about methodologies to lay the groundwork for the chapters which follow.

What is gender?

Perhaps the key contribution of feminist theorising to contemporary understanding of gender and gender relations is the challenging of the idea that there are 'natural' or 'biological explanations for human behaviour' (Richardson, 2017, p.5) through the dislocation of sex and gender 'sex being 'what was ascribed by biology: anatomy, hormones, and physiology. Gender…was an achieved status: that which is constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means' (West and Zimmerman, 1987; p. 125). If we understand gender as a social construction, and that 'sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex' (Eckert and McConnell, 2013, p.2) we can come to understand that gender functions as a social division to legitimate differences between men and women based on beliefs about masculinity and femininity (Kaufman, 1999). Broadly speaking, masculinity and femininity exist as the recognisable 'doings' of gender identity in this configuration. So, gender is not real in a biological sense, but is a social practice (Connell, 1985) that is 'done' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) or 'performed' (Butler, 1990).

These are important points in relation to my thesis and in relation to the study of fatherhood/ disability. Firstly, feminist theory has disrupted the idea that a father is chiefly 'a male person whose sex cell has been successfully joined with a female sex cell in the act of fertilization, thus helping to form a new organism' (Maskalan, 2016, p.384) and have challenged the idea that the unequal responsibilities associated with the gendered categories of father and mother are natural and justifiable (Connell, 2009; Lamb and Lewis, 2004; Whitehead, 2002). Next, the contributions of postmodern gender theorists such as Judith Butler (1990) have disrupted the stability of the categories of woman and man and of mother and father, with Butler famously suggesting that gender can be 'undone'. And finally, our conceptualisations of what constitutes 'the family' have changed (Giddens, 1991; Smart, 1999; Weeks, Donovan and Heaphy, 1999) and so has our understanding of family relationships (Morgan, 2011). The notion that the father 'was to be psychologically strong, dominant within the family, assertive, decisive, and successful as a provider' (Lamb, 2000, p. 28) while mother stayed at home to care for the home and children is now generally considered to be an antiquated

concept. Accordingly, the idea that 'what once seemed a natural pattern—a parenting model in which fathers were viewed as "helpers" to mothers—is now yielding to new cultural ideals, such as coparenting' (Cabrera, 2000, p. 133).

What is disability, and where are all the fathers in disabilities research?

Research informed by critical disability studies has unsettled dominant understandings of disability as a tragedy, and accordingly the focus of this body of work has developed to encompass not only the experiences of disabled people themselves but also their families (Goodley, 2017). Feminist disability studies specifically is an intersectional approach which observes the socially constructed nature of disability, gender, and other social divisions such as race and class, and 'helps us understand in more complex ways that the particularities of human variation are imbued with social meanings and that those meanings comprise narratives that justify discriminatory practices that shape the lives of both disabled and nondisabled' (Garland-Thompson, 2005, p. 1582). Research informed by this theoretical paradigm has increasingly focused on the experiences of parents of disabled children and has shown that many parents seek to reject disablism and 'grapple with alternative understandings of disability and alternative (collective) ways to create better social conditions for their children' (Vaughan and Super, 2019, p.1102) beyond medical, burdensome, or tragic stereotypes.

Alongside these changes in theorising disability, social, cultural, and economic shifts have made unstable the 'old' ideas about gender and gender relations, and contemporary fatherhood has been redefined. The cultural figures of the 'new man' and 'new' fatherhood are reflected in the parenting of men who consider themselves to be significantly involved in the care of their children in ways that previous generations of men were not (Banchefsky and Park, 2015; Dermott, 2008; Henwood, Shirani, and Coltart, 2014). This 'new father' ideology has been criticised, for example, by Gregory and Milner (2011) and it is argued that most men have difficulty balancing the demands and opportunities that 'new' fatherhood seems to promise with the demands and advantages masculinity can offer (Petts, Schafer and Essig, 2018). Therefore, as Dowd remarks, for many families, 'the pattern of involved fathers…is not one of coequal or equal coparenting' (2000, p.23) and, as Whitehead states 'while being a 'new father' implies a break with increasingly dated ideas of traditional male roles…in practice it can often mean little more than a symbolic attachment to the idea of being a father

rather than a full, equal, and unmitigated engagement in its harder practices' (2002, p. 154, italics in original).

Gregory and Milner note that 'new father' ideologies 'tend to be conservative in their representations and reinforce existing stereotypes rather than innovative in representations of gender relations' (2011, p. 588) and even the most recent, qualitative 'autism and fatherhood literature' lacks a critical edge, generally reflecting the illusion of engaged fatherhood. Examples of this can be found in work by Cameron and Cooper, (2020), Cheuk and Lashewicz (2015), Dunn, Burbine, Bowers, and Tantleff-Dunn, (2001), Keller, Ramsich, and Carolan, (2014), May, St George, and Lane, (2021), O'Halloran, Sweeney, and Doody, (2013), Rafferty, Tidman and Ekas (2020). Such studies do little but conceal the ongoing nature of gendered inequality in parenting autistic children specifically, through the presentation of data that seems to suggest that men have 'changed' (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Demetriou, 2001).

Nevertheless, to a certain extent, this cluster of papers is preferable to a second, larger body of work which assumes that masculinity is a specific set of biological and psychological traits that makes male care, and the care of disabled children specifically, somewhat problematic. There are a multitude of studies which predominantly use quantitative methods to establish differences in maternal and paternal coping mechanisms in relation to parenting autistic children (see, for example, Ahmad and Dardas, 2015, Barak- Levy and Atzaba- Poria, 2013; Benson and Karlof, 2009; Benson, Karlof and Siperstein, 2008; Dabrowska and Pisula, 2010; Gray, 1997, 2003; Hayes and Watson, 2013; Hastings, 2003; Hastings et al. 2005; Nealy et al. 2012; Rivard et al. 2014; Wood and Eagley, 2010; 2015).

The findings of such studies generally support the hypothesis that men do not 'cope' well as parents with autistic children because of how men 'are'. Such suggestions feed into stereotypes of autistic children as burdensome (Gray, 2003; Marsh, Warren, and Savage, 2018) and work naturalises binary gender relations between men and women, affirming specific paternal roles for fathers and mothers, emphasising the idea that 'mothers and children will always have a special bond that we as men will have a difficult time understanding. Men are programmed to procreate and raise families, women are programmed to nurture and raise children' (Huhtanen, 2009, p. 81).

According to Whitehead, work of this type remains popular partly because these theories offer 'a readily understandable, accessible and common- sense version of an otherwise highly complex reality' (2002, p. 11) which suits men's interests and which feminist theory has sought to challenge. In relation to this point, it is also important to note that 'the theme of the 'good mother' (Knight, 2013, p.660) continues to dominate in disability research and policy (Boyd et al. 2019). So, in returning to Mitchell and Lashewicz (2019) concerns about the theoretical frameworks necessary for understanding more fathers with autistic children, my suggestion is that work is needed which challenges these essentialist beliefs about gender (and autism) and explores the diverse reasons as to why and how different men take up (or not) specific roles as fathers and as men with autistic children, in different times and in different places, the crux of the thesis I present here. To understand this, it is helpful to frame men and fathers using an intersectional lens which acknowledges the social construction of gender and autism (Crenshaw, 1989; Garland-Thompson, 2005) but also recognises the variability amongst men to explore their power and powerlessness, the ways in which fathers are governed and regulated in terms of what is expected of men, and where "different masculinities stand in different relationships to power" (Connell, 1985; Ramazanoglu, 1992, p. 342).

Theorising masculinities

Probably the most influential contribution to theorising masculinity comes from Raewyn Connell (2005[1995]; 2000; 2002) who outlines masculinities as plural, relational and situational performances which seek to convey an appropriate male gender identity. Her work provides a theoretical framework which acknowledges the place that power plays in the social organisation of masculinity and she draws on Antonio Gramsci (1971) in developing the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemony can be understood as the achievement of dominance attained through consensus about the nature of power and privilege; a generalised belief in the order of society and how things 'are'. Within Connell's framework, hegemonic masculinity functions in a similar way as a set of expectations reflecting how masculinity should be 'done'. Connell and Messerschmidt explain hegemonic masculinity to be:

> a pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or
> an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue.
> Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities,
> especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not

assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might
enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most
honoured way of being a man, it required all other men to position
themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global
subordination of women to men (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p.832).

Donaldson offers a similar explanation, stating that:

there may well be no known human societies in which some form of
masculinity has not emerged as dominant, more socially central, more
associated with power, in which a pattern of practices embodying the
"currently most honoured way" of being male legitimates the
superordination of men over women. Hegemonic masculinity is normative
in a social formation. Not all men attempt to live it, and some oppose it by
developing alternative (and subordinate) masculinities, but all men position
themselves, in relation to it in situations where their choices may be quite
restricted (Donaldson, 1993, p.643).

Connell refers to patterns of gender inequality and difference between women and men as
'the gender order of a society' although she points out that this does not assume a binary
opposition with 'women on one side and men on the other' (2009, p.73). She goes on to argue
that within this framework, 'femininity is central to men's dominance over women' (Schippers,
2007, p.87) and as femininity benefits men, so it can never be a source of power for women.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is the mechanism that orchestrates how gender should be done. It is a system that
defines sex differences and justifies as normal and natural differences between women and
men and the unequal rights and responsibilities that come from occupying a specific gender
category. Connell defines 'the advantage to men as a group from maintaining an unequal
gender order' as 'the patriarchal dividend' (2009, p.142). She points out that 'the patriarchal
dividend is the benefit to men as a group. Some men get more of it than others, other men get
less or none, depending on their location in the social order' (2009, p.142). Most men, 'even
white men, are far from the top of the patriarchal order, particularly at work. Many men are
severely oppressed as members of certain racial or class groups' (Becker, 1999, p.3) and

some men may be marginalised if they do not live up to the cultural expectations that hegemonic masculinity demands. Gay men, disabled men and working- class men, for example, be 'positioned at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men' (Connell, 2001, p.40) because they have limited access to the tools and markers which convey patriarchal power and maintain male privilege and so cannot comply with the dictates of hegemonic masculinity.

The concepts of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy have been criticised. Wetherell and Edley identify a lack of clarity around what hegemonic masculinity 'might look like in practice' (1999, p.336). Yang (2020) refers to the concept as 'pessimistic' noting the ways in which Connell's framework simply reproduces patriarchy, stating that 'not all female-bodied persons are invested in femininities, [and] not all male-bodied persons are invested in masculinities (2020, p. 330). Christensen and Qvotrup Jensen state that it is 'too structural, too abstract, for reifying normative masculinity positions, [and lacks] conceptual cogency which has resulted in contradictory approaches to, and uses of, the concept' (2014, p.61). Demetriou (2001) is perhaps the most pessimistic, suggesting that new, more progressive masculinities, for example, gay masculinity eventually come to embody hegemonic masculinity and male domination. Notably, Paechter disputes that 'everyone is in either a hegemonic or some sort of subordinate or otherwise degraded position, but that some people's takeup of gender can be simply non-hegemonic, rather than being caught up in a hegemonic/subordinated relation' (Paechter, 2018, p. 122). Nevertheless, appearing sufficiently masculine remains important to most men, although this is likely to be a highly specific relational and contextual matter (Hearn and Morgan 1990; Robinson and Hockey, 2011).

It remains important to note that patriarchy can harm men, for example, by defining what constitutes an appropriate gender display for fathers as masculine subjects specifically (Kauffman, 1999; Mc Laughlin and Muldoon, 2014). Furthermore, Gottfried (1998) is wary of the uncritical deployment of the term 'patriarchy' by some feminists, suggesting that the displacement of social class 'impoverishes analysis of both gender and class' (p.451) through failing to recognise how their 'enmeshing' effects 'can highlight the tensions, contradictions, and oppositions within social processes' (p. 464). Therefore, it is important to recognise that men's ability to exercise patriarchal power, by choosing how to parent or present themselves as fathers and as men is best viewed using an intersectional lens as their practices are strongly

linked to individual men's social status, relationships with others, and ability to exercise power in a given context (Waling, 2019).

Paternal masculinities

According to Pleck, fatherhood denotes 'both fathers' parental status and their parenting' (2010, p.29) and this is associated with a specific gender category 'male'. It is impossible to divorce ideologies of fatherhood from ideologies of masculinity but the link between these two masculine identities is not uniform and such simple models of fathering have been criticised. Thus, as masculinity becomes masculinities in the plural, so 'some theorists have grown more sensitive to the co-constructed nature of men's identities' (Marsiglio, 2000, pp. 1177) recognising that paternal masculinities are not fixed and static but are 'complex identity formations' (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003, p. 53) reflective of most fathers' tenuous relationship with patriarchy and male power (Connell, 1995). Fathering is therefore best understood as 'done' through practice (Dermott, 2008). Nevertheless, fathering and its associated set of paternal practices constitutes one element of 'a central set of tasks in constructing gender identity and sexual difference' (Morgan, 1996, p. 101) which sustains inequalities between men and women.

Towards an intersectional understanding of fathers' practices.

According to David Morgan, practices place 'emphasis on doing, on action, or social action. Whether we are talking about the work of office holders in a public bureaucracy, daily encounters between professionals and clients, or the everyday experiences of marriage and parenthood what matters are the day-to-day practices rather than any formal prescriptions or descriptions' (2011, p.2). Practices enable us to understand how the actions of individuals are shaped by social influences and so they are intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality developed from black feminist theory (Collins, 1986; Crenshaw, 1989) and is an important analytic tool which encourages consideration of:

> the perspectives of multiply marginalized people, especially women of
> color; an analytic shift from addition of multiple independent strands of
> inequality toward a multiplication and thus transformation of their main
> effects into interactions; [encouraging] a focus on seeing multiple
> institutions as overlapping in their co-determination of inequalities to
> produce complex configurations from the start, rather than "extra"

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interactive processes that are added onto main effects (Choo and Ferree, 2010, p 131).

Doing gender is, of course, a social practice which reflects how these social influences shape the situated and relational nature of gender performance (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Relatedly, Schrock and Schwalbe have acknowledged how men might engage with 'manhood acts' as 'gendered beings in many contexts, from intimate relationships to the workplace to global politics' (2009, p.277). However, introducing an intersectional lens can enable us to understand how patriarchy and masculinity influence fathering in more nuanced ways by recognising that men (and women) variously negotiate and perform identity not just because of gender, but also according to how and where they are placed in, identify with, and are looked upon by others in relation to their positioning in diverse and overlapping social categories informed by ideas about class, disability, or age, for example. Intersectional research allows scholars to identify these structural, cultural and individual influences and discourses and examine the 'interactional effects' (Hankivinsky, 2010, p. 1663) of these on fathers specifically by considering how the practices of fathers are shaped by attitudes and beliefs held by men themselves individually, and about men by other people (Adamson and Smith, 2020).

For example, despite shifts in how we conceive of families and family life, the physical care of young children is generally considered mothers' responsibility (Evans, 2002; Hays, 1996). In a UK context there remains a general policy focus which affirms that men's primary contribution to families should be an economic one (Featherstone, 2009) and the idea that a disabled child's key relationship is with its mother still underpin policy and practice in a western context, positioning her 'as the key agent of social and developmental change' (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2011, p.71). Accordingly, it is the mother, but rarely the father, who comes under scrutiny 'in the form of expert intervention in the child-rearing process, including assistance from professionals such as social workers, medical personnel, psychologists, therapists, and educators, the very people socially mandated to intervene based on intensive mothering standards' (Rapp, 1999; Sousa, 2011, p. 222). Such ideologies about mothers also infer those fathers may be unsuitable carers, an assumption which Tronto states 'is a psychological artifact of femininity, a cultural product of caretaking activity, [and] a positional result of social subordination' (1987, p. 663). Accordingly, we can come to see that 'different ways of 'being' a man [are] not only a matter of individual choice, the ability to

choose an identity from 'free-floating signs and signifiers' in the post-modern sense. Rather, 'being' a man is something that is predicated on gender relations that are also embedded in social structures' (Robertson, 2006, p. 309).

Intersectional work has proved to be a useful research concept for the study of 'diverse families and communities, variation in social and behavioral processes, and the impact of legislative and institutional constraints and resulting disparities on individuals and groups across the lifespan and geography' (Few-Demo and Allen, 2020 p. 341). Intersectional geographies have acknowledged the spatial organisation of race (see Neely and Samura, 2011, for a summary) the spatial organisation of disability (Imrie and Edwards, 2007) and of care (Bowlby, 2012). Research has reflected the complex geographies of childhood (Morrow, 2008) and of fathering, with Meah and Jackson specifically pointing out that fatherhood 'is far more complex than is allowed for within conventional definitions of fatherhood as a social construction which focuses narrowly on men's role as breadwinner within monolithic constructions of the nuclear family' (2016, p. 506). Clearly, such an intersectional approach does not dispense with gender, rather 'it conceptualizes gender as a fluid, intersecting form of inequality' (Hankivinsky, 2012, p.1663) so allows us to see the ambiguity and contextuality of masculine identity and recognise how most men are variously privileged in some areas of their lives but are less so in others (Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). It can help us to see that men's engagement with children is sometimes limited, for example, by the attitudes of other people (Kaufman, 1999; Robertson, 2006).

This is important because previous research about fathers' lack of involvement in the care of autistic children has tended to reflect a division of responsibilities by gender which presumes women's subordination is supported by fathers themselves. This does not take into consideration that 'families who adopt differing patterns around care and breadwinning can also face scrutiny' (Doucet, 2011, p.91) and for a variety of reasons, fathers may not be permitted or comfortable to engage some aspects of care, or with services around the child, sometimes to the detriment of their own health and well-being, although this has not been addressed in any robust way in the autism literature specifically (Smith and Robertson, 2008). Furthermore, there are fathers who wish to be more engaged with their children's care, and there are fathers who parent independently; post-divorce or widowed fathers for example, although they make up a very small percentage of fathers overall (Dowd, 2000).

Moreover, by drawing on Goffman (1959) we can understand that each 'gaze' cast upon fathers is informed by a different opinion or perspective regarding what is good or appropriate behaviour for these men, and performances of masculinity and fathering are produced accordingly. Because gender is relational, there is 'a need to consider the influence of the complex, fluctuating nature of power relations between men and women as well as between different groups of men' (Christensen and Qvotrup Jensen, 2014, p. 60) and how these dynamics influence what fathers say and do. This way of 'seeing' fathers with autistic children turns on its head Mulvey's (1975) claim that it is the woman, rather than the man, that is looked upon and troubles the idea that men's power and privilege is universal. For example, we understand very little about how such fathers might engage with the intimate and embodied care of autistic children, such responsibilities generally thought of as being the specific remit of mothers and women (Carnaby and Cambridge, 2006; Doucet, 2008; Erickson and Macmillan, 2018; Gabb, 2012; Priestly, 2003; Shirani, 2013; Shirani and Henwood, 2011; Slevin, 2008). But we might come to know more about such matters by recognising the contextual scrutiny fathers face, at home, for example, by social workers, or even via the internet, and in public by schoolteachers or doctors, or by strangers or neighbours (Herz, 2017; Hopkins, 2009; Hubbard, 2000).

Lack of attention to the gaze is also evident in academia in that most research at the overlap between autism, parenting and gender has not attended to issues of positionality and reflexivity and so has tended to reflect a 'top-down projection of values and standards' (Gillies, 2005, p.70) which has been 'limited to intact nuclear families in the middle or upper middle classes' (Altiere and von Kluge, 2009, p. 91). Indeed, whilst a male gender identity infers patriarchal privilege on most fathers, this is not experienced by men in any uniform way, but the impact of this on fathering has rarely been given due consideration. Previous work with fathers who have autistic children has failed to address the experiences of men who are positioned at the intersection of class and gender, and to my knowledge, there is no specific research which focuses on working-class fathers with autistic children specifically (Coston and Kimmel, 2011; Gottfried, 1998) or which reflects a working-class feminist informed standpoint or methodological approach in studying these men's lives (Barker, 1989).

Cheuk and Lashewicz (2017) are interested to know 'how' fathers with autistic children are doing, but a more pertinent question going forward here seems to be *what* fathers are doing,

how we should go about finding out 'how men transform their attitudes about fatherhood into parenting commitments and actions?' (Litton-Fox and Bruce, 2001, p.394) *which* men should we ask and *who* should be doing the asking?

Introducing class

Bourdieu (1984; 1986) wrote at length about class practices, discussing how social divisions demand befitting performances of the self in accordance with what is expected, and indicating that these performances carry profoundly different levels of value or 'capital'. And of course, Goffman (1959; 1963) observes individuals avoid social disqualification by means of strategic impression management. One social group identified by both Goffman and Bourdieu was that of the poor and working-class. Owen Jones (2011) and Imogen Tyler both note that 'the word "chav," alongside its various synonyms and regional variations, has become a ubiquitous term of abuse for white working-class subjects' (Tyler, 2013, p.17). Tyler and Skeggs (1997) both observe that working-class women specifically might experience struggles presenting themselves as subjects of worth and value. But what of working-class men? Marsiglio notes that:

> heated public debates have emerged over numerous issues relevant to fatherhood, including divorce and single parenthood, "deadbeat dads" and "androgynous" fathers, welfare reform, teenage pregnancy and nonmarital childbearing, fathers' rights and responsibilities, the definition of "family," and fathers' potentially unique contributions to child development. Discussions of these issues often make reference to serious social problems assumed to arise from the diverse conditions of fatherlessness and father absence (2000, p. 1174).

It is also important to acknowledge that 'new' ideologies of masculinity and fatherhood emerged as a popular political discourse in the light of moral panics about the 'underclass', 'fatherlessness' the breakdown of society, the erosion of the traditional family and the instability of the old ideas which affirmed the gendered division of parenting roles and responsibilities (David, 1999; Murray, 1990). Perhaps working-class fathers are still considered a problem in and of themselves, and what they are doing is thought of as unworthy of research attention unless it supports the notion that they need to be 'helped' to parent in better ways. This might explain why most research on working-class families with

disabled children reflects a concern with policy, often acknowledging the economic difficulties these families may endure following the imposition of austerity policy in the UK (Cross, 2013; Goodley, Lawthom and Runswick-Cole, 2019).

This policy focus is by no means a bad thing, showing the disadvantage and high levels of need experienced by families with disabled children. Indeed, studies indicate that the economic pressures imposed on men to provide financially for their children may undermine their intentions as parents (Dermott and Gattrell, 2018; Dermott and Miller; 2015; Gregory and Milner, 2011; Roy, 2004). However, Braun, Vincent and Ball note that 'future research on fathers and parenting more generally [should examine] class-based cultures and conduct of fathering in greater depths' (2011 p.33). There is a need for studies such as mine which recognise the ways in which working-class fathers' practices may be restricted by policy or informed by the demands of others who hold fixed ideas about what men should do and seek to question their motives and capability as fathers and how fathers might innovate in response (Featherstone, 2010; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007; Siltanen and Doucet, 2008). Whilst some men might feel this is a means to avoid certain responsibilities, not all fathers experience this as advantageous. Not all working-class people need to be 'rescued', some autistic children don't have a mother or a female carer, and not all men have a female partner to defer to when their parenting is questioned in this way (Marsiglio, 2000).

Holmes makes an important point in relation to this when she states that understanding the lived experience of class requires consideration of 'both material conditions and discursive formations' (2007, p. 140) as reflected the cultural turn in sociology. Therefore, an examination of class should also take 'seriously the relationship between the social and the psychic in the production of class subjects' (Brah, 1999 p.10). If, as Charlesworth states 'the existence and reproduction of class…concerns powerful affinities and aversions to persons, things and spaces…they absorbed it as the space absorbed them in demanding that they comport themselves within a certain manner in order to be successful within its parameters' (2000, p.64) then it has likely gone unacknowledged that some paternal practices might emerge in those contexts which sit outside or on the boundaries of 'the established package of partnership, parenthood and household' and which have 'their own distinct characteristics' (Jamieson et al., 2006, p.1).

Research should take into consideration the contextual scrutiny some men with autistic children face should they trouble what is considered acceptable in terms of paternal masculinity, and also recognise the moral concerns held about the competency and motivation of some men's fathering practices through addressing the experiences of unemployed, or working-class fathers, or fathers who are parenting without a female co-parent because they are divorced, widowed, or separated, for example (Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2010; Edwards and Gillies, 2000; Heeney, 2015; 2018, Li, Savage and Warde, 2015). But such an approach would also recognise that to be scrutinised because of difference can be advantageous and difference can function as 'a resource that allows [individuals] to obtain ends they desire' (Link and Phelan, 2014, p. 24).

Summary and conclusion

Most previous work with fathers who have autistic children has not addressed the ways in which beliefs about men's and women's parenting roles are based on gender stereotypes which sustain patriarchy (Eckert and McConnell, 2013). Accordingly, research has not adequately 'allow[ed] fatherhood to be understood as a key cultural and discursive resource in the making of contemporary heterosexual male identities' (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003, p.44) nor considered that the socially constructed and/or biosocial concomitants of being male may influence a man's involvement with his child as well as the nature of his paternal identity' (Pleck, 2010, p.31). The ways in which fathers are variously pushed out of parenting are rarely given critical consideration (Cosson and Graham, 2012; Mc Gowan, 2016). As a result, even the most contemporary work reflects the discourses of 'new fatherhood' (and 'intensive mothering') and, in doing so, does little but 'reinforce existing stereotypes rather than innovative …representations of gender relations' (Gregory and Milner, 2011, p.588).

Rather than seeking to establish what fatherhood is or to measure if and how fathering may be 'a causal factor in explorations of child development' (Dermott, 2008, p.2) most fatherhood scholars have come 'to view the meanings and experiences associated with fatherhood as existing through specific sociocultural processes rather than as a stable identity' (Marsiglio, 2000, p.1178). Accordingly, as I have stated thus far, fathering is best understood as temporal and most contemporary research examines paternal engagement in contextualised and relational social practices (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007). Such studies recognise that 'a father's parenting may be influenced by his masculinity orientation and vice versa'

(Pleck, 2010, p.32) but there are other influences such as class, race, age, and culture for consideration (Marsiglio, 2010; Morgan, 2011). Accordingly, this intersectional focus is important in terms of widening a research focus beyond a consideration of gender to acknowledge the multifariousness amongst fathers, fathering practices, families, and autistic children and the social and cultural positions they occupy and to the critically analyse how fathers experiences of marginalisation and exclusion also shape 'the diversity of meaning around paternity, familial masculinity, and wider kinship relations' (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007, p. 68) and inform the practices of fathers accordingly.

With this in mind, I have shown that previous studies which have drawn on a practices approach can acknowledge how men's positioning within fluid and shifting webs of relationships, spatialities, policies, and ideologies which govern and create multiple social categories may inform their actions as fathers with autistic children (Morgan, 2011; Robinson and Hockey, 2011). This in turn has enabled greater understanding of how and why men might live up to or reject specific masculine roles to sustain a valuable paternal/masculine identity and allowed a more critical awareness of how and why these masculine identities might be 'done' as a means to assert or reclaim power (Robinson and Hockey, 2011).

I want to end this chapter by resituating the points I have presented thus far in the broader context of feminist research with men and consider some of the political and ethical tensions that might emerge as a result of my research interest in these men specifically. The increasing focus on men in feminist research has been debated with the marginalisation of women's knowledge and the corresponding side-lining of feminist concerns and the inequalities faced by women raised as points of contention (Beasley, 2015; Featherstone, 2010; Hearn, 2004; Jordan, 2020). It is right that fatherhood studies recognise that a masculine identity is still a privileged one, allowing men access to power that women might not share (Robinson, 2015). An uncritical focus on men's marginalisation risks taking 'the heat off patriarchy' (Robinson and Richardson, 2004, p.25) promoting men's interests whilst simultaneously side-lining the ongoing injustices faced by women (Hearn and Morgan, 1990). Further, research with men has the potential to be hijacked and used by non-feminists in the pursuit of 'equality' and 'gender justice' for men specifically (Doucet, 2008). Such work can be used by men to feed into fathers' rights discourses or bolster neoliberal policy responses that seek to reiterate the importance of fathers to families without specifying why this is necessary (Churchill, 2016; Jordan, 2016).

In accordance with these points, it is important to note that men's demands that they be acknowledged as fathers with autistic children may be little more than demands that they be acknowledged as men rather for anything specific they bring to the parenting table (Featherstone, 2010). Some fathers might 'feel that they are dealing with novel situations and that they are responding in imaginative and innovative ways. Some indeed manifest a sense of being pioneers' (Jamieson, Morgan, Crow and Allen, 2006, p.3) without much evidence of this happening. Accordingly, it is important to recognise that men can blend both hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities simultaneously, and for some men specifically, this affords them special privileges and recognition that are not generally extended to mothers (Wetherell and Edley, 1999). To ignore these complexities is to affirm male privilege if any vague suggestion that fathers are involved in their children's lives is presented as evidence that men have 'changed' and that gender equality has been achieved (Gregory and Milner, 2011). Taken as a whole, such research would also provide insight as to what men and women consider constitutes gender equality, or even if this is a goal for men. Indeed, this is a key finding that I discuss in later chapters.

On the other hand, research such as mine might illuminate the highly engaged nature of some fathers and their fathering practices that other studies have 'missed'. In that respect, it might move beyond binary positions and open up possibilities for gender to be 'undone' (Butler, 1990) by illustrating the workings of the gender order in the context of parenting autistic children, by highlighting the scrutiny of male parenting, for example (Herz, 2017; Kaufman, 1999). Fathers with autistic children may be denied involvement with their children in ways that mothers are not (Aitken, 2000; Donaldson, 1993) and the social support requirements of fathers and the individuals and services they turn to for help in times of need both informally and formally are limited (Doherty et al. 1996). It can identify the tensions men feel as a result of these experiences and suggest where changes and interventions might be made to enable men to engage more fully with parenting as masculine subjects specifically.

Such a study would enable a move away from overly determinist debates to develop a more fluid examination of how paternal masculinities are influenced by men's positioning in society, by the tenuous and interrelated social constructions of masculinity and femininity, fathering and mothering, place, age, and disability/ autism (Christensen and Qvotrup Jensen, 2014; Ives, 2019). Accordingly, research should be culturally, contextually, and relationally

sensitive in 'recognising that there are a range of vectors of relationality present within masculinities in different places and at different times' (Hopkins and Noble, 2009, p.812). This brings me on to my final point in that a major issue with the autism literature to date seems to be methodological. Day and Lamb (2004) observe:

> that how we conceptualize and assess father involvement reflects historical and social trends that, in turn, shape men's beliefs about their family identities as well as other family members' beliefs and views about men's roles in family life. …at least from a research viewpoint, understanding men in families involves a dynamic process in which research agendas need to change as the protean nature of family life changes (2004, p. 1).

Yet, Pini and Pease note that within the field of masculinities research, 'there is no debate that is comparable to the discussions within feminist scholarship about appropriate methodologies for researching women's lives' (2013, p. 1). There is a need for methodological innovation and sensitivity in doing research with these men that previous studies have not taken into consideration (Lashewicz, Shipton, and Lien,2019; Meth and Mc Clymont, 2009). These are the issues I explore in the next chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction and overview

This chapter reflects the tensions of doing socially and politically responsible feminist research with fathers who have autistic children. Specifically, if feminist research is a critical paradigm which invites us to scrutinise the conventions of academic research, then how can feminists who do research with men 'expand our professional horizons, encompassing a wider view of what qualifies as 'acceptable' scholarship' (Swartz, 1997, p.2) and, if we are to produce knowledge 'with' participants who are men then how should we go about doing this? Further, if the gendered/ classed gaze of the researcher (Mulvey, 1975) leads to certain masculinities being performed and evaluated 'in the eye of the beholder, and …activated at some level, consciously or less consciously' (Mulvey, 1975; Ridge, 2019, n.p.) then the processes that give rise to these various activations are important points of consideration as they affect fathers' practices in day-to-day life, but also their performances in a research context.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first sections provide some background to the evolution of the project, reflect on positionality, epistemology, and ontology, and explain how I subsequently achieved a personal standpoint on the research issues at hand. I then provide an overview of the original research design before discussing the difficulties I had in accessing the field, in recruitment and in data collection, and explain how I addressed these issues as they arose. In the final section, I reflect on the criticism I faced as a consequence of the choices I made. I offer some thoughts on ethics and suggest that there is a need for resistance to mainstream approaches and methods which are presented as more intellectual and rational, but merely reinscribe hegemonic power relations through their findings about men, and through governing what counts as academic research (Law, 2004; Swarts, 1997).

Background to the study and key aims

According to Ousley and Cermak 'autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a behaviorally defined neurodevelopmental disorder associated with the presence of social-communication deficits and restricted and repetitive behaviors' (2014, p. 1). It is currently estimated that 1 in 54 children has been diagnosed with autism (CDC, 2021). Autism has been defined and

discussed in the main, using a biomedical lens. But autism is not simply a label or a medical condition. It is both a social phenomenon and an experience (Garland-Thompson, 2005).

A rich body of research has acknowledged the roles played by mothers of autistic children, although this intense focus risks positioning them as natural carers (Ryan and Runswick-Cole, 2008). In comparison, fathers with autistic children remain somewhat side-lined, reinforcing the notion that male care is not really very interesting, or even wanting, and further indicating perhaps that masculinity (or fatherhood, more specifically) and disability are somewhat incompatible (Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson, 2012). This 'othering' of fathers (and autistic children also) is a conduit for disability/ gender stereotypes (Lefkowitch, 2009). Therefore, the initial aim of this study was to conduct a qualitative research project, the focus of which is the 'practices' (Morgan, 1996; 2011) of fathers with autistic children. A practices approach places emphasis on action, context, and temporality, offering insight into how interpersonal, structural, cultural, and ideological influences might shape participants' everyday actions as fathers with autistic children specifically. Moreover, the methodological approach I outline in this chapter acknowledges that these practices are also undertaken in a research setting.

Whilst the original aims of this project were to examine the interface between fatherhood and autism, to know more about how fathers parented autistic children, I came to realise that fathering cannot be separated from masculinity, and so, a fathering identity is also a masculine one. Thus, the focus of my work developed into a critical analysis of 'the practices of identity work that arise from the category 'men' (Whitehead, 2002, p. 209) and 'women' and what this provided was greater understanding of 'the material and power consequences arising from the practices of gender signification' (Whitehead, 2002, p. 210) as this was variously imposed on and taken up by taken up by *paternal masculine subjects*, or, to be more specific, by fathers who have autistic children.

Of course, the ways that men 'do' masculinity in a research setting has been well acknowledged, for example, by Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) and Allen (2005). A performance of a masculine identity can be detrimental and create problems in terms of the quality and nature of data gathered. But I did not really acknowledge the significance nor the complexity of these points of consideration until I reflected on a smaller project that I conducted, prior to beginning my doctoral studies, also with fathers who had autistic children.

As I will explain, for some men, even the processes which inform ones' decision to take part in a research study in the first place, are shaped by concerns about 'the right and wrong ways to act' (Burkitt, 2008, p. 59) as a man, a father, and as a research participant.

At the time of carrying out my first research project, I was studying for a master's degree in Social Work. I recruited my participants with the help of John, the manager of an organisation who provided a range of social care services including respite care. I had been placed with this organisation during my social work training and John had been my practice supervisor. Whilst I had not been involved in the delivery of respite services during my time with this organisation, and so had not met any of the fathers whose children received such services, John had 'persuaded' five fathers to talk to me, vouched for me and generally said I was 'ok'. Nevertheless, I have memories of these men shuffling awkwardly as I questioned them, with one father specifically warily eyeing me up and down and muttering with some suspicion 'a social worker, hey?'

Qualitative interviews can be understood as 'an embodied dialogical performance with and for others and that others will judge that performance according to ethical standards inherent in the history and culture of their particular social group' (Burkitt, 2008, p. 77) and these first experiences of interviewing fathers was a steep learning curve for me in terms of understanding this in terms of how participants performed identity according to their audience (Goffman, 1963). For example, it has been acknowledged that men may be likely to talk to people they know something about but be fearful of research agendas if gender is a theme, or if the researcher is a woman (Adler and Adler, 2003; Hopkins and Noble, 2009; Pini, 2005). As I found out, social workers and others who hold (or are presumed to hold) positions of power, knowledge, and influence (including mothers who have autistic children of their own!) might be perceived as threatening or critical by some fathers, and this affects their willingness to participate in research and influences the type of information they are likely to share (Herz, 2017).

This is a particularly important point of reflection in relation to the present study because the voices of middle-class men dominate most fathering studies generally, and they are often presented as exemplars of how to parent well although there may be little to suggest innovation or gender parity in their parenting practices (Banchefsky and Park, 2016; Braun, Vincent, and Ball, 2010; Shows and Gerstel, 2009). As Collier observes, 'sex, class and

morality have been bound together in projecting the idea of the 'responsible' father' (1995, p. 229) who, whether he has a disabled child or not, is usually white, married, and middle class. On the other hand, working-class fathers must fight against stereotypes; they may be thought of 'problem parents' (Freeman, 2010) less competent, interested, or intelligent than middle class counterparts (Durante and Fiske, 2017) or as benefit scroungers (Heeney, 2015; 2018). Previous research with single fathers specifically suggests a tension between caring and breadwinning that these men might struggle with (Coles, 2015; Williams, 2007). But a further issue for consideration in relation to all the points discussed here is working-class fathers may not feel they can express their feelings and experiences to someone who they believe, as an academic, cannot understand or represent their lives (Charlesworth, 2000). For all of these reasons, some fathers may be resistant participants and find research a threatening experience (Phoenix, Frosh and Pattman, 2003).

In *Distinction,* Bourdieu makes the comment 'one does not speak to any Tom, Dick or Harry; any Tom, Dick or Harry does not take the floor' (1977, p. 649). As a working-class woman, I have both a personal and a political interest in speaking to the Toms, Dicks and Harrys of this world, to address in a small way the positioning and representation of working-class voices in research, which have often been considered 'threatening to the status quo' (Collins, 1986, p. 17; De Benedictus, 2012; Skeggs, 1997). Therefore, my work attempts to provide new sociological understandings about working-class men with autistic children, but also attempts to open a reflective dialogue in relation to methodologies in the context of researching 'well' with these men specifically (Hopkins and Noble, 2012; Meth and Mc Clymont, 2009; Pease, 2013; Pini, 2005; Robinson, 2013; Seidler, 1995). In addition, the process of carrying this research out has allowed me to understand something about the difficulties of doing research as a working-class female subject, with working-class men, in ways that fit with academia's middle-class demands (Barker, 1996; Charlesworth, 2000; Lawler, 2005; Reay, 2004).

Philosophy

My work is conducted from an interpretivist paradigm. In contrast to positivism, which claims to objectively seeks facts and truths, interpretivism rejects any objective reality as such, and instead foregrounds the highly subjective, fragmented and socially constructed nature of the world, and acknowledges that the variable contextual and relational positions we hold shape our understanding of social phenomena, of ourselves, of 'research' and of 'knowledge' itself (Guba and Lincoln, 1984; Stanley and Wise, 1993). Accordingly, I draw

on a theoretical paradigm which acknowledges that 'truth' and 'reality' are social constructs which are contestable, situated and temporal, and on feminist theory in recognising that gender is a social construction and a social and cultural practice which functions as a social division amongst many others which legitimises inequalities between men and women (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Richardson, 2017).

However, feminist research with men can be politically tenuous if it does not have gender equality as an aim and my work is underpinned by a belief that research on fathers should be led by feminist goals of achieving gender equality for men and women as parents to autistic children specifically (Dowd, 2010; Gregory and Milner, 2011; Featherstone, 2010; Pease, 2013). A key point of consideration in relation to this point is that methodologies which focus too much on men's power present a generalised view of masculinity and fatherhood, as prior research on fathers with autistic children attests. Indeed, these studies have not recognised the variable nature of men's (and women's) access to power, nor how differences and similarities in gender, class, race, age, and disability influence relationships in the field, and data gathered (Burkitt, 2008; Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Paetcher, 2018; Pease, 2013; Seidler, 2006). Etherington (2004) observes that attending to power relations in research has long been a concern of feminist researchers and, therefore, a key methodological theme I develop here is how and why a working-class woman might go about carrying out her research with men in ways that seeks to take into consideration the variable nature of power/lessness as it infuses their social experiences and also affects relations between them in a research setting (Hopkins and Noble, 2009; Seidler, 2006; Stanley and Wise, 1993).

Meth and McClymont (2009) remark that methodologies underpinning research on men and masculinities must remain critical and that 'feminist researchers must focus on the ways in which their research can challenge the persistence of unequal gender relations' (2005, p.921). Unequal gender relations are important, but in the context of this study, they are not the only inequality for consideration. Therefore, my approach to working with these men specifically reflects the 'cultural turn' in sociology by stepping away from an all-encompassing focus on gender, embracing an intersectional approach which considers the complex nature of relations and identities, and how these might manifest and be 'managed' within a research setting (Crenshaw, 1989; Coston and Kimmel, 2011; Nash, 2001). But how does this fit (or not) with what 'counts' as feminist research or feminist research practice?

Reflections on ontology and epistemology

According to Crotty (1998) ontology is concerned with the study of being, the nature of 'reality' and what 'exists' and what can be 'known' about the social world. Stanley and Wise (1993) state that our beliefs about the world develop via our experiences as we are positioned in the social realm. Although there is no objective 'truth' about the operation and structuring of the social world, we may experience, understand, or claim that the social organisation of everyday life with its associated categories, rules and stipulations is 'real' and necessary, or not, according to our social position and the benefits this might afford us. This requires researchers be reflexive about their situatedness and their practices in relation to their topics of study and how this then shapes their ontological and epistemological positions (Haraway, 1991).

Reflexivity is a process through which the researcher addresses how her beliefs and values have influenced the project and its findings. Without reflexivity, data gathered by researchers are 'evaluated' and presented, as 'the truth of a situation' (Stanley and Wise, 1993, p. 115). Accordingly, when I began my research journey, I was primarily concerned with the idea that working-class fathers are 'oppressed' because of stereotypes held about men's parenting capabilities, about working-class subjects, and because of poor research practice (Robertson, 2004; Williams, 2007). I 'knew' this from my own experiences of doing research with these men, and through my experience of co-parenting an autistic child with my husband (Flick, 1998, Guba and Lincoln, 1994, Stanley and Wise, 1993). Nevertheless, I came to recognise that although my participants and I shared some common experiences of oppression as working-class subjects, our understandings of on what constitutes gender equality, autism, or disability, for example, often shared little common ground (Ives, 2019; Milton, 2012; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Witt, 2010).

Stanley and Wise note that 'people experience their 'selves' neither as complete social constructions nor as essential and 'uncultured' sites of unchanging difference' (1993, p. 194). In accordance, I subscribe to a feminist-relational ontology which foregrounds the significance of 'selves-in-relation' (Ruddick 1989, p. 211; Thayer-Bacon, 2010; Wildman, 2006). This ontological position recognises that the idea of a coherent identity is problematic. Both privilege and oppression affect the dynamic and shifting positions occupied by the researcher and her respondents in a research setting to influence data obtained and analysed (Burkitt, 2008; England, 1994). Accordingly, my ontological perspective is informed by the

ambiguity of identity and the fluctuating nature 'of power relations between men and women as well as between different groups of men' (Christensen and Qvotrup Jensen, 2014, p. 60) as they manifest in fieldwork and elsewhere. My participants and I occupied shifting positions of dominance and marginalisation at different stages of the research (Paetcher, 2018; Seidler, 2005).

An epistemology can be defined as a theory of knowledge and as such, understandings of social phenomenon are influenced by the epistemological position of the persons conducting the inquiry (Sprague and Kobrynowicz, 2006). Hankivinsky notes that 'intersectionality is concerned with epistemologies (theories of knowledge) and power, and in particular, with the relationship between power and knowledge production. Including the perspectives and worldviews of people who are typically marginalized or excluded in the production of knowledge' (2014, p.10). Wilson Ray, Morrin and Abrahams remark that 'while there is a focus on the problems of being [working -class women] in the academy, we also acknowledge our relative privileges, and use this as a platform to call out or 'name' the injustices we see' (2021, p.33) and accordingly, my research is undertaken from what I term a working-class feminist standpoint epistemological position. Standpoint is a critical feminist epistemology which aims to reveal 'the ideological strategies used to design and justify the sex-gender system and its intersections with other systems of oppression, in the case of feminist projects' (Harding, 2004, p.6). Some versions of standpoint claim epistemic advantage on the grounds that because most women experience life differently to most men, they understand the world in different ways and thus can make alternative knowledge claims which stem from their position in the world (Hartsock, 1997).

Contemporary standpoints have evolved to encompass the specific perspectives and concerns of women who occupy multiple standpoints, for example, black women, working-class women, and disabled women (Barker, 1996; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1984; Morris, 1992). These standpoints embrace plurality and do not reflect a priori assumptions about 'better' views emerging from a fixed social location, instead recognising the intersectional and relative nature of social identity and the multiple perspectives generated (Harding, 2004; Wylie, 2003).

Thoughts on a third space feminist working-class standpoint epistemology.

My standpoint developed over time and, as I have indicated, was 'achieved through a critical, conscious reflection on the ways in which power structures and resulting social locations

influence knowledge production' (Intemann, 2010, p.785; Wylie, 2003). Whilst reflecting on my experiences as a parent with an autistic child who does research with men who also have autistic children has been a key part of this process, my second point of reflection comes when Peggy McIntosh invites me to check on my white privilege which she states 'is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks' (1989, n.p.). In re,ation to this point, Tyler observes 'that "the student" has emerged as the most clearly definable "opposite" of the chav' (2008, p.31). This has not always been my experience as a 'chav' working-class student. Maybe it is harder to acknowledge your privilege when you have been called a 'Scouse cunt'.

However, my educational and academic capital does offer me privilege in many ways. I have been extremely fortunate in obtaining a university education, although the social and cultural capital that is supposed to flow because of my achievements is still somewhat lacking (Bourdieu, 1984). Nevertheless, like other working-class feminist academics, I often feel a sense of separation between my academic self and my working-class self, as D'enbeau at al. note, 'class distinctions have a profound impact on the ability and willingness of people to connect. Indeed, even when the ability to connect across class is available, the willingness to connect can be affected by defensive attitudes, resentments, and distrust' (2010, p,716) and most 'academic training makes available the sense form and modality of an experience of the social that is the exact opposite of the relation to the social inscribed in the position of being unemployed, or of being a labourer or taxi driver' (Charlesworth, 2000, p. 72, Wilson, Reay, Morrin and Abrahams, 2021). This distrust and inability to connect, as D'enbeau et al. describe it, is especially significant in a research context; as Barker explains, there are few 'concepts, ideas, and categories that fit the everyday lives of working-class people [and] we are left with concepts developed to fit the lives of class-privileged people and then applied to working-class people' (1996, p. 111). However, John Law suggests that:

> if we want to think about the messes of reality at all then we're going to
> have to teach ourselves to think, to practise, to relate, and to know in new
> ways. We will need to teach ourselves to know some of the realities of the
> world using methods unusual to or unknown in social science. …knowing
> would become possible through techniques of deliberate imprecision.
> Perhaps we will need to rethink how far whatever it is that we know travels
> and whether it still makes sense in other locations, and if so how. This

would be knowing as situated inquiry. Almost certainly we will need to
think hard about our relations with whatever it is we know and ask how far
the process of knowing it also brings it into being (Law, 2004, pp. 1-2).

In relation to this, Haraway remarks that adopting a standpoint epistemology requires considering the complexities of 'doing' research, stating that 'how to see from below is a problem requiring at least as much skill with bodies and language' (1988, p 594). Therefore, with these words in mind, I believe that working-class feminist researchers, such as myself, might be able to use a class identity to overcome 'epistemic relations of distance' (Charlesworth, 2000, p. 68) which hamper meaningful, situated research with working-class subjects. All those involved in research 'can construe 'other''(Stanley and Wise, 1993, p. 944) and so I might strategically use my positioning, my 'embodiedness', my knowledge about aspects of Liverpool culture and relations, and draw on these practices as class-infused forms of cultural capital to help to avoid this dualism and enhance the research process (Boland, 2008; Huppatz, 2012; Mischi, 2019; Pelzang and Hutchinson; 2018; Reay, 2005).

But what of gender, and gender differences? What position should I adopt as a woman, a feminine subject, conducting feminist research with men? These were matters I did not fully consider until they emerged during and following fieldwork as issues to be dealt with and reflected upon. I explore these complexities in more detail in the sections below, beginning first with an outline of my original research design, and then providing a reflective account of my fieldwork as it progressed, addressing the academic, personal, and professional tensions I experienced doing and writing about feminist research with working-class men who have autistic children.

Original research design
I planned a qualitative project, the purpose of which was to understand fathers' experiences deeply and in detail in contrast to the findings of much previous work on the topic conducted from a positivist, quantitative paradigm (Mc Hugh, 2014). Qualitative research involves in depth analysis and so generally a small sample size is preferable as 'the goal is to the look at a "process" or the "meanings" individuals attribute to their given social situation, not necessarily to make generalizations' (Hesse-Biber 2007, p. 119).Therefore, my aim was to recruit 10 men who lived in the Merseyside area and who identified as working-class fathers

with autistic children, via purposive sampling[1]. Purposive sampling as a strategy in which participants are recruited based on their suitability for the topic of study and the nature of the data they might offer (Bryman, 2004). Purposive sampling intends 'to maximize the range of information collected and to provide most stringent conditions for theory grounding' (Lincoln and Guba, 1982, p 248) and is thought to increase the trustworthiness of naturalistic research findings.

Initially, I felt that 'emancipatory' (or non-threatening) methods such as photo elicitation and narrative interviewing were ideally suited to this, and would be enough to encourage men to participate, particularly as photo-elicitation might be appealing to men as it allows participants to retain an element of control through choosing what to share and discuss and positions participants as experts in their own lives (Barton, 2015; Sopcak, Mayan and Skrypner, 2015). Indeed, Creighton, Brussoni, Oliffe, and Han note that these 'methods afford a number of benefits when doing research with men that can help to overcome some of the identified challenges, which include providing an opportunity to build rapport [and] offering participants greater control in directing the interview process' (2017, p. 1473). Photo elicitation has been widely used in research, for example, by Affleck, Glass and MacDonald, 2013; Harper, 2002; Oliffe and Bottorff, 2007; Pink, 2015; Streng, Rhodes, Ayala, Eng, Arcero and Phipps, 2004; Wang and Burris, 1997). My participants would choose photographs and items meaningful to them, and then use these photographs and objects as props or tools in unstructured interviews.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) define unstructured interviews as interactive conversations between co-participants, with minimal control from the interviewer herself. They suggest that richer data regarding the subjective lived experience of respondents can be obtained via this approach. The informal, conversational nature of informal interviewing might facilitate deeper rapport between participants and interviewer and thus enable the gathering of richer data (Duncombe and Jessop, 2005). In line with Lincoln and Guba's recommendation that 'the naturalist must observe the facts as they normally occur, not as they are contrived in an artificial context' (1982, p. 245) I also planned (and ultimately carried out) much of my fieldwork in participants' homes. I felt that this would not only enable me to gain additional

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[1] See pages 253-254 for details of participants that took part in the study.

insight as to my participants' daily lives, but that this would also facilitate their comfort as research participants (Bashir, 2018; Elwood and Martin, 2000).

All interviews conducted were transcribed verbatim. Data analysis focused on individual transcripts and emerging themes, utilising Clarke's (2003) situational analysis model. This tool of analysis has roots in symbolic interactionism and centres on 'elucidating complexities-the key elements and conditions that characterise the situation of concern in the research project' (Clarke, 2003, p. 554). The goal of situational analysis is 'thick analyses' (Fosket, 2002) paralleling Geertz's (1973) 'thick descriptions' (Clarke, 2003, p. 554). Thick description involves writing detailed accounts, to examine and explain the interactive, dynamic complexities of the situation or event in question, to understand how social position, situations and interactions shape narratives offered. According to Denzin, 'a thick description … does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another' (1989, p. 83). Lincoln and Guba consider that thick description increases the trustworthiness of research findings through 'providing enough information about a context, first, to impart a vicarious experience of it, and second, to facilitate judgments about the extent to which working hypotheses from that context might be transferable to a second and similar context' (1982, p. 248).

Clarke's (2003) approach is useful as it is compatible with a feminist methodology generally in identifying and reflecting on both marginalised and dominant positions held by participants and researchers. Further, there is an analysis of both the said and the unsaid and the influences, material, relational and contextual, which may prevent or facilitate men's engagement in fathering, and men's engagement in the processes of research. In relation to this latter point, Clarke's model is strongly reflexive in acknowledging that the researcher must include an analysis of her own influence on the research process (Lincoln and Guba, 1982; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002).

Reflections on recruitment
Recruitment of the right research participants is an essential aspect of our research and although this a challenge for almost all researchers, few acknowledge this, 'perhaps as a way of protecting both researchers and research interests in the pressure to demonstrate the validity of the results' (Wigfall, Brannen, Mooney and Parutis, 2012, p. 592). Female

researchers have acknowledged the difficulties they had in gaining access to and working with male participants, for example, Easterday et al., (1977), Gurney (1985) and Horne (1997). Horne's (1997) work specifically acknowledges that women might perform an identity that is congruent with participants perceptions of her as a female subject and this might be advantageous for her in developing research relationships and thus eliciting 'better' data. But, as she recounts, this throws up ethical issues for consideration. Matters of coercion, transparency and accountability are considered key to ethical research practice, and feminist research specifically is generally underpinned by ethical principles of social justice and care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1982).

On the other hand, it has been argued that specific strategies and elicitation techniques may be needed by some researchers for the recruitment and engagement of some men to some studies (Barton, 2015; Ives, 2018; Kierans, Robertson and Mair, 2007, Thurnell- Read, 2012; Wigfall et al. 2012). Indeed, failing to recognise and work to tackle resistance to participation can lead to poor quality data, and this is a key point of ethical consideration that underpins this thesis overall (Stanley and Wise, 1993).

It is important to note that 'parents with autistic children' are much in demand as research participants regardless of gender, and 'research fatigue and the associated claim of being over-researched' (Clarke, 2008, p.954) may be a very real barrier to participation. But as I found out, it is notoriously difficult to reach and recruit *fathers* of autistic children as research participants. Other studies indicate the same problem, for example, Cameron and Cooper (2020) recruited four fathers via one author's role as a Learning Disability Nurse. Batchelor, Maguire and Shearn (2020) recruited seven fathers from a 'dads' group' that ran monthly facilitated by the researchers themselves, and four fathers participated in a study by Seymour, Allen, Giallo and Wood (2020) who recruited through autism specific organisations.

My first attempts at recruitment involved approaching the fathers I had previously interviewed, and the dissemination of information about the study to organisations, schools, and support groups[2]. Three of the original five participants from my MA study agreed to participate, but I had a very poor response from the organisations I approached. I recruited

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[22] Examples of these can be found on pages 265 and 266

one father via his daughters' school, but most of the information leaflets and posters which I distributed amongst autism-related services in the North-West of England garnered little response and probably ended up in the bin. Some of the services I approached were particularly obstructive, flatly refusing to disseminate information about the study to service users, claiming that they were 'research fatigued' (Clarke, 2008).

After much persistence on my part, I was eventually invited to attend a couple of family support groups but the response from the predominantly female members varied from disinterest and distain to hostility. They were clearly offended by my interest in men and their frustration is understandable. I was mindful of the paucity of social service provision available to mothers and their children (Cross, 2013). Most of these women had provided care to their children for many years without much recognition or support. In relation to this point, once fieldwork began, the ways in which participants' wives and girlfriends responded to me was somewhat similar. On two occasions, participants' wives entered the interview and sat down with the full intention of participating in the discussion. When this happened, their partners stopped talking as if they were happy to allow 'experts' to take over. The voices of these women are not represented within this thesis, an issue I address in the concluding chapter, but, for now, it is interesting to briefly consider why participants and their partners acted in this way.

Allen and Hawkins have proposed a theory of 'maternal gatekeeping' which they state is marked out by 'mothers' reluctance to relinquish responsibility over family matters by setting rigid standards, external validation of a mothering identity, and differentiated conceptions of family roles' (1999, p.199) and 'gatekeeping' can take place in a research interview as it would anywhere else. Indeed, Hauser (2012) observes that asserting control over information shared about the child is an aspect of gatekeeping behaviour. But what might motivate women to do this, and what does this behaviour say about gender relations in the context of parenting autistic children? And is women's quest for dominance and control the only explanation? Tina Miller suggests that a richer picture of gatekeeping behaviours could be gained from considering 'the interactions between father's and mother's attitudes and behaviours, which constitute forms of gatekeeping, especially in relation to 'standards and responsibilities'' (2018, p.27). Thus, gatekeeping is not always to do with mothers' desire to control men, rather, this behaviour can reflect the societal expectation placed on women to

assume responsibility for the organisation and execution of care, including overseeing the caring responsibilities fathers take up.

Negotiating with gatekeepers

Researchers often depend on gatekeepers who may wield immense power and influence in facilitating or denying access to potential research participants. Mc Areavy and Das state that 'not only do gatekeepers come in different guises, but the way in which researchers evaluate and negotiate with these often very powerful figures is significant in shaping the research' (2013, p.124). During recruitment, I met with three such gatekeepers; John, Andrew, and Michael. Gurney notes that 'an important, but frequently overlooked, issue in qualitative research is how the status characteristics of the researcher affect the process of gaining access to, establishing, and maintaining rapport with respondents or informants in a setting' (1985, p. 42) and the interactions between gatekeepers, potential participants and me are interesting in terms of how this played out.

Andrew was the manager of a local charity providing services to disabled people and their families. I was invited (summoned) to meet with him to discuss my research in more depth, despite having provided extensive written information from the university about the nature of the study, detailing my supervisors contact details, indicating my registration as a PhD candidate, and confirming that I had been through the ethical review process and given the go-ahead to begin my work. On attending, I was subjected to a sort of 'interview', seemingly to assess my suitability as an individual, rather than to find out more about the study itself. I was asked to supply background information about my qualifications, and a DBS certificate was requested. The 'gatekeeper' reassured me of his influence and his intention to pass on my contact details to several individuals who he claimed would be interested in taking part in my research. Some men perform a masculine self by demonstrating their power and capability, and on this occasion, this behaviour was supplemented with sexualizing tactics: the man offered his cheek for me to kiss, and not really knowing what was expected of me, and needing his influence to reach participants, I went ahead and kissed him (Pini, 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). The incident disturbed me, and as a further point of interest, I did not hear from the man in question again, nor did any of his 'contacts' subsequently contact me as potential research participants.

I was then invited to meet with Michael, the manager of a large, autism-specific service. He was extremely supportive, interested, and helpful. However, I was subsequently contacted by the directors of the organisation who wanted to approve any written material prior to inclusion in a thesis or publication and asked me to periodically report back with progress and findings. Broadhead and Rist observe that gatekeeping is a tool of social control which 'influences the research endeavour in a number of ways: by limiting conditions of entry, by defining the problem area of study, by limiting access to data and respondents, by restricting the scope of analysis, and by retaining prerogatives with respect to publication' (1975, p. 325) and I had not expected the organisation to exert this degree of control and influence. I was relieved that I was not approached by any of their service users and cut ties with them soon afterwards.

Broadhead and Rist (1976) also remark that gatekeepers are more likely to be sympathetic to requests for access if they feel they share common values with the researcher and are sympathetic to the project, and, John, my ex-placement supervisor, agreed to pass on my details to three fathers he knew. Emmel et al. suggest 'that participants use their experiences of gatekeepers and those of their limited networks to carefully evaluate risk when making a decision to involve themselves in [a] study' (2007, n.p.) and this seemed to be an important factor for me specifically in term of making initial contact. When these new participants contacted me, they invariably said something like 'John told me to ring you'. John's involvement seemed to buy me degrees of credibility and acceptability with these men that I could not have achieved without his help (McAreavey and Das, 2013).

The presentation of self in everyday research.
Ethnographers state that building relationships with participants is key to successful fieldwork and that 'laying the relational groundwork for future interviews not only enhances their access to study populations, but based on depth, commitment, and trust, these longitudinal associations may lead to research that yields richer portraits of the subjects' (Adler and Adler, 2003, p. 165). It seems to me that full consideration of these issues must begin with recruitment. Indeed, Donna Harding states, 'what one does both enables and limits what one can know' and a researcher may have to 'do the necessary work' (2008, p.194) to gain entry to and gather data about groups and individuals.

Gurney notes that 'an important, but frequently overlooked, issue in qualitative research is how the status characteristics of the researcher affect the process of gaining access to, establishing, and maintaining rapport with respondents or informants in a setting' (1985, p. 42) and Goffman has famously said that we are all 'staging a character' (1959, p. 201) , noting that individuals take greater care in terms of putting on the correct performance where there are important outcomes at stake. A degree of strategic self-presentation is likely to foster success in interpersonal relations and so matters in a research setting as much as anywhere else, although researchers might be slow to discuss this (Arkin and Shepperd, 1990).

Warren (1985) notes that that a 'female' identity can be specifically advantageous in a research setting. Women may be less likely to be considered to occupy positions of power and influence than men and this afforded Warren a cloak of 'invisibility' which allowed her to go about her research undisturbed. Nevertheless, researchers might be cautious in explicitly acknowledging doing identity or gender in their research practice for fear of appearing 'unprofessional' or 'unscientific', although, as Haraway remarks, 'the ideological doctrine …of scientific method [was] cooked up to distract our attention from getting to know the world *effectively'* (1998, p. 577; italics in original) and various other (white, male) academics have remarked that those that seek to gather good stories may need to act as 'coaxers, coaches, and coercers' (Plummer, 1995, p. 21). Of course, Goffman (1964) wrote extensively about the strategies people employ to present themselves as respectable people, including the matter of self- presentation in a research context, a tactic that he used himself in his 1961 research on asylums. Here, Goffman 'posed as a pseudo- employee of the hospital for a year, an assistant to the athletic director, and gathered ethnographic data on selected aspects of patient social life' (Weinstein, 1982, p. 267).

The significance of managing my identity to recruit participants became even more of an issue when it occurred to me that fathers with autistic children are likely to be present in a diverse number of locations unrelated to autism and I began to post information about the study via online sports forums. The phenomenon of identity presentation in online spaces has been widely researched in relation to internet user more generally, for example, by Turkle (1995) and by Poletti and Rak (2014). Generally, online identities are thought to develop because the internet allows individuals the opportunity to experiment with configurations of identity that seem preferable to 'reality'.

The sporting websites on which I posted information about the study seemed to encourage the display of particularly stereotypical masculine subjectivities (Adams, Anderson, and McCormack, 2010) and going online did not eliminate the previous recruitment difficulties I had experienced in any way. Within these online communities as elsewhere 'a woman asking men about gender relations is likely to meet with a high degree of resistance' (Pini, 2005, p. 212) and I was 'booted' from one chat group for not approaching the board moderator for not following the rules and asking for permission before 'posting' on the site (Schmitz and Kazyak, 2016). Therefore, observing or 'lurking' on these websites enabled me to understand that the right kind of identity performance was a necessary part of the recruitment process (Easterday,1977; Horne, 1997). Therefore, when I next posted information about the study on these online spaces, I feigned a little helplessness, spoke in slightly submissive language, suggested naivete regarding the 'rules' of the online communities I entered into, requested 'permission to post' and apologised for 'interrupting' the usually football related discussion. These tactics are referred to by Hermanowicz as 'the practice of playing the innocent' (2004, p.486).

There is, of course, a deeper ethical debate to be had in relation to this, and this is a discussion I will return to. But first I want to continue with the matter of recruitment. Initially, my careful online identity performance proved a fruitful way to establish contact and gain interest and email responses from interested fathers was quite high. However, I was disheartened when most of these respondents asked for a questionnaire to complete. Wigfall et al. (2012) note that some men are uncomfortable taking part in qualitative research. Perhaps the clarity of formal, structured methods undertaken by the scientific, detached, objective interviewer appeals to some men who might also wish to be viewed as scientific, detached and objective rather than as complex, fallible human subjects (Fontana, 2003). But, despite this setback, I was eventually able to arrange some initial meetings with some men to discuss their further involvement with the project.

Meeting Joel

There is a whole body of guidance about how to avoid the 'pitfalls' of research with men (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001) and how to research with men as a woman (Pini, 2005). This guidance generally focuses on the interview itself and presumes men feel intimidated and thus react in ways that seek to re-establish control. Although men's power is a key factor

for consideration in relation to this point, it is not the only issue to think about. What is less acknowledged in the literature is the fear and uncertainty some men feel as fathers, and as working-class research participants and what can be done to 'encourage' them to engage in studies and to speak about things in non-stereotypical ways (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). This really struck me when I met my first 'new' participant, Joel.

Joel had contacted me through John, my ex-placement supervisor. I first met Joel at his home to drop off information and consent forms about the study, and explain a little about photo-elicitation, but upon returning a couple of weeks later to conduct the interview, he explained to me that he did not understand 'the photos thing' and so had no photos to share. Fortunately, by his own admission, Joel 'loved talking' and he engaged in an unstructured interview (incidentally, he used the photos on display in his house to help him). Research has acknowledged the importance of participants' perceptions of their research experiences (Kost et al, 2011). Accordingly, I was cognizant of how Joel's perceptions of me as a 'researcher' might influence his narrative, despite John's influence in assuring him that I was 'ok', and I could not help feeling that some aspects of Joel's narrative reflected familiar constructs about fathers and autism in line with what he thought I wanted to hear, particularly as Joel stated his participation was a result of a perceived 'duty to educate people about autism' (Czarniawska, 2004; Emmel, 2007). So, if more work is needed about 'part of the larger feminist project of creating knowledge with, rather than about, our participants to provide more robust and respectful accounts of their experiences in the world' (Orchard and Dewey, 2016, p. 250) then men's perceptions of female/researchers/ research agendas matter. But how should these issues be responded to, what are the ethical points of deliberation this invokes, and what does this mean for feminist research with men?

Going cyborg: Opening a third space for intersectional research

Although most research guidance would have us believe that a distinction between the researcher and the researched is clear cut, criticism of this artificial distinction is a cornerstone of feminist qualitative research (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993). Further, Ralph Bolton suggests that the ways in which we are expected to behave with participants in a research context 'raises significant and unsettling questions about how [researchers] conceptualise the people they study and how their own views…are shaped by unexamined cultural premises and biases' (1995, p. 106). However, the guidance provided to researchers is rarely enough to help them to make sense of and respond to dilemmas in a research

context, most specifically, how the relationship between researcher and participant should be managed when this becomes messy or complicated (Orchard and Dewey, 2016).

Maybe we should reject 'clean' research and embrace this messiness as a welcome 'side effect' of the pursuit of ambiguous and contextual 'situated knowledge'? (Haraway, 1998). Choo and Ferree ask how intersectionality can be *practiced,* suggesting that 'it might be part of a methodological strategy to consider how a design will denaturalize hegemonic relations, particularly by drawing attention to the unmarked categories where power and privilege cluster' (2010, p. 147). Although these authors do not extrapolate further on how this might be achieved in the contours of fieldwork, they do recognise the significance of 'intersectional relations' (Choo and Ferree, 2010, p. 135) and therefore considering how the unfixable and ambiguous dynamics of identity, positionality, and of gender and class specifically, made my experiences of fieldwork more complex is worthy of methodological attention.

The following points of consideration I offer in relation to this have much in common with Haraway's claim that cyborg writing (and, presumably, cyborg research), 'is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other' (1985, p.311). What I am talking about is using my identity in strategic ways which helped me conduct research with these men. Law notes that researchers can 'shape shift' and work with incoherence to move 'between different realities' (2004, p. 122). Etherington (2016) and Bolton (2015) both observe that there are specific ways we can 'help' people to share their stories. These approaches, which reflect flux and instability (intersectional research practice?) can 'go some way towards troubling and de-stabilizing the power relations inherent within much science and social science research' (Douglas and Carless 2013 p. 57) which I needed to do to gather 'better' data on these fathers than that previously presented. These practices were research tools from which I could step into a 'third space' a context which:

> is often understood as a location for exploring issues of dominance, power, and emancipation. It is a means to imagine new ways of working, new ways of talking and original, transformative ways of relating. It is a post-structural means to contain radical ideas and practice. It makes hybrid forms of culture pre-eminent (Waterhouse, McLaughlin, McLellan, and Morgan, 2009, p.5).

I suggest that stepping into a physical, embodied, symbolic, and discursive 'third space' allowed me to work 'better' with participants to elicit richer information about their lives and experiences. However, doing so requires reflection on the purpose and nature of research ethics, and on feminist politics and research practice.

Third space methods: 'Rapport'

According to Bolton 'elicitation techniques provide alternatives to direct, verbal interview questions and are especially useful when researchers want respondents to talk about controversial topics or ideas, they have little experience discussing' (2015, p. 199). Bolton then goes on to explain that the success of these methods relies on the skills of the interviewer in building rapport with participants. Garbarski, Schaeffer and Dykema state that:

> "rapport" has been used to refer to a range of positive psychological
> features of an interaction -- including a situated sense of connection or
> affiliation between interactional partners, comfort, willingness to disclose
> or share sensitive information, motivation to please, or empathy. Rapport
> could potentially benefit survey participation and response quality by
> increasing respondents' motivation to participate, disclose, or provide
> accurate information (2016, p.1).

In feminist research, rapport is 'created through mutual sharing, minimal power hierarchies, and a feeling of genuine trust between interviewer and interviewee [but] there is a tension here of which feminist researchers and scholars should remain critical, as the idea of good feminist rapport can clash with the necessity of "getting the data"' (Thwaites, 2017, p.1). Therefore, vague references to 'rapport' and reflexive accounts of attempts to share or minimise power imbalances and attempting to facilitate the comfort of research participants does not always address the work researchers must put in with some groups and individuals to engage them in studies. For example, some researchers conducting inquiry of a sensitive and emotional nature must 'manage' or conceal their emotions for the benefit of participants

whose views and opinions might be contradictory to their own[3] (Blee, 1998; Hochschild, 1985; Kelly and Westmarland, 2016; Lalor, Begley and Devane, 2006).

With these comments in mind, the development of 'rapport' between investigator and participants is not always naturally emerging, it may be something that needs to be deliberately worked at or performed (Thwaites, 2017). Researchers are not obliged to 'like' their participants, and vice-versa. Therefore, a more honest description of rapport, I believe, comes from Duncombe and Jessop, who state that building rapport has 'the instrumental purpose of persuading interviewees to provide us with data for our research' (2005, p. 108) to 'call forth a desired response' (Goffman, 1959, p. 13) from participants. From this perspective rapport is a strategic performance used by researchers to 'help' 'to establish a personal connection (however defined) with interviewees' (Blix and Wettergren, 2015; Prior, 2017, p.4) the goal of which is simply to 'induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (Hochschild, 1985, p.7).

Rapport plays an important part in work which attempts to engage individuals from a given culture and should reflect cultural norms (Awad, Patall, Rickley and Riley, 2015). Therefore, I want to start by considering the place of working-class cultural norms in developing rapport and reflect on what the benefits of this might be for my research specifically. For Charlesworth (2000), the positioning of the working-class subject is at the centre of a class-sensitive method. He acknowledges that class is a relational experience that emerges from:

> an experienced structure of being with others that is as fundamental as our relationship to the object-world. Through a variety of relationships, intimate and formal, there emerges a realm of self-understanding and absorbed feeling the conditions of which is life with others, that grounds communal conceptions of things (Charlesworth, 2000, p. 66).

The idea of being 'researched' by someone 'doing a PhD' and the language used to describe research processes and protocols was alien to most of the men I wanted to speak to, as my

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[3] See, for example, Blee's (1998) work with racist activists, and Kelly and Westmarland's (2016) account of conducting qualitative research with violent men

meeting with Joel attests. At this point, I want to make it very clear that the men I subsequently worked with were far from stupid. This is not what I mean at all. Nor were they without degrees of power that emerge from a male gender identity. This was important to consider because as my fieldwork progressed, I observed that whilst most fathers were very vocal about a need for social change in relation to the needs of autistic people, they often did not want to change much about themselves and concerns about women's power and claims to fathers' rights was often at the root of their concerns (Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Jordan, 2020). For these reasons, I did not discuss my background as a social worker, nor was the world 'feminist' spoken during my fieldwork. These ideological and linguistic barriers may have prevented men's full understanding of and engagement with the project (Aaman, 2017; Bourdieu, 1977; Herz, 2017).

On the other hand, the ability of a researcher to 'speak the local language …will determine the credibility of the researcher in the eyes of participants and the data obtained' (Pelzang and Hutchinson, 2018, p.3). Language as a practical activity is a signifier of social position, it is 'a bodily technique ...in which ones' whole relation to the social world…are expressed' (Bourdieu, 1991, p.510). Accents and dialects indicate place of birth but also convey the qualities and cultural norms that come to be associated with coming from that place (Pelzang and Hutchinson, 2018). Further, as Bourdieu (1984) explains, a working-class social position is made visible through a multitude of lifestyle indicators such as talk, hobbies, dress, musical tastes, home furnishings and so on.

Bottero states 'social comfort … comes from associating with 'people like us' (2004, p.995). Therefore, I arranged most first meetings with potential participants in local supermarket cafes rather than in artisan coffee shops or in participants' homes. Beverley Skeggs' observes that 'attacks on snobbery and pretentiousness have long been central to working-class values' (2011, p.506) and our food practices, our tastes, the ways and the places in which in which we choose, eat, drink, share and pay for (or argue about who pays for!) food speak volumes about our cultural and social position. There is nothing very pretentious about eating toast and drinking tea in Tesco's café.

At these meetings, fathers heard me speak, sometimes for the first time as most prior contact was via email. Crossley notes that much of the "doing" of class relations involves talking about music, television, sport, and the like' (2013, p.123) and these first meetings were peppered with

discussions of this nature rather than focusing solely on the research project at hand. Furthermore, when I met with my potential participants, I brought along a set of photographs to help explain what photo-elicitation was. These pictures reflected the everyday, mundane nature of household events such as a half- eaten sausage butty on thick white bread, the telly on in the background, the Moshi Monsters[4] sticker collection, the bathroom covered in wet towels, discarded shampoo bottles, and dumped school uniforms, a ticket from a football game and incidents recalled about going to chippies and pubs. These stories reflected a working-class cultural standpoint and set of associated practices (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Accordingly, these preliminary meetings often went on for far longer than the timetabled interviews and resulted in richer data[5]. Yet, two fathers did not return for follow up interviews arranged, despite willingly trading their stories and experiences of fathering autistic children and showing me photographs of their children on their mobile phones, in conversations that lasted a couple of hours.

Interviewing Ken: 'that'

As Hesse-Biber acknowledges, 'as a feminist interviewer, I am aware of the nature of my relationship to those whom I interview, careful to understand my particular personal and research standpoints and what role I play in the interview process in terms of my power and authority over the interview situation' (2007, p.114). To do this, feminist researchers practice reflexivity which 'keeps the researcher mindful of his or her personal positionality and that of the respondent' (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 117). In developing my ideas here, I have argued that reflexivity must begin at the start of the research enterprise. Nevertheless, key events during my research journey made me 'more' reflexive and alerted me to the need to respond and plan accordingly in order to complete my project successfully. That some men were reluctant to participate in an interview having spent so much time with me and having shared so much personal information with me was such an event.

Initially, I felt that men's lack of commitment could be put down to them using me as an emotional sounding board (Hochschild, 1985). Once I had served my purpose in giving them space to talk, they had no desire to repeat the experience. But I felt there was more to it than

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[4] 'Moshi Monsters is an online social game popular with 6–12-year-olds that allows children to choose, customise and nurture a pet monster. Children can play games, solve puzzles and explore Monstro City with their pet' ([Moshi Monsters | Safer Internet Centre](#), accessed 15/7/21)

[5] I kept detailed fieldnotes on these meetings and obtained consent from all participants.

that, as when I first began to interview those men that agreed to participate, fathers often behaved very differently to the way they behaved in these earlier 'chats.' On one such occasion, I recall that Ken, Ben's dad, froze and was unable to mutter more than a few words. When I asked what the issue was, he gestured towards the Dictaphone and said '*that*'.

Narayan (1993) has noted the ways in which a professional identity can create problems in fieldwork, making distinct differences between researchers and participants. Moreover, England notes that 'reflexivity can make us more aware of asymmetrical or exploitative relationships, but it cannot remove them' and she goes on to suggest 'that we approach the unequal power relations in the research encounter by exposing the partiality of our perspective' (1994, p. 250). I was clear about the partiality of my perspective, but my experience with Ken indicated that the issue of how I was to 'get' the data I wanted remained an issue to be dealt with.

The embodied female researcher

Whilst I have written at length about place that doing class played in my research practice, there remains something of a gap in terms of addressing the matter of gender, an issue I turn to now. Of course, much has been written about how gender differences might shape the research process. Kaufmann (2000) argues that the relationships between masculinity and power can create difficulties in research when a masculine identity is questioned, which is, arguably, more profoundly experienced in cross-gender research. Men might seek to exert control during interview (Pini, 2005). Men might attempt to manage their emotions and present a self which reflects stereotypes of masculinity (Vaccaro, Shrock and McCabe, 2011). Further, many female researchers reflect how unwanted sexual interest from research participants leave them 'having to manage the boundaries of intimacy and cope with feelings of embarrassment and respect' (Kaspar and Landolt, 2016, p. 107).

Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) offer a guide to women who research with men, advising formal dress and behaviours to convey professionalism and deter unwanted sexual attention. This advice did not sit well with me or work in practice. Indeed, following my difficulties with recruitment, with dropouts, and with Ken's fear of the Dictaphone, I felt that the transition from me as 'the nice woman in the café' to me as academic was the key problem. This further revealed the contextual instability of identity, of gender relations, and how men's

concerns about being scrutinised, or found wanting by an 'expert/ woman' might hamper the project (Herz, 2017, Robertson, 2996; Rose, 1985; Whitehead, 2002).

As I have explained, the research contexts where bodies 'meet' shape relationships, understandings and knowledge shared and participant- researcher interactions will support (or not) the research process (Blee,1998; Hulme, Cracknell and Owens, 2009). Koro-Ljungberg notes that 'qualitative researchers have the chance to constitute themselves through resistance, to reflexively analyse their own practices of subjectification, and to truly consider what kind of moral and ethical research they desire to conduct and how they can be critical of normalization by differently constructing themselves and their roles' (2007, p. 1092).This resistance might require constituting oneself differently, as a gendered person, for example, through reflecting on and re-constructing those aspects of identity or research practice that are the 'problem' or issue. Much of what I have already discussed in this chapter reflects my awareness of these dynamics and my attempts to address this problem through the discursive and symbolic nature of fieldwork relations.

However, qualitative research is not merely discursive and symbolic. Stanley and Wise argue 'the necessity of 'taking the body seriously' and to 'think and write of the body as not merely a linguistic creation but as also having a physical, material and consequential reality' (1993, p. 197) and Haraway advocates that 'we need to learn in our bodies, endowed with primate colour and stereoscopic vision, how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and where we are not' (1989, p. 582). She also posits that she 'would like to insist on the embodied nature of all vision and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere' (1998, p. 581) and I agree with these authors here. Embodiment plays a part within qualitative research in 'sensing' the unspoken aspects of research, and as a means to develop relationships with those people we want to know about (Chadwick, 2017; Lockford, 2004; Sheets-Johnstone, 2018; 2019). I suggest that by developing 'an embodied knowing strategy…an individual might creatively adapt personal beliefs and behaviours in order to resolve the tensions inherent in living in a Western context' (Barbour, 2004, p. 235). Yet, reconstructing a researcher identity which may include embodied elements is rarely discussed (Bolton, 1995). This seems a somewhat taboo suggestion; as Barad has stated 'when touch is at issue, nearly everyone's hair stands on end' (2012, p. 206).

It is interesting that Hermanowicz (2004) uses a dating metaphor in describing the processes of preparation for fieldwork. He likens the processes of thinking through engaging with participants as like entering into a romantic relationship, stating 'this is a person you want to get to know, so much in fact that you have prepared in advance both how you will go about handling yourself and the fanciful encounter that awaits you' (Hermanowicz 2004, p.482). Yet, the increasingly risk-averse nature of research policy reveals the ways that gendered bodies specifically are disciplined in an academic context (Young, 1990). I agree with Karen Barad who states the "the "problem" of self-touching, especially self-touching the other, is a perversity of quantum field theory that goes far deeper than we can touch on here. The gist of it: this perversity that is at the root of an unwanted infinity, that threatens the very possibility of calculability, gets "renormalized" (2012, p213).

From Barad's perspective, the (female?) researching body is dangerous, it requires managing or even eliminating; the rational, scientific researcher is, of course, male (Rudberg, 1997). But this disciplining of gendered bodies does not seem to be consistently imposed on men and women. For example, Thurnell- Read (2011) reflects on how his own performance of a masculine identity enabled him to gain rich data in his research with men on stag tours. He states that 'vital to the process of gaining an ethnographic insight into the highly gendered leisure spaces of the stag tourism phenomenon was a willingness to centre sensory, emotional and embodied data in the research process' (Thurnell- Read, 2011, p. 39).

But Luce Irigaray (1985) invites us to 'think beyond the andocentric, one-subject culture. [She] identifies points of strategic intervention for feminists who want a world more conducive to the flourishing of subjects other than the masculine' (Khader, 2011, p.1). Irigaray notes that the "feminine" is always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value' (1985, p.69). Irigaray's goal is to reposition women and femininity away from this deficit position and her work emphasizes the multiple nature of feminine styles. Thus, 'women' and 'femininity' are 'not an independent representation of the real world understood by an already constituted subject, but part of a system that produces meaning, the world and the possibility of a subject. If identity is a construction and not an absolute fixed reality, then this opens up immense scope for feminist thinking' (Pinggong, 2018, p.252). Irigaray's work affirms that women can strategically perform their own feminine identities, and this is a feminist practice.

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But what might 'doing' embodied femininity bring to research? Although Rudberg suggests that women 'can play out their own bodily otherness' (1997, p. 196) the result of which might be 'less boring and more pleasurable research' (1997, p. 198) what happens when we throw class into the mix with this? As Tyler (2008) describes, working-class female bodies are regulated through discourses of disgust and shame; the 'chavvy' working-class female researching body troubles both class and gender, she is the exact opposite of the impartial, objective, middle -class male academic. Yet, it is my assertion that these bodies can be used strategically as methodological tools and embodied ways of knowing and finding out can help to overcome the dualism between mind/ body, male/ female, us/ them that many feminists have critiqued as illusory (Bolton, 1995; Cupples, 2002; Haraway, 1998).

How did I do this? I touched most of my participants, and they touched me: a hand on the arm, a slap on the back, a hug. I sat closely with them looking at photographs and listening to stories, drinking tea, our legs sometimes touching on the settee. Co-presence and proximity can involve touch, and touch can be an important means to convey trust and break down stereotypes between groups (Simmel, 1908[1950]; Urry, 2002). Further, Sheets-Johnstone (2018) has suggested that humans experience each other through sensations of movement. These kinesthetic experiences enable individuals to develop a sense of self and sense of the other to affect how we behave in relation in a social encounter. A further point that Sheets-Johnstone (2019) makes is that kinesthesia specifically relates to the matter of agency. The ability to move around people and the dis/comfort we might feel reflects ones' position in the world and ones' beliefs about those we move with and around, and vice-versa. To illustrate, when conversations then turned to the intimate, for example, when men tentatively discussed their sons' sexual development, I never flinched. I took it all in my stride despite sometimes feeling uncomfortable. Had I expressed this discomfort by shuffling away or changing the subject, such a response would likely have affected participants, causing them to close down the discussion (Thanem and Knights, 2012).

I flirted with my participants, both before and during interview. Some accounts of flirting reflect the idea that women only hold subjugated positions in relation to men (Guerney, 1985). This is not always so. Here, I bring class and culture into focus; indeed, Williams states that different classes 'are quite distinctly committed to different and alternative

versions of the nature and purposes of society, and consequently to different versions of human relationship' (1975, p.31) and for many working-class people, flirting is an aspect of the banter and piss-taking which plays a role in their daily interactions (Butler, 2007; Skeggs 2011). Accordingly, my 'flirting' did not indicate sexual attraction or availability but comments about being late, for example, turned into banter about being 'stood up' on a blind date (Jenkins, 2006)

Zijderveld (1983) observes that using humour in a research setting implies a lack of professionalism or academic rigour. I'm not sure that is a bad thing, indeed, given that Adler and Adler note that 'humour, ribaldry and self-depreciation' (2003, p. 167) might be key to a successful interview, then such behaviour which serves to 'reflect a shared ethos that places value on ''not taking yourself too seriously''' (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012 p.1112) might be highly appropriate in such circumstances. Indeed, I was never intimidated or treated badly by any of my participants (unlike the service manager who asked me to kiss him in the office where he worked with disabled people and their families). On the contrary, my participants were warm, welcoming, and good company, as my data attests.

'You can't write this!'

At this early stage in my project, I submitted a manuscript to an academic journal for review. Sketchily entitled 'Confessions of a Failed Feminist? Performing Strategic femininity in Research with Men' this reflective essay discussed my experiences of fieldwork thus far, and the strategies I had drawn upon. I received the following feedback:

> This paper provides an interesting reflexive insight into the author's experience of researching men while being cognisant of her identity. However, there are serious ethical and professional issues evident throughout, which are of great cause for concern. This work, if anything, sets women researchers back in trying to be taken seriously both in and out of the field. It is most definitely not feminist.

I subsequently shared this feedback with a (male) colleague who quick to advise me that 'you can't write this!' and as my pursuit of such ideas was akin to academic suicide and a failed PhD so I should desist with such writing immediately. Such criticisms (which terrified me at

the time) reveal that 'the spaces within which, and from which we speak and write, are imbued with relations of power/knowledge' and also that 'we, the intellectuals, are privileged and not without complicity in a variety of oppressive structures and relations' (Routledge, 1996, p. 402).

Jones and Pitman state that any 'theory of strategic self-presentation must be anchored in identifiable social motives' (1982, p.235) thus such actions must be justified. Aside from the ethical debates this throws up (which I will return to) the notion of identity performance seems to contradict the idea that feminist research practice and processes must be reflective of a certain political and professional stance to carry true academic weight (Grossberg, 1996). This further reflects the idea that 'unless you attend to certain more or less determinate phenomena (class, gender or ethnicity would be examples), then your work has no political relevance (Law 2004, p.11). But what of intersectional research which emphasizes the experiences of those who are positioned within a 'matrix' of identity categories, and where 'determinate phenomena' as Law (2004) puts is, cannot and perhaps should not be identified (Collins, 1991).

Furthermore, Spivak (1986), Bhaba (1984), Irigary (1985) and Haraway (1991) to name but four feminist theorists, all seem to suggest that that female bodies can be powerful tools which can be used to subvert gender and gain entry to contexts they would ordinarily be prevented from entering. They are a means for women to craft synthesised identities which play with ideas about how women should behave. Spivak's and Bhaba's works are rooted in post-colonial studies and thus reflect the authors' concerns about gender and race. A significant point made by Spivak in her infamous essay *Can the Subaltern Speak* is that 'a substantive concern for the politics of the oppressed…can hide a privileging of the intellectual and of the 'concrete' subject of oppression that, in fact, compounds the appeal' (1988, p.87). And Haraway seems to agree when she suggests that 'the imagined 'they' constitute a kind of invisible conspiracy masculinist scientists and philosophers, replete with grants and laboratories. The imagined 'we' are the embodied others, who are not allowed *not* to have a body' (1988, p. 575, italics in original) but are not allowed to 'use' it, nevertheless. Perhaps this is why most accounts of women's bodies in research continue to reflect socially and academically sanctioned performances of white, middle-class femininity (Thanem and Knights, 2012). Was Thurnell- Read (2012) asked to discuss the ethics and politics of his masculine research practice? I don't know.

Nevertheless, Law remarks that 'the problem is not so much the standard research methods themselves, but the normativities that are attached to them. [Therefore, we are caught] in a set of constraining normative blinkers. We are being told how we must see and what we must do' (2004, p.4-5). I believe the criticisms aimed at me are rooted in a somewhat outdated understanding of gender, and of men's power which fail to consider the barriers to engaging some research participants (Seidler, 2006). Unless we explore ways to overcome these barriers, we are in limbo. There is little to be gained methodologically or empirically.

Nevertheless, in what follows, I take as my starting point Louise Alcoff's remark that 'it is both morally and politically objectionable to structure one's actions around the desire to avoid criticism, especially if this outweighs other questions of effectivity' (1991, p.22). I do this to claim the validity and robustness of my research in the light of my awareness that white working-class women must seek to defend their research practices and their moral subjectivity and integrity as feminist academics in ways that middle-class women or men might not.

Some thoughts on ethics

Qualitative research is ethically complex as it requires negotiating dilemmas that arise during the research process. Feminist research with men is also ethically complex in holding onto its feminist goals (Dowd, 2010). These dilemmas are both personal and professional and extend far beyond the ethical formalities that review boards demand (Abbott, 2019; Reid, Brown, Smith, Cope, and Jamieson, 2018). Positionality, occupying intersectional roles of insider/ outsider, for example, gives rise to difficulties in managing ethical dilemmas (Narayan, 1993). Judgements made about what is permissible in a research context are gendered and classed (Barbour, 2004). Therefore, as Gilligan (2003) and Spicker (2011) state, demands for masculinist objective rationality cannot provide a good enough framework for responding to moral and ethical dilemmas in fieldwork, and Lugosi (2006) and Calvey (2008) suggest that it is impossible to apply narrowly prescribed ethical procedures to all research. Thus, ethics is more than a matter of 'finding a neat definition of the "morally right"' (Chappell, 2013, p.152) and, as I have argued, it is the unfolding nature and context of the study, and the relationships between participants and researcher and the nature of fieldwork as it unfolds which should determine how ethics are put into practice (Spicker, 2011).

Research considered deceptive is generally considered inappropriate as it transgresses a core ethical value that participation in research should be undergirded by informed consent. This way of framing deception is informed by the conventions and processes of scientific research (Holman, 2013). But feminist approaches to ethics have at their heart the notion that identity and gender are social constructions and are 'done' or performed (Butler, 1990; Goffman, 1959) and a reflexive approach to ethics steps away from the idealized and rational subject and takes into consideration how individuals are situated as individuals and within specific social groups and how their positioning in a web of relationships with others affects the ethical decisions they make (Lindemann, 2019). This fluidity makes unstable researcher and participant identity, which in turn makes unstable and fuzzy matters of research relations, and the ways in which deception and manipulation are conceptualised and deployed. Further, if research conducted drawing on a feminist ethical paradigm aims to reclaim subjugated knowledge, distort incorrect representations of gender, and illuminate the social orders that maintain them, then as my literature review indicates, research methods and practices in the field reflect and create social reality, and the presentation of such research findings can have profound ethical consequences (Lindemann, 2019; Law, 2004; Stanley and Wise, 1993).

In relation to these points, I believe the absence of accounts of what working-class fathers do is an ethical/ methodological issue. Therefore, the ways in which we plan and carry out our research with men are as important as the men who participate in our research project (Meth and Mc Clymont, 2009). A working-class female researcher's motivations for carrying out a study, her identity, her personal biography, and her place within the social world all shape her values and her relationship with participants. Her way of conducting herself in the field matters, influencing how participants respond, the stories they are willing to share, and how data is analysed and interpreted (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Goffman, 1959; Stanley and Wise, 1993). This is important to consider because sensitivity to cultures of masculinity or fatherhood or class matter as much in a white, western context as they do anywhere else and should influence research practice accordingly (Seidler, 2005).

For example, Sennett and Cobb discuss (1972) the effects of the "hidden injuries of class" and "the feeling of vulnerability in contrasting oneself to others at a higher social level, the buried sense of inadequacy that one resents oneself for feeling' (1972, p. 58). Working-class fathers more specifically might face additional challenges to engaging in research with women that I have already discussed. Ideologies of working-class deficiencies often

underpinned by methodological short-sightedness have been used by middle-class theorists to sustain class and gender domination both in family policy and in a research setting. For example, the middle -class new man and the new father have been valorised despite there being little evidence in relation to their 'newness' (Braun, Vincent, and Ball, 2010; Gregory and Milner, 2011; Vuori, 2009).

In explaining the difficulties faced in recruiting fathers to take part in his own research, Jonathan Ives suggests that 'that any strategy to motivate men to take part in research must be multifaceted and/or directed to the kind of father needed' (2018, p. 9). I agree, but intersectionality complicates the idea that a 'kind' of man can be identified. Nevertheless, the approach I describe changed the dynamics of my relationships with participants, helped me to explain what my research was about, helped me recruit the fathers I needed and helped me to develop methods to capture the data I wanted which, I believe, is a more reflective and ethical representation of these men's lives.

However, I am conscious of the criticisms I am likely to face in staking my claim for knowledge. Patricia Hill-Collins observes that 'Black women are not the only outsiders within sociology[but] Black women's experiences highlight the tension experienced by any group of less powerful outsiders encountering the paradigmatic thought of a more powerful insider community' (1986, p.529) and Goffman states 'perhaps the most spectacularly discrepant roles are those which ring a person into a social establishment in a false guise' (1959, p.145). Maybe as a working-class woman I occupy that discrepant, outsider, stigmatized role? But maybe this brings me degrees of privilege also, affording me access to groups and experiences that others might be denied (Broomes, 2020). I am reminded of the famous quote by Audre Lorde who states:

> those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of
> acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of
> difference -- those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black,
> who are older -- know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning
> how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools
> will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to
> beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about
> genuine change (Lorde, 1984, p.111).

Accordingly, in writing this chapter, I have become aware that what is significant is the matter of who defines what is 'proper' research and, correspondingly, who can make a valid claim for knowledge (Wilson, Reay, Morrin and Abrahams, 2021). Working-class women's ways of knowing and the research they produce may be dismissed on the grounds that it does not fit with how 'proper' research should be done (Luttrell, 1989) and working-class female academics experience a 'constant process of institutional and social misrecognition' (Skeggs, 2010, p.33) which extends to examining their 'conduct' during research. This has a deeply moral and gendered dynamic. Academia is laden with classist, racist and sexist values and in order that working-class female researchers specifically have their knowledge taken seriously, they must display they conformity with sexist and 'classist conceptions of knowledge' (Barker, 1996, p.114) through meeting with the relevant criteria which constitutes their compliance with the correct academic and gendered standards (Law, 2004). Another way of putting it reflects my opening points of concern: which Toms Dicks and Harrys (or Joannes) get to be heard, and which do not.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that 'standpoint projects do not start off from conceptual frameworks of research disciplines, which have become servants to the dominant social institutions' (Harding, 2009, p. 184) and the tools I use to 'see' stand in contrast to 'mainstream sociology [which] flows from the standpoint of privileged men' (Sprague and Kobrynowicz 2006, p. 29) which do not serve the needs of women in academia nor my participants as research subjects. I have suggested a need for methods and practices which reflect the fluid and intersectional nature of 'subjectivity, representations and power' (Routledge, 1996, p. 399) which are also reflective of modern-day masculinities and femininities (Whitehead, 2002).

Nevertheless, as a result of this, I have come to understand that the 'living' of this PhD thesis and its 'intellectual production is a constant negotiation or compromise between the impulse to be 'self' expressive and the need to communicate meaningfully within a common discourse that has acquired some objective standing' (Robbins, 2007, p. 145) necessary to meet the constitutive requirements of the social establishment that is the university. The questioning of my practice (and presence) in these spaces shows how power functions through gender and class in research and enables me to acknowledge what underpins the idea

that I am (un)deserving of my place in the academic social order (Day, Gough, and Mc Fadden, 2003; Skeggs, 1997).

Dowd states that 'because the relative position of women in general and men in general may be different, the nature of the issues and the analysis is not parallel, and gender specificity may be necessary to achieve gender equality' (2010, p. 419) and my methodological approach to research with men, supported by the data chapters which follow, reflects this complex dynamic. But I also recognise the credibility afforded to certain research practices and knowledge claims made from specific standpoints are political. In sum, 'the subtle and not-so-subtle forms of institutional power' (Ahmed, 2012, p.13) which secure a *befitting* feminist academic identity are affirmed through my engagement with those dominant structures and institutions which lie at the root of my own oppression as a working-class woman. Nevertheless, I foreground the idea that the research methods and practices I developed as a white, working -class woman opened a third space and 'a context of cultural understanding' (Baugh and Lisa, 2006, p.1) which I believe is conducive to carrying out more equitable, socially responsible research with working-class fathers who have autistic children.

Chapter 4
AGE

Introduction

According to Spector -Mersel (2006) there is a lack of research which reflects the overlap between gender and ageing. Therefore, in this chapter, I use age as a means to provide an initial introduction to these fathers, their children and families, and as a lens to view how men's practices as paternal masculine subjects are shaped not just by autism, but also according to the age, class, gender, and life stage of the child, the father himself and his other family members (Bruner, 1991; Elliott, Parsons, Brannen, Elliott & Phoenix, 2018; Harrison, 2008; Hutchison, 2010; Kilvington-Dowd and Robertson, 2020; Mc Adams and Mc Lean, 2013; Moen, 2001; Morgan, 1996, 2011; Robinson, 2014).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim claim that great societal shifts have weakened the significance of the family as we knew it, and 'the logic of individually designed lives has come increasingly to the fore in the contemporary world. The family is becoming more of an elective relationship, an association of individual persons, who each bring to it their own interests, experiences, and plans' (2002, p. 97; Giddens, 1991). In relation to this claim, Goodley, Liddiard and Runswick- Cole have suggested that disability can blur the 'typical, common sense normative human categories of adult, child, youth and family' (2015, p.4). However, my data does not wholly support these theoretical assertions.

Fries Rader states that 'age has become a master status, determining what major life activities one will be allowed or forced to participate in' (1979, p. 644). Of course, Aries (1962) recognises that contemporary ideologies of children and childhood are socially constructed ideas. Childhood is a time during which 'developmental crises' such as autism can be identified (Fries Rader, 1979, p.646). Relatedly, Nikolas Rose (1985; 2013) explains how the evolution of psychology has enabled the emergence of new methods and strategies which subsequently govern the personal lives of families with families with autistic children through 'techniques of social administration' (1985, p.7). Following diagnosis, such techniques encompass professional care but extend to the care provided by the 'natural family' (Rose, 1985 p. 185). Here, these systems connect forming a system within which children and families are regulated.

In this chapter, I offer a gendered analysis of the 'powers of the psy domain' (Rose and Miller, 2008, p.10) and discuss the effects on fathers with autistic children across the life course. I will discuss how the social construction of age and of the life course function as systems which overlap with disability to define specific age-and gender-appropriate identities and practices by the parents of autistic people specifically (Barrett, 2005; Elder, 1975, 2001; Laz, 2003; Moen, 2001; Pickard, 2016; Smart, 2007).

Barrett (2005) suggests that the life course of the family is structured around the life course of the mother. Parents are subject to a gendered disciplinary gaze (Foucault, 1977;1981; King, 2004; Rose, 1985) should they attempt to breach the temporally specific social role expected of them and, accordingly, the men in my study experienced uncertainty about what they should 'do' as paternal masculine subjects. However, I show that these men experienced age-specific masculine / paternal subjectivity as variously problematic and advantageous. Whilst they are vocal about their exclusion, at other times they are compliant in opting out of some aspects of parenting because of age, or they foreground as necessary a gender-specific involvement in care at some stages of the life course. Age is therefore significant as 'a means to understand the advantages and disadvantages that follow gender throughout the life course, as well as the gendered nature of power and domination' (Conway, 2018; Finch, 1989, 2007; Hooyman, Browne, Ray, and Richardson, 2002, p.5) in terms of understanding fathers' engagement with autistic children specifically.

Diagnosis: 'Dads just plod on'

Studies which explore parental reactions to the diagnosis of autism have tended to use Kubler-Ross' (1974) model of death and dying, suggesting parents initially 'lose' and grieve for the child they had imagined. In this chapter, I want to take a different approach in which I examine the overlap between gender, disability, parenting, and age that emerges as fathers reflect on the diagnostic experience.

Writing in 1985, Rose states that diagnosis involves identification of 'the mental defective' (p.93). More contemporary terminology found in the DSM (Diagnostic Statistical Manual) refers instead to diagnostic categories and 'disorders of the brain' (Rose, 1985, p. 6). Regardless of terminology, diagnosis is not just a clinical matter. Diagnosis comes to constitute people's 'social, economic, [and] political reality, held in place by many social practices' (Rose and Abi-Rached, 1998; Rose, 1985, p.4). In relation to this point, the

processes of diagnosis and the social practices that stem from this experience function to govern the parents of children diagnosed with autism, but this is a deeply gendered matter. Indeed, Rose acknowledges that following diagnosis, 'the occasion and objective of intervention was the child, but the instrument was the mother' (1985, p. 148) and this process has been the focus of much research interest.

Furthermore, 'diagnosis enables a story to be created about it – what has led to it, what it is, how it will be treated, what the outcome might be, how it can be spoken about with family, friends, employers, and others' (Rose, 1985, p. 3). Indeed, most fathers in my study drew on age categories when discussing their involvement with their children, beginning when they were young, before or near the time of getting an autism diagnosis, and bringing stories up to the present day. In that respect, a chronological 'life story' approach is useful at this point in terms of structuring the accounts I draw on in this chapter. However, there is a gap in research which examines the social practices of the child's father which also recognises that the time around diagnosis is laden with assumptions about age, disability, gender, childhood, and, relatedly, appropriate parenting roles (Barrett, 2005; Elder, 1975). Therefore, for my purposes, diagnosis is a means to bring fathers' awareness of gendered and age-specific parenting responsibilities into focus

All the fathers who took part in my study found the experience of diagnosis to be an unexpected 'rupture' to an imagined future, requiring men to reflect on and redefine themselves beyond any 'idea of being a father' (Whitehead, 2002, p. 154) or a masculine subject they may previously have experienced or considered. The power of experiencing the diagnostic process was such that most of the fathers began their interviews by reflecting about these clearly frightening and upsetting experiences, as Nigel (white, married, 40's) explains below:

> This doctor, she didn't half scare us, she said [Sean] mightn't walk or talk,
> all that, it was terribly upsetting, I was crying and all that. I was there with
> my mum but [partner] had gone to get [older son] and when she came in
> and just told us it was terrible, we were sobbing. We had to tell her then, so
> when he was walking at a normal time we were made up. He's 10 now
> there doesn't look like he's got it anything wrong with him, there's no
> visible signs.

As the extract suggests, the process of diagnosis was emotionally difficult for most fathers as they saw their child pathologized, with investigations and therapeutic interventions to follow. Nigel's words also indicate an expectation that he would not challenge medical opinion, and there were few opportunities presented to him to question the problematic ontological status of disability or autism (Kuch, 2011; Kumari Campbell, 2015; Milton, 2012).

A consistent theme in the research and in my data is the responsibility placed on mothers for the care of disabled children, and these demands correlate with the age of the child and the nature of the child's impairment. Younger children with intellectual disabilities such as autism remain very much tied to their mothers (Brust, Leonard and Sielaff, 2007) and the differential positioning of men and women as carers of autistic children specifically, and the responsibilities imposed on them seemed to flow from this starting point (Rose, 1985). Indeed, this experience was not unlike the birth of a new baby, a 'tremendously powerful, and yet incredulously short, period of the life course where gender magnification is in full play' (Doucet, 2009, p.93) as the next extract from Tom (white, married, 40's) indicates:

> Just after Lucas was diagnosed, someone was in our house, speaking to my wife, saying, 'there's help out there' and my wife said, 'but I feel sorry for Tom, because he gets all this and then has to go to work'. But the nurse just went 'yeah' and ignored me, and my wife again said, 'Tom needs some support he's struggling' and again she just ignored me. I don't know whether to feel angry or to just accept it. Mums' opinions matter, 'we will look after you'. Dads just plod on. You just have to get on with it. It really, really bothers me.

According to Rose, the 'natural family' (1985, p. 185) is a social apparatus, the role of which is to provide the appropriate care of 'feeble-minded' or 'mentally defective' children under the watchful gaze of formal agencies such as doctors, social workers, and education professionals. Burkitt explains that 'the micro-social power politics of becoming self is linked …to a macro-power politics in which selves are created through discipline and knowledge in various institutional sites' (2008, p. 90). In this respect, fathers like Tom were sensitive to the ways in which parental identities were created and disciplined via the institutions that diagnosed and 'treated' autism, and provided familial support, and these fathers specifically remained valued insofar as they met with 'conventional notions of the

masculine' (Robertson, 2006; Wetherell and Edley, 1999, p.335). Messages conveyed these fathers did not extend far beyond traditional notions of their obligations as wage earners (Barrett, 2005; Morgan, 1996) and Tom's emotional and support needs as a masculine subject are considered somewhat irrelevant in comparison to those of his wife (Collinson and Hearn, 2001; Latshaw, 2011).

Tom's words indicate sensitivity to a gender disparity in terms of maternal and paternal responsibilities, knowledge, expectations, and needs. The extract suggests that his wife's participation 'in the fight against autism, and toward normative versions of the human and well-being' (Douglas, 2013, p.174; Goodley and Runswick- Cole, 2011, p.71) is essential, although his is not. Thus, diagnosis was a challenge to his paternal masculine subjectivity.

Several other participants seemed share this sense of irrelevance as fathers and felt they were expected to manage their emotions alone in ways that women were not. But this was a difficult and frightening experience for Tom, as he explains:

> You just feel 'I am scared, and I don't matter then'. It's not [wife] or the
> kids. I start thinking 'I don't know what I'm doing'. But the kids give me
> confirmation, from the kids, not society, the kids are happy, but other
> people's attitudes… [tails off].

These experiences of being ignored or dismissed common to many the fathers seemed to invoke feelings of ontological insecurity (Giddens, 1991; Whitehead, 2002; Thompson, 1997). Laing, (1990 [1959]) describes the experience of ontological insecurity as feeling:

> precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity
> and autonomy are always in question. He may lack the experience of his
> own temporal continuity. He may not possess an over-riding sense of
> personal consistency or cohesiveness. He may feel more insubstantial than
> substantial, and unable to assume that the stuff he is made of is genuine,
> good, valuable (Laing, 1990 [1959] p.42).

Ontological insecurity and feelings of exclusion and 'not mattering' can lead to paternal disengagement if the ontologically insecure individual has a weak conceptualisation of his

sense of self and what is required of him (Giddens, 1991). Feelings of alienation and inadequacy were commonly reported by several fathers as mothers become the centre of attention. However, it is important to bear in mind that ontological insecurity can result from the denial of male privilege and men's frustration might be an expression of a wish to be acknowledged rather than be 'helped' in any way (Pease, 2012; Robinson and Hockey, 2011). Further, some men might seek to construct themselves as valuable subjects in strongly masculinist terms to counteract their comparatively unimportant positioning as men and fathers.

With these remarks in mind, my data suggests that to reposition themselves as valuable and necessary, these fathers draw on 'age categories and distinctions…proposed or accepted as common knowledge without evidence of their meaning to the individuals involved' (Elder, 1975, p.173). Gender and age stereotypes can function to dispel insecurity through providing a sense of the familiar from which fathers can reflect on their situations. They are tools with which fathers can constitute degrees of continuity and stability when this is challenged and undermined (Giddens, 1991). In doing so, fathers infer that some time or age specific practices, behaviours, and knowledges specific to men are important and necessary. Furthermore, fathers consider these age-specific and gender -specific practices are important at key times in their child or children's lives, which provides fathers with a sense of temporal security when the necessity of their engagement in parenting is questioned. In examining this in more detail, the next set of extracts discuss the experience of parenting an autistic child from the perspective of the three single fathers who took part in the study.

Single fathers

According to Rose, the 'natural family' is the preferred context for the successful rearing of children, whilst also being a site for the enforcement of 'new doctrines of motherhood' (1985 p. 149). Given these presumptions, it is unsurprising that Soulsby and Bennet describe marriage as 'an anchor for identity' (2015, p.20) and notion of family as 'the lynchpin of social cohesion, civilisation and order, and as a structure embodying the moral health of society' (Gillies, 2005, p.4). Accordingly, Smart and Neale (1999) note that parents must carve out new maternal and paternal identities post-divorce. They suggest this is somewhat easier for mothers who, in comparison to fathers, can construct moral identities around maternal provision and intensive mothering inaccessible to men (Hayes, 1996). My data supports these points. In what follows, I show that a heterosexual marital status overlaps with

age and gender to strengthen others' perceptions about the parenting these men provide (Elder, 1975; Brannen and Nilsen, 2005; Morgan, 1996). Extracts from my interviews with three different middle-aged single fathers reveals that post-divorce, presenting an age-appropriate paternal identity for these men is difficult, but this is not necessarily seen as problematic for them (Barrett, 2005).

David

David (white, 40's) is a solo parent who has custody of three teenage children (two boys and one girl). Two of the children, Rebecca, and Paul, are autistic. David's ex-wife lives nearby and has weekend contact with the children, but rarely sees Rebecca, who, against David's wishes, spends her week in a residential unit for autistic children but comes home to David at the weekend. Following the breakdown of his marriage, David's fitness to parent alone was questioned by social services and looking at photographs of his daughter, Rebecca, was a difficult experience for him:

> This picture here is me and Rebecca, it's upsetting because she was only a
> few months old and she was so animated and then when she got to 12
> months she just turned, and this just epitomises what she was like. She was
> so full of joy, and we were made up as well because we thought we had got
> away with it but a few months later it started to go [he pauses and tails off]
> but I like that one 'cos she's laughing.

Solo parents, according to Neale and Smart (1997), have responsibility for their children whilst the ex-partner has little or no involvement in children's lives. However, this is not David's experience. David's ex-wife has a significant amount of power she can deploy despite being a non -resident parent (Neale and Smart, 1997). Cosson and Graham suggest that although some men will ''step up' and try to play an equal role, it seems they are still perceived as the secondary parent' (2012, p. 128). Concerns have been raised about the quality of parenting single fathers can provide, and the long-term effects of this on children themselves, and this has been David's experience (Coles, 2015). David's fathering does not seem to carry the same levels of value or autonomy as mothering (Hayes, 1996; Smart, 1999). And given a general belief that the care of disabled children is the remit of mothers, the surveillance faced by David is intense (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2008).

According to Herz, social workers often view men and masculinity 'as being the risk' (2017, p.35) and therefore David parents in the shadow of concerns about some aspects of male care being risky (Gabb, 2012). As a result, his parenting skills, and intentions as a father and as a masculine subject have been repeatedly questioned by professionals involved with the family who have raised concerns about his mental well-being and his involvement in the children's personal care (Feder, 1997).

Ken

Single father Ken (white, 40's, one child, Ben, aged 18) begins by explaining how a lack of adequate support and information about autism led him to the internet in search of advice and guidance. His opening words reflect a lack of opportunity for families with autistic children in terms of access to alternative, non-pathologizing discourses of autism (Milton, 2012). He stated:

> what I had googled about autism was quite upsetting, heart-breaking: 'just
> show some affection' so it's brilliant that he [Ben] does

In contrast to the disciplinary gaze experienced by David, solo father Ken then provides an account in which he affirms as acceptable that after separation or divorce, 'the father's identity is less likely to be derived from such an intense focus on parenthood' (Smart and Neale, 1999, p.52). His narrative justifies his stepping back from the responsibilities David wishes to fulfil as a father. For Ken specifically, the idea that fathers have less authority and skill than mothers is strangely advantageous as it brings him degrees of support (Smart, 1999). He states:

> I could come and go so it hit me like a ton of bricks as a single man, no
> other family members it was all on my shoulders. Gradually I started
> getting support getting respite but that's took a while to kick in, I had to beg
> for it because I was gonna end it all.

In contrast to David, Ken articulates an identity as a struggling single father which in turn allows him to deflect the new responsibilities for care that come his way. That his struggles are to be expected enable his demands that he be provided with support as a 'single man' to be met. In subscribing to the 'helpless man' ideal, Ken is able to assert male privilege as

father with an autistic child through emphasising the risks posed to them both should support not be forthcoming (Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Morgan, 2004; Reay, 2004).

Mark

The final extract comes from Mark (white, 40's, divorced). He has weekend contact with his autistic daughter, Tina, who resides with her mother during the week. Neale and Smart (1997) note that generally speaking 'residential mothers held the balance of power in terms of decision making for the children' (1997, p.201) and this belief was woven through Mark's narratives. For Mark, the idea that mothers occupied a more dominant, valid, or powerful position than he did was somewhat problematic (Morgan, 1996; Smart and Neale, 1999). As Collier observes, men sometimes fall back into a discourse of 'rights' when they feel that masculinity is 'beleaguered and misunderstood' (1995, p.65) and experiencing irrelevance or loss of power elicited some extremist beliefs from Mark about women. For example, he made the following comment about feeling excluded from Tina's care by professionals and by Tina's mum herself, following their acrimonious split:

> This is about power and control … But is ironic that I say something [about Tina's care] and everyone turns against me. It just seems to happen across the board really, it's like this constant discrimination, like 'oh what are you doing here'.

Mark was involved with Fathers 4 Justice, a campaign group whose goals 'can be situated within a broader category of 'men's rights groups' who, as the category suggests, are engaged in campaigning for rights which they see as somehow deriving from, or related to, their gender' (Jordan, 2009, p. 421). Campaigns by activist groups such as Fathers 4 Justice are underpinned by discourses which make clear that judicial systems and policies biased towards women and mothers are to blame for the erosion of men's rights as fathers and husbands (Flood, 2004).

The idea that a woman's decision be taken more seriously or contradicts the opinion of a man may be a bitter pill for some men to swallow (Woolley and Marshall, 1994). An interesting example of this comes from Roger a man in his 50's who dropped out of the research project in its early stages, citing marital issues as the reason he was unable to continue. His eighteen-year-old autistic son was in the process of moving from the family home to residential care, a

course of action that he and his wife had bitterly disagreed about, and one which he claimed had contributed to the breakdown of their marriage.

Like the other accounts, Mark's narrative can help in our understanding of the dynamics of gender power as it manifests through post- divorce parenting for middle-aged men (Smart and Neale, 1999). In contrast to David and Ken, rather than seek to engage with or avoid (some of) his responsibilities, many of Mark's discussions focus on the pursuit of male justice as he understood it. His words illustrate 'the appeal of the essentialist position reflects a reaction against the rapid changes in family life that have taken place in the past three decades' (Silverstein and Auerbach, 1999, p.13). His investment in the 'essential father' paradigm and narratives of paternal persecution and unfettered maternal power are resources to be tapped into, indicative of his concerns about men's loss of status as a result of policy changes and as a way to hold onto a masculine identity that was eroding in terms of its relevance (Dahl, Vesico and Weaver, 2015; Edley and Wetherell, 2001; Kaufmann, 1999; Pleck, 1974; Yarwood, 2011).

Bob Pease remarks, that 'as men begin to articulate dissatisfaction with their own lives, numerous discourses are available to enable them to make sense of these dissatisfactions in ways that are quite compatible with the patriarchally constructed interests of men' (2002, p.172). These three contrasting narratives can help in our understanding of how men might respond to ontological challenges to their status as fathers to autistic children, following divorce or separation. Single parenthood challenges men's ontological security as men and fathers, and their involvement with the care of autistic children seemingly compounds this, requiring that fathers reconstitute themselves in new ways as masculine subjects in the face of professional scrutiny (Rose and Abi-Rached, 1998; Rose, 1985).

Carers are a new social category and 'new methods of surveillance enabled those who provided care, as well as those who received it, to be recognised' (Heaton, 1999, p.772). However, care and a caring identity is a deeply gendered matter. Both David and Ken shoulder some responsibilities at home that were previously considered 'women's work'. However, in contrast to the responsibilities a mother in the same position would have to take on, neither of these men are expected or allowed to take full responsibility as parents (Neale and Smart, 1997). Both men are denied their autonomy and variously draw on the concept of risk in explaining their subsequent practices (Morgan, 2004). Ken's narrative suggests that

ontological security can be achieved through drawing on discourses of paternal helplessness and riskiness which affirms patriarchal gender relations in the domain of parenting. Thus, identifying as a father in difficulty can be advantageous as it is easier for fathers to avoid some aspects of fatherhood without being labelled as wanting (Miller, 2011; Vuori, 2009).

On the other hand, David's narrative suggests that a middle-aged man appearing too involved with the care of children invites degrees of suspicion and an unsettling disciplinary gaze. His words reflect his frustration at complying with those professional discourses which identity the risky dimensions of his practices as Rebecca's father specifically (Morgan, 2004). The extract from Mark indicates that fathers may experience degrees of oppression and discrimination, but this does not always lead to a greater awareness of, or desire for, gender inequality beyond the meeting of men's own interests, needs and rights (Pease, 2002).

Claims of maternal advantage and demands for men's rights or demands for men's services detract from of the paucity of services for families with autistic children generally and obscure the pressure on women to care. A over focus on risk overshadows more progressive insights as to what fathers, like mothers, might bring to parenting autistic children more broadly at different stages of children's lives, irrespective of gender, age, or marital status (Flood, 2003; Jordan, 2009).

Schools and services: 'fucking stupid songs'
A frequent topic of discussion amongst these fathers were services for children, with school and education being an issue of some concern. School remains a stage in child's life which overlaps with the family life course: it is during this time that male breadwinner/ female carer ideologies are particularly intense (Pickard, 2016). The fathers in my study often claimed that they felt pushed out and ignored by their children's schools, others stated that this was an area where their wives had greater knowledge and expertise than they did (some stated they had 'forgotten' some of the finer details but claimed their wives would remember!) But nevertheless, the significance of the child's mother is central in many of their narratives even when mum was no longer on the scene.

Nikolas Rose (1985; 1990) points out that one of the functions of the contemporary education system is defining normality and regulating children's behaviours. Identification of unwanted traits enable the identification of new diagnostic labels such as ADHD and autism which in

turn enables the introduction and operation of an 'apparatus of scrutiny' (Rose, 1985, p.108, Timimi, 2005) turning a lens on the behaviours of children and their families.

From a Bourdeuian perspective, education is tool for the reproduction of class hierarchy. As Ingram remarks, 'working-class boys are …one of the groups that are marginalised by and within the system' (2019, p.31). There are some important overlaps with my data here. Firstly, although many parents increasingly invest in their children's education as consumers in a neoliberal marketplace, choice was not something that seemed available to these children and their families (Reay, 2017). Secondly, entry into systems of education is tightly bound up with being recognised as a human subject. This recognition straddles both class and disability and was something fathers clearly felt strongly about as this recognition (or lack of) affected their children and themselves in numerous and often disadvantageous ways (Reay and William, 1999). For example, James (mid 40's, white married, 3 autistic children) made the following remark about his children's schooling:

> they aren't interested. Individually, yes, but as a school the volume of kids,
> it's just, get them in, get them out.

James went on to recall the negative prognosis medical and educational professionals had given his three autistic children at the time of their diagnosis, and which has been deeply inaccurate with the children all subsequently doing well at school and college. Another father, Danny, recalled how a speech therapist had professed that his son Jack *'might be able to sit a few GCSEs'*, a prediction made when Jack was five years old. Jack was now considering which 'A' levels to take.

A harmful effect of the lack of recognition afforded to working-class people is much prior research 'stops short at challenging the assumption that working-class culture is deficient' (Ingram, 2019, p.22). Diane Reay (2006) puts forward a sophisticated argument, in suggesting that working-class parents are not ignorant or disinterested in their children's education but may be considered somewhat problematic in comparison to their middle-class counterparts. In some sections of the press, working class parents who have children with invisible disabilities such as autism, are labelled as benefit scroungers who profit from childhood disability, thus they may be ignored or not taken seriously by professionals (Freeman, 2010; Heeney, 2015). Accordingly, fathers' frustration about the quality of their

children's education may be incorrectly interpreted as the disinterest that Annette Lareau (2011) incorrectly describes. In contrast, my data indicates that most fathers in the research cohort demonstrated great reflexive awareness about the quality of schooling provided to their children as working-class, autistic subjects, and an intention to fight to get the best possible educational experience for them.

An example of this comes from Joel. He and his wife became engaged in complex legal battles to address the local council's refusal to educate his son, Layton. Joel skilfully explained the lack of appropriate opportunities for his son were as a direct result of political game playing and inadequate funding at an authority level. Joel explains:

> We had a battle with the LEA [Local Education Authority] What happened was there's nothing out there, so you get nothing, if you think it's bad now, it was worse then, [when Layton was young] so through someone we found out about this programme ABA [applied behaviour analysis] the Lovaas method,[6] so we went down that route. It was costing us a fortune, so we said to the LEA why don't you fund this? Other parts of the country do and they said 'no we will put him in this special school' … totally inadequate, long story short we went to a tribunal we had to log everything for 6 months, we had to fly an attorney over from America, we had a lawyer from London and an expert witness from a school in London, so we went to tribunal and we had done this programme [ABA] for about 18 months it had cost thousands, we were running it in here [in the family home]. This house was like Piccadilly Circus, you know, it was ridiculous.

Fathers' reflections here are illustrative of what Heus, Robeyns and Schabroeck (2018) refer to as 'the ethics of autism' whereby diagnosis functions as a trigger, questioning and sometimes placing in opposition parental and professional ontologies and subsequent decision making in

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[6] 'The Lovaas Approach is a form of Applied Behavioral Analysis that is used in early intervention programs for children who have developmental delays or who have been identified as autistic. The program, created by Ole Ivar Lovaas, is derived from work done by B.F. Skinner in the 1930s' (APA Programmes Guide. Available at www.appliedbehavioranalysisprograms.com.) [Accessed: 11/8/21]

relation to the child. Eventually, Layton was awarded a school place, and Joel and his wife became well known in the city as advisors for other parents in similar situations. They developed a sophisticated awareness of the systems of finance and legislature which govern special education. This is a highly individualised response to positioning within structural disadvantage, indicating that some fathers and mothers are active in driving forwards social change at a community level (Aiken, 2000). But these changes were not long lasting. Following an incident that took place at school, Layton was later placed in a segregated unit away from the other pupils, as Joel explains below:

> When he went back they isolated him in a room on his own in a separate
> building he was like Charles Bronson, and what they used to do was they
> would pick him up in the bus of a morning, and I knew the driver
> personally they'd been doing this for years and the head said 'oh no that
> will have to stop we will have to bring a teacher and one of our mini buses
> and pick him up 'cos he could be a danger'. Totally over the top. Anyway,
> he was in this isolation playing cartoons to him all day it was horrid.

As the last extract from Joel suggests, Layton's behaviour is considered a risk which 'is an obstacle to the smooth operation of a universal system of education' (Rose, 1985, p. 93) and so he is excluded from it. The data indicates that class as both a cultural signifier and a reflection of economic inequality meant fathers like Joel do not have the financial resources to maintain their efforts in combatting professional responses to this (Roy, 1999).

However, what is also particularly striking about Joel's discussion is the place that Joel's wife plays in his narrative. Like several fathers from the cohort, Joel's narratives are told from 'we' rather than 'I' positions. This suggests married or partnered fathers had difficulty in narrating stories from an individual speaking position. Given that participants were asked specifically to account for themselves, their roles, and actions as fathers, this is a significant point which suggests that participants felt good fathering and heterosexual marriage are inseparable (Silverstein and Auerbach, 1999). The 'we' speaking position seeks to reflect partnership and a sharing of responsibilities and thus allows men to situate their discussions within the context of a partnership (Galdiolo, et al., 2016). However, these 'we' narrative tactics may also serve as smokescreens, to preserve identity when there is little opportunity for fathers to present themselves in a more active way (Bamberg, 2011). This contradiction is

reflected in the following extract from Tom, who we met earlier. Tom was saddened at the lack of support for fathers who had autistic children. Indeed, his decision to take part in the research was because he felt there was a lack of interest in the experiences of men like him. Yet, when the opportunity arose for Tom to engage with his son's schooling, he did not take it up, stating:

> School? I can't say it's all the fault of the school, they don't communicate with me, but he has a home -school book, but that's my fault I haven't communicated with them yet, but I know the channel is there if need be. The routine will be if I am home [from work] I will write in the book, it just depends who is home, that's the way it has fell, it has never been a closed thing.

There is little evidence that equality of responsibility for this task is part of Tom's agenda, and the responsibility has fallen instead on Tom's wife (Rimm-Kaufman and Zhang, 2005). It could, therefore, be argued that a 'we' speaking position allows men to become visible, and deflect a sense of immateriality, through adopting a discursive position which reflects 'strategic alliances' (Demetriou, 2001, p.348) with women and professionals sometimes in the pursuit of personal recognition (Pease, 2002). On the other hand, this phraseology might reflect the insecurity men feel in speaking out and being validated, 'the issue of whose opinion matters - who has access to forms of public representation, and whose voice will be heard and taken seriously' (Lawler, 2005, p. 802) whilst women's 'maternal gatekeeping' and the dominance of their voices indicates the responsibilities placed on women to 'own' knowledge about children (Miller, 2012).

For David, as a single father with two autistic children, there was no 'we' for him to speak from. A major concern of his was the quality of education his children received at the special schools they attended. In the extract below, David is discussing son, Paul's experience of school:

> The school don't provide a good enough service for my kids so it's a babysitting service, I have told them concentrate on the basics, self-help, tying your shoelaces that type of stuff, fuck everything else because you are wasting your time but they don't, they carry on doing the same shite which

agitates them like dressing them up for school plays which I know [Paul]
doesn't like and I've told them and he comes running over and just sits with
me when all the teachers are singing fucking stupid songs.

The so-called 'feminization of education', driven by high numbers of female teachers in early and primary education has become the focus of research attention (Griffiths, 2006). Concerns have been raised about the 'fundamental, widespread effects on primary pedagogy and culture caused by the predominance of women teachers' (Skelton, 2002, p.86). It has also been argued that a lack of male role models in schools has had an adverse effect on boys' education (Griffiths, 2006).

Perhaps in response to this, and also given their experiences of exclusion and invalidation, fathers often looked for opportunities to 'do' masculinity with their sons. Kilvington-Dowd and Robertson note that 'skill in performing hands-on tasks is often a class-orientated form of cultural capital for elderly working-class men due to the emphasis on practical and technical skills required in industrial and manufacturing labour markets' (2010, p. 25). Although David is not elderly, engaging in hands on tasks with Paul serves a similar function through which he is able to demonstrate his usefulness as a masculine subject. These ways of doing fatherhood suggest that this is one route with which David, and other fathers, can present themselves as non-risky and valid individuals through complying with normative ideas about what fathers and sons should do (Morgan, 2004).

In David's later comments we can also see the emergence of ideas suggesting a more masculine focused curriculum would be beneficial to Paul, rather than doing 'sissy' stuff like dressing up and singing. Several fathers drew on stereotypes in terms of how their (usually male) children should behave and what fathers' involvement with them should entail. These claims bought them degrees of masculine capital and constituted their involvement as necessary (Blankenhorn, 1995). This is also reflected in the following extracts from Tom, one of the very few participants who expressed disappointment and concern about the lack of 'drop in' services available for fathers with autistic children:

One thing I definitely want to mention is a dads' club we used to go to, it
was the best thing that ever happened to me, it was Saturday morning there
was one fella running it…it must have been through the school, but I got in

through false pretences because it was at [local football stadium]at first but 'come and see us next week'. So, I did and there was only me. This fella [the facilitator] was a godsend to me. Now, a few others came over the next few weeks, it used to be there was a dad's club with activities that that had run for years, but what I liked about this was that as it started so small, it was kids were playing and we had a cuppa there was no plan it wasn't structured at all, just turn up and they all just interact. The dads and blokes could have a chin, talk about footy or whatever, and the kids just played. If the kids were playing up one of us would go 'hey, knock it off' and nothing got said it was so relaxed.

Work by Alan Dolan (2014) 'explores men's motivations to attend [services] and demonstrates some of the challenges relating to masculine identity that fathers face when seeking support regarding their children' (2013, p.1). He concludes that attendance at services undermines men's sense of masculinity. In contrast, Tom's opening narrative says very little about autism, but his attendance and engagement with the club seems to foster a sense of competence and to some extent, endorses the practices, emotional and otherwise, of hegemonic fatherhood as skills that are important, even superior, but perhaps under-appreciated outside of this context. From points made about discussing football and drinking tea, through to his enthusing over '*no plan'* and no structured activities, and in encouraging children to just get on with things (note also his emphasis on disciplining children as a value all participants seem to ascribe to: (*'hey, knock it off' and nothing got said it was so relaxed*) the club validates fatherhood as distinctly different to motherhood, and perhaps necessary for the development of an age and gender specific identity for boys specifically. It could be said that attendance at the 'dad's club' allows fathers like Tom to reflexively manage the risks he feels as a father with an autistic child through engagement in social organisations which reflect the values of the 'moral majority' (Morgan, 2004, p.29). Indeed, Tom's reflections about the 'dad's club' have a strong focus on play. In that respect, there is nothing to suggest that Tom's parenting is different to the parenting of most men whose children don't have autism (Lamb, 2010). Nevertheless, Tom continues:

the kids loved it, it felt like a them and us and [the funders] were saying 'you need to do this' [structured activity] but we just went 'nah we are not doing that we are doing this', just enjoying being with our kids, but the fella

that ran it he must have had a lot of pressure because every now and then
he'd say there's another session on at the same time, grandparents for
justice or something, so next week we have to put them in with us so we
would have to try to get them [the children] doing gardening and
woodwork.

The extract indicates that Tom, like David, was aware of how stereotypes of masculinity side-lined men as parents, but fathers often bought into these stereotypes to justify their parenting, nevertheless. This often reflected their beliefs about particularly meritorious principles of masculinity specifically (Silverstein and Auerbach, 1999). Tom continues:

We used to take the piss saying, 'oh put your cup of coffee over there away
from the kids it's health and safety', and 'this week we have got to do this
activity'. It was like 'you don't know what you need to do with your own
kids, son, we will show you'. It makes you feel crap if you let it get to you.
It's like, well maybe I don't know what I'm doing but the kids tell me. If
we did what we had meant to have done nobody would have gone to that
club.

Pease (2002) notes that any evidence that men are changing must also give due consideration to how changing might be beneficial to men. On one hand, that Tom attends such activities with his children might be an indication of his increased social commitment to his children and to active fathering. On the other hand, the provision of structured activities at the 'dads club' undermines Tom's sense of autonomy through suggesting a need for instruction and training as one aspect of risk management imposed on fathers specifically (Cosson and Graham, 2012).

However, Calasanti and King (2007) note that male caring identities can thrive in contexts where specifically masculine behaviour is celebrated (Calasanti and King, 2007). In that respect, 'taking the piss' out of the activities allows Tom to perform a caring masculinity whilst simultaneously indicating that he resists being controlled by others. In foregrounding his disinterest in the service, hinting at the collusion that takes place between the (male) staff member and the attendees and explaining his continued attendance as being because '*all the kids loved it',* Tom minimises ontological threats to his masculine identity by feigning

disregard and lack of concern about any personal benefits attendance might offer to him (Ezzell, 2012). In contrast, later in his interview, Tom became incensed when the club closed because of a lack of funding, stating:

> It made me really angry but a few weeks after it ended it was mothers' day and I walked past the centre and there was a big sign, it said, 'mums come in for free make up' and I thought that just sums it up, there's no money for dads but mums come and have a pamper. We didn't want any of that we just wanted a room I felt like a massive minority after that.

Tom's narrative is laden with assumptions that the closure of the 'dads club' was because of the privileging of women's needs and he draws 'on a discourse of victimhood' (Pleasants, 2011, p. 234) to position himself within systems which in his opinion, disempower men and advantage women. This narrative is woven throughout most of his interviews and is also common to most of the study cohort (Flood and Pease, 2005; Thurnell- Read, 2011). What seems to lie at the heart of these narratives is a belief that fatherhood is a specific and necessary social role that only men can provide which justifies as natural gender specific caring practices (Blankenhorn, 1995). This pronounced differentiation continued in an even more overt way as children entered adolescence.

Adolescence: 'generally speaking, female superheroes don't wear very much'

Curtis defines adolescence as 'a complex, multi- system transitional process involving progression from the immaturity and social dependency of childhood into adult life with the goal and expectation of fulfilled developmental potential, personal agency, and social accountability' (2015, p.1). There is an expectation that children's dependency on parents lessens during this time and independence and autonomy increase (Hockey and James, 2000). Parents enter a stage known as 'midlife' when their social roles begin to shift in line with culturally specific age and gender ideals (Cohen, 2015). Teenage young people are expected to engage in risky behaviours as a way to test boundaries, although disabled young people may be excluded from such experiences (Steinberg, 2008). Much of the literature on disability and adolescence tends to sketch out family relationships at this as time as deeply problematic for parents because of the difficulties experienced by the autistic child (Mailick, at al., 2001) and this was reflected in some fathers' narratives; Joel, for example, made the following remark:

> When he got to 14, I'll say it was adolescence, I don't know, they were the
> worst times. He [Layton]started attacking us and one day he came right
> through that front door, it was plate glass, his arm went right through, it was
> cut here [indicates place] blood everywhere

In other ways, the lives of some of the autistic young men discussed by fathers in my study did not really differ a great deal from those of their neurotypical peers (Beresford, 2004). For fathers with sons, their involvement in some practices of parenting increased during the teenage years, suggesting they felt this was the 'proper time' (Finch, 1989, p. 172) for them to engage with their sons and take up age and gender specific roles, often underpinned by the notion that males and females are essentially different (Lorber, 1992). In this respect, it could be said that sons' transition to adolescence enabled middle-aged men construct a meaningful and valid self-concept through engaging their sons in gendered rites of initiation (Cohen, 2015; Turner, 1974).

For example, Danny, a father in his 40's, expressed how much he enjoyed taking his teenage son, Jack, to watch football matches, and to the pub with his group of middle-aged friends, enthusing that '*he goes on all our nights out my brother absolutely loves him.*' It is important to acknowledge that participation in such stereotypically masculine activities might position sons away from discourses of impairment (Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson, 2012). However, going to the football and the pub also allows fathers like Danny to demonstrate their engagement and evaluate the quality of their parenting in line with the parenting of most other fathers and thus increase feelings of security and worthiness (Finch, 1989).

For James (40s, white, married, 3 autistic children) fathering involved rejecting the belief that autistic children should be helpless and dependent (Gershick, 2000). He explains that:

> Billy [eldest son] is doing performing arts at college, and has just got his
> first gig, he's got 3 days of practice, then filming, he gets paid for all this,
> dollars in his pocket, he's probably an extra in a telly programme.

All of James' children had chores inside and outside the home. James was keen to explain his role in facilitating this, stating:

The first thing to do is show them how they can get money! That's how you get them to do it. On one hand you have got DLA but it's also about teaching them how to live, and it works, I know that Billy can be totally self-sufficient, and his work ethic is unbelievable- money can get me my things and if you do work you get money. That's a life skill. They won't sit round all day watching the telly.

Vessiere (2018) argues that strong gender roles are common in neoliberal rhetoric whereby they serve as an 'antidote' to concerns about societal ills. Gender stereotypes are commonly drawn upon to negate the demasculinizing effects of disability discourse on disabled boys and men (Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson, 2012). James' discussions reflect both these ideals, and also link good fathering with the ability to provide guidance and opportunities for his sons to fulfil these gender norms as disabled masculine subjects, for example, by encouraging paid employment and independence (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005; Yarwood, 2011). Yet, the lack of work opportunities for most autistic people makes James' enthusiasm here difficult to critique. His words may also be a deliberate backlash to the media focus on the 'workshy' disabled, which has paved the way for the reformation of disability welfare, and demonised many disabled people (Crow, 2014). Nevertheless, ideologies of masculinity are central to James' narrative in relation to himself and his sons, and these ideologies were reflected in the narratives of the other fathers in the cohort. For example, during one interview, David showed me a photograph of his son Paul, explaining:

Here we are cutting some hedges. He's [Paul] got some grass cutters. He's helping his dad and its lovely to get him involved. Here he's hoovering, it was in the summer holidays, he came out, I was hoovering the car, I said 'go and get the goggles.' I use them all the time for any D.I.Y. but he likes putting them on and he wants to join in, so he was doing it for ages.

Gelber (1997) suggests that men's enthusiastic take up of DIY:

permitted men to be both a part of the house and apart from it, sharing the home with their families while retaining spatial and functional autonomy.

> Do-it-yourself was one of a series of roles that suburban men created so that they could actively participate in family activities while retaining a distinct masculine style. Outdoor cook, little league coach, driver of the car (when the whole family was present), and household handyman where all ways men could be intimate in family affairs without sacrificing their sense of maleness (Gelber, 1997, p.69).

However, David's words also show the sociocultural connections between masculinity and physical work as they infuse 'crucially masculine parenting' (Bibliarz and Stacey, 2010, p. 4). Collectively, the extracts presented share a common theme whereby individual 'men are actively engaged in constructing and policing appropriate masculine behaviours and identities; above all, in regulating normative masculinity' (Gill, Henwood and Maclean 2005, p.37). By shaping their son's masculinities, they reveal what they themselves consider to be appropriate paternal masculinity (Hearn, 2001). As disabled men are at risk of being denied masculinity (Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson, 2012) then this focus is perhaps unsurprising.

Nevertheless, there is a need to consider why these fathers subscribe to stereotypical ideologies of masculinity on an individual level, particularly as these stereotypes problematize male engagement in some aspects of care specifically. Given the exclusion and scrutiny that these fathers have experienced, I suggest that their engagement in a typical father-son 'apprenticeship or teaching relationship: come on, let me show you how' (Popenoe, 1996, p. 8) allows fathers to find security in complying with culturally accepted risk-minimal paternal roles. Furthermore, fathers felt this was important during the teenage years specifically, allowing them to suggest they have an important role to play in making 'unique contributions to child rearing, including a parenting style different from mothers' (Popenoe, 1996, p1).

This belief about an essential paternal role was also reflected in fathers' narratives about their teenage son's physical masculinity. Fathers in my study often drew on biological explanations of human development. Curtis states that this is 'the most readily recognized hallmark of adolescence [as] physical growth and sexual maturation begin' (2015, p.6). A focus on the embodied aspects of adolescent development seemed a way for fathers to 'cancel out' some aspects of disability in their sons, positioning them away from those discourses

which emasculate disabled men (Gerschick and Miller (1995) as the following extract from David illustrates:

> [Paul] is very protective of [his teacher] it's a mixed class and some kids are quite aggressive and sometimes go for the teacher. He sits by the teacher, and he gets up and looks at them and gets in between, like 'if you come any closer you are gonna get a fucking belt' and they back off. He's almost like the teacher's bodyguard, which is lovely really because he's protecting someone he cares about. He's a big lad, don't mess with him 'cos if he hits you …but he wouldn't anyway cos he's not violent, but he's not scared of nothing.

Discussing Paul's ability to draw on his physical strength also requires that David negotiate an appropriate identity for himself given that 'the worst-case ideal type for men is usually too aggressive, selfish, and not caring enough [and] the best-case archetype for a man is usually strong, protecting, and generous' (Veissière, 2018, p 274). To do this, David attempts to constitute himself and Paul as moral subjects by indicating that good fathering has enabled the development of Paul's healthy masculinity which encompasses physical strength and bravery but also moral control (Abbott, 2020). This is, in turn, reflective of David's own risk-conscious, moral fathering and his own healthy masculinity (Morgan, 2004).

Fathers also sought to fashion healthy masculine identities for themselves and their sons by confirming their moral 'subjecthood and personhood through sexualized interactions' (Pascoe, 2012, p. 69). Becoming sexual is a key part the transition from child to adult for most men, and heterosexuality is a key aspect of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Heterosexual relations within families are an 'important context within which traditional forms of femininity and masculinity are reproduced' (Hockey, Meah and Robinson, 2007, p.125). However, many authors have noted that learning-disabled young adults are often denied the opportunity for sexual expression or activity (see, for example, Harris, Heller, Schindler, and Van Heumen, 2012). However, the fathers in my study regularly drew upon narratives of heterosexual masculinity in discussing their sons, although in doing so they tended to indicate that their involvement at this time was especially important in fostering helping them to develop healthy attitudes towards sex and sexuality, often underpinned by a belief in biological differences between women and men nevertheless (Lorber, 1992). James,

for example, made the following remark about attending Cosplay events with his two autistic sons:

> Generally speaking, female superheroes don't wear very much, and it came out the last couple of years there have been instances of girls being uncomfortable of people trying to touch them. There have been campaigns look don't touch kind of thing.

He explains that he has 'rules' that the boys must abide by, and he continues:

> Look but don't touch, if you want to touch the gun or ask what the costume is made of that's ok. I don't go and ask for a picture, I look like a dirty 'perv' at my age, Billy can he is still young he is still pretty …I give him loads of stick cos he goes for all these pretty girls, but they are good looking lads too, they know what the rules are though.

The inferences in James' narrative are complex and contradictory. Firstly, James guides his sons in being appropriately heterosexual as teenage boys, but in doing so, he draws on sexual scripts to transgress the stigmatizing aspects of disability as they affect many disabled men (Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson, 2012). Bogdan and Taylor (1989) claim that parents of disabled children may use gender or sexuality in the processes of establishing valued age specific social identities for their sons and daughters. Sexual scripting is useful in explaining how and why individuals like James might draw on such scripts to make sense of others and to make sense of themselves and it is important to acknowledge the absence of disability-positive scripts for fathers to draw on (Carpenter, 2010; Jackson and Scott, 2010; Presser, 2005).

Secondly, Morgan (2004) notes the ways in which family-based practices might develop which mediate risk, and James' sexual script is risk-conscious in that he instructs the boys how to behave appropriately and respectfully around women. The words and concepts men like James draw on when they discuss their sons and daughters reflect the narratives available to them, but also indicate that fathers' personal gender projects outlined here cannot be separated from their awareness of risk as it relates to how their fathering/ masculinity might be viewed by others (Katz and Marshall, 2003).

Nevertheless, my data indicates that the obligation to perform a heterosexual sexual self remains key to successful masculinity for both fathers and their sons, and this transcends disability and age (Katz and Marshall, 2003). In one respect, both James and David (below) reflect a desire to show their sons as complying with normative and accepted sexual behaviours (Löfgren-Mårtenson, 2013). David explains:

> But I just see it you know and [Paul's] just walking around with a fucking wig-wam in his trousers you know, what are his thoughts, what is he thinking of, you know. You get frustrated in puberty and even though kids can't reconcile what's going on it must be fucking terrible for him, and you know, I've got to do something about it… He doesn't understand what it is…but he's got this …he went through a phase of going out and buying a toy, he'd buy a doll, you know, like a Barbie doll or something, and he's still got them around somewhere and he'll take the clothes off them, so I think he's trying to understand the sexuality, he'll bath them out there [in the garden].

The extracts infer a belief in the 'naturalness' and biological nature of the heterosexual male sex drive as 'real', in need of control, and 'having a mind of its own to some extent' (Flowers et al., 2013, p.126; Martino and Kehler, 2006). In that respect, they allow fathers to display a somewhat maverick paternal identity which reifies as natural some aspects of masculine heterosexuality but at the same time, recognises and responds to the risky behaviours heterosexual masculinity might give rise to (Hubbard, 2000). In this way, fathers can justify that their contribution to parenting is necessary because 'their unique, masculine contribution' (Silverstein and Auerbach, 1999, p.2) and is important for the moral and sexual development of teenage autistic boys specifically (Blankenhorn, 1995; Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Calasanti and King, 2005; Laz, 2003; Pascoe, 2012; Spector- Mersel, 2006).

Daughters: 'I can't say I found it comfortable, but I did it'

As Liddiard (2018) points out, disabled men are more likely than disabled women to have their sexual identities and needs taken seriously, and one of the key issues for consideration in what follows is how the rights and needs of disabled women have been side-lined in comparison to those of disabled men. Accordingly, in contrast to the previous sections of this

chapter, my data reveals a significant difference in terms of how fathers discussed their teenage daughters as sexual subjects.

However, McCarthy (2000) observes that women with intellectual disabilities are commonly viewed as asexual and discouraged from talking about sexuality and relationships (see also Meekosha, 2004; Trasustadottir and Johnson, 2000). And Asch and Fine (1988) state most mothers and fathers do little to challenge the stereotypes faced by disabled girls and young women, and do not recognise their 'social potential' or encourage involvement in social events where the development of sexual identities might be possible (Rousso, 1988, p. 160). Further, there are few sexual scripts that fathers can draw on in discussing daughters without seeming somewhat perverse (Hubbard, 2002; Simon and Gagnon, 1986). The data in the following paragraphs provides some contrasting empirical material in relation to these points, but also reveals differences in how fathers interpreted male and female autistic sexuality.

The first extracts recognise the different meanings fathers attach to the body in their constructions of disabled teenage female sexuality. A focus on hormones shows a belief that gender flows from the physical body. In many respects, there is little difference between these narratives and earlier narratives about 'wig-wams' and so on. However, these discussions differ as fathers link ideas about feminine sexuality to the menstrual cycle, discourses they can use to justify the 'irrational' and 'uncontrollable' behavior in women' (Rodin, 1992, p.49) as something alien to them. For example, in one of our first meetings, David told me that Rebecca had been prescribed medication to prevent her monthly periods as managing the bleeding was problematic for Rebecca herself and for him. Rodgers, Lipscombe and Santer recognise that menstruating women with learning disabilities should be supported in 'recognizing and defining the problems they experience' (2006, p.364) as part of the empowerment process. It is not clear to what extent this has happened in Rebecca's case. David made the following remark about Rebecca during a later interview:

> It got to the point in the last couple of years, a veil has come over her, a veil of [he pauses]. It's a different child now, puberty is certainly an issue there, the hormones and that, but it's like a veil, she didn't smile as much, she doesn't laugh as much.

Unlike David's earlier discussion about the 'wigwam' in Paul's pyjamas, Rebecca's sexuality is tied into nothing more than problematic female hormonal bodies (England and Bearak, 2014; Fine and Asch, 1981). Historically, men have used hormones to justify the pathologizing of femininity and the control of women's behaviour (Ussher, 2003). However, as Kalman observes the expectation is that 'in our society, as a female reaches puberty and a daughter's sexuality emerges, the father often withdraws' (2003, p 39) and this is an important point of consideration to bear in mind. Indeed, Hubbard (2010) notes that discourses of age, gender and sexual immorality come to define single parents in risky terms. Unsurprisingly, these intersecting concerns have permeated almost every aspect of David and Rebecca's relationship. His awareness of this is summed up in the following extract in which he is discussing current sleeping arrangements:

> She was lovely 'cos [Rebecca] was only little, she was a little toddler, and her feet would have to be on your leg it was so lovely, and as she got older, we thought, well, she's gonna have to go into her own bed. She can't sleep with her dad you know fucking forty odd years of age, it's not right, even though it wouldn't bother me because she is still my little girl.

The extract shows the intersubjective disciplining of fathers and disabled teenage girls and allows us to recognise the meanings and the potential taboos attached to the ageing masculine/ paternal body in interaction with the bodies of disabled young women (Hockey and James, 2000; Robinson and Hockey, 2013). Cultural norms to do with paternal bodies and disabled, female, teenage bodies mean men's comfort or willingness to engage in with them can be a fraught affair. Indeed, this engagement extends to the realm of discourse through the lack of words available to men to discuss such things (Braun, Vincent, and Ball, 2010). This is reflected in Mark's statement below:

> Periods are not something I would bring up, but I have to deal with them, I have to, I have no choice. So how do we deal with that thing? Tina would not be as mortified as her older sister.

Marks' discussion about Tina's sister reveals the embarrassment many women face in managing (or hiding) that they are menstruating (Kowaski and Chapple, 2000). In contrast to fathers' earlier discussions about their pubescent sons, female embodied sexual development

is to be concealed, rather than celebrated. Mark's narrative reveals his discomfort in talking about as well as physically dealing with Tina's periods.

As Rubin explains, 'adults who deviate too much from conventional standards of sexual conduct [including the discursive] are often denied contact with the young, even their own' (1984, p.159) and like David, Mark's later narratives show that when fathers' caring extends to teenage female embodied sexuality and intimate body parts, they are caught in a crossfire of internal and external demands about 'the proper way to behave' as fathers and as men (Doucet, 2008; Doucet, 2017; Finch, 1989, p. 115; Robinson and Hockey, 2011). Mark begins by explaining:

> I took her [Tina] to the walk in when she had thrush. I can't say I found it comfortable, but I did it. At the end of the day, I had to.

Taking an autistic young woman with vaginal thrush to the walk-in clinic reflects the boundaries, real or imagined, that foster the socio-spatial governance of fathers' bodies and disabled teenage female bodies (Hubbard, 2000; Robinson and Hockey, 2011; Rose, 1985; 1985). Indeed, this issue had so troubled Mark that he had tried to persuade his partner, Jenny, to take Tina to the appointment, but as the clinic needed parental consent to treat her, he had to go to the appointment himself. Although he subsequently found out that the clinic staff were 'fantastic' the data suggests that Mark's concerns are underpinned by the belief that to appear too involved with Tina's intimate health and sexual body parts is a moral concern and the governance of her disabled, sexual body should be the responsibility of medical professionals (Fischer,2010; Primoratz, 1999; Rose, 1985).

Rose (1985) suggests that one of the functions of the clinic is to regulate family roles with particular reference to the identification of inappropriate parenting and the facilitation of good mothering specifically. In that respect, Mark's reaction is indicative of his awareness of the socio-spatial regulation of male caregiving as it overlaps with disability, age, gender, and embodied sexuality (Hubbard, 2000). There are clear parallels between Mark's words and David's opening narrative whereby these fathers face scrutiny for appearing too involved and too willing to become involved in issues that are not considered appropriate for men. In relation to these points, Doucet affirms the insecurity and surveillance men experience as they enter 'oestrogen filled worlds' (2006, p.696) as caregivers with young children, but my

data suggests this influence is even more profound as the (autistic, female) child grows into a young woman.

'And it turns out she fancies the little boy.'

As Grosz (1995) remarks, contextual and relational factors affect the acceptability of embodied practices. In relation to this point, it is notable that Mark found the emotional and relational aspects of Tina's emerging sexuality much easier to manage than the physical aspects. He explains:

> She was here the other day she [was in a bad mood] I was like 'What's the matter, has something happened in school has someone said something? Is it a kid, has a kid been horrible to you?' and she was like 'Err, no' and I was going 'Well has anyone said something to you was it a boy or a girl?' and she was like 'Boy'. I was like 'Ok, well what's going on? What's the boy said?' And it turns out she fancies the little boy and the little boys not interested. I spent the rest of the night going 'do you know what that happens to everyone you know sweetheart you don't have to have bleeding autism to have that one' you know what I mean.

One way of interpreting this statement reflects Rousso's (1998) concerns about the oppression of disabled female sexuality. Therefore, it could be said that Mark's acknowledgement of his daughter's experience and feelings about the boy on the bus reflect his belief in Tina's personhood and social value as a sexual being which, in turn, function as an attempt to subvert the 'rolelessness' that society 'imposes on disabled women' (Bogdan and Taylor, 1989; Fine and Asch, 2014, p.235). Mark continues, explaining that:

> She [Tina] walks past boys and she always sits by this boy on the school bus, and she giggles when we walk past boys and that reaffirms a normal 15-year-old under the cluster of things on the outside, and unless you haven't known her, you wouldn't know her because she doesn't communicate.

As feminist disability scholars have pointed out, disabled women experience gender discrimination differently to non- disabled women. They may be thought of as weak and vulnerable (Garland- Thomson, 2005) or asexual, childlike, and innocent- this latter label

imposed on learning-disabled women specifically (Mc Climens, 2004; Traustadottir and Johnson, 2001). One of the few pieces of work addressing relationships between fathers and disabled daughters is from Harilyn Rousso (1998). Although Rousso's work does not focus on intellectually disabled young women, she suggests some disabled young women enjoy the beneficial aspects of 'a close relationship' with their fathers in developing sexual identities. Indeed, she states that some 'felt closer to their fathers than to their mothers when growing up and that their involvement with their fathers offered the promise of successful involvement with men outside the home' (1998, p.157).

With these points in mind, it could be said that Mark considers himself something of a maverick. He blends progressive attitudes towards his daughter's emerging sexual citizenship with discourses that endorse 'a model of sexual behaviour for young women which can be described as passive femininity' (Holland et al., 1994, p. 23) and so his narratives suggest some investment in Popenoe's (1997) claim that fathers have a role to play in guiding girls in terms of how to behave as sexual subjects (Silverstein and Auerbach, 1991).

Ageing and the future: 'basically, until I drop fucking dead.'

The final set of data reveals men's concerns about ageing and the future. Kalmijn and De Graaf (2012) remark that there is a lack of research which acknowledges how children's transitions across the life course affect parents. Ryan, Taggart, Truesdale-Kennedy and Slevin (2014) found that the responsibility for intellectually disabled adult children tends to fall on mothers. This is unsurprising, as 'western sex role socialization aims young women toward caregiving by encouraging their activities at the domestic center of the family and preparing them for nurturing roles across the life cycle' (Applegate and Kaye, 1989, p.4). Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that most men are unprepared for the care of adult children as they themselves enter the later stages of life and the concerns of ageing fathers providing care to intellectually disabled adult sons and daughters are clearly under theorised.

For some autistic people, transitions may be as profound as entering residential care as the parent ages or dies. For example, Gerrard (white, married, retired) had placed his son Anton into supported accommodation when he had reached young adulthood, but this had not gone well, and Anton had returned home following a fall in the shower. Gerrard explains:

It was awful. He had an injury it was hidden in his hair. We saw it when we visited, and the blood was in the shower room. There was broken equipment in there that he had broken on the way down. He's made his way onto his bed, and they just said he'd been tired all day.

At the time of conducting these research interviews, three of the fathers were in the process of securing residential care for their sons as they reached the age of 18. Some fathers found the notion of their children never becoming independent a challenge and their narratives reflected understandable concerns about their long-term future (Harris, Heller, Schindler, and Van Heumen, 2012). Other fathers were unable to discuss the matter fully; one father (Roger) dropped out of the study, Ken, refused to discuss this aspect of his son's life in a second interview, but a third, Joel, saw residential care as an opportunity for his son to lead a more fulfilling life than he could offer him as they both aged. These brief points of reflection indicate there is a need for research which shines a light on paternal concerns about these imagined or actual future events.

Death and dying was only discussed in any depth by one father from the cohort, David. The lack of support and guidance for carers and family members regarding discussing death and dying with learning disabled people has been highlighted by James (1995) and is reflected in David's words below:

How do you explain death to autistic kids? When my mum and dad died [eldest, non-autistic son] was close to my mum, she helped us a lot but the [autistic] kids have no concept of death so there was no point them going to the funeral. Life and death are concepts they don't understand. Sometimes it's a blessing but sometimes autistic kids they keep looking for someone that's gone because they can't understand. It's difficult.

Historically, systems of care in Western society have been based on 'a system of intergenerational reciprocity [where] adults provide for young dependents (children) and in return, when those young dependents become adults, they provide for older dependents' (Harper, 2014, p.591). This 'typical' care scenario will not be possible for David and his family, and his subsequent narratives reflect the inevitability of his children ending up in residential care at some point in the future, as he explains:

The kids are well looked after that's the main thing. What the future holds

for them I don't know; I don't even go there 'cos it's too difficult to even

contemplate. I always knew they were gonna end up in care, I'm not

fucking stupid, but it just came a little bit early for me.

Furthermore, with no other family members available to provide care, the responsibility for, at the very least, thinking about the children's future care falls to David, and this concern haunted him:

Well, my idea, I've got plans, get some money together, get the attic room -

we've got an attic - I wanna convert that into a self-contained flat. I'm

imagining all this, I wanna get two people living up there, two care workers

who, as I am getting older, will help me looking after the kids, looking after

Rebecca to be honest, two girls looking after Rebecca, dealing with her

needs. Obviously, I'll still be her dad, rather than her being in a home,

being cared for here, basically until I drop fucking dead.

Hockey and James (2000) note that individuals can resist the stigmatizing effects of dependence that come with growing older through drawing on ideals of continuing development and personal growth. In doing so, David can fend off stigma by framing himself in active terms as an autonomous male subject. The extract reflects David's attempt to manage this interwoven with his 'expressed anxiety about ageing, predominantly in terms of declining ability 'to do'' (Shirani, 2013, p. 1115). Nevertheless, his remarks about 'still being a dad' as he grows older suggest that increasing age allows him to consider models of fatherhood that justify a lack of direct action with care (Lamb et al., 1985). The tasks generally associated with caregiving fall onto the shoulders of the young women he hopes to employ when the time comes. This assertion reflects the gendered nature of care and caring roles over the life course (Calasanti and King, 2005).

Conclusion and discussion

Unlike previous research with fathers, which often prioritizes the 'whats' of their experiences, my focus here has been how and why fathers with autistic children reflect on and make sense of events and present themselves as ageing masculine subjects within the

stories they recount (Bamberg, 2011; Gubrium and Holstein,1997; Holloway and Jefferson, 2008). I felt these stories were important to participants on a personal level as they allowed men to use time to organise and give meaning to their lives as fathers of autistic children specifically, an experience they seemed grateful for, and one that most participants seemed to readily engage with (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim state that 'the character of everyday family life is gradually changing; people used to be able to rely upon well-functioning rules and models' (2002, p.91) which are now eroding in terms of their use and significance. Further, Goodley, Liddiard and Runswick Cole 'believe that disabled children are key agents of change' which encourage us to 'rethink key human concepts such as development, family and sexuality' (2015, p. 1). This chapter serves to outline the limitations of these views. In articulating this, I have used the work of Rose (1985; 2013) to acknowledge how gender operates alongside 'psy' disciplines. Mothers and fathers are disciplined in accordance with how well they comply with and construct their identities in line with age-appropriate ideologies of masculinity and femininity in their caring roles.

Masculinity is a contradictory force in men's lives as they transition through life course stages as fathers with autistic children (Robinson and Hockey, 2011). The life course of the autistic child and family is structured around the life course and the caring responsibilities expected of the mother (Barrett, 2005). Therefore, when men experience exclusion or dismissal, this leads them to question their role and purpose, and to doubt themselves and 'the components which make up the self, including previous roles, relationships, and assumptions' (Riches and Dawson, 1997, p.71).

In order to resource themselves as significant, and to assert the power that has been denied to them, men return to gender essentialism and masculine capital to bolster their self-concepts, to justify what they do, or don't do, in uncertain circumstances when risk is an issue for consideration, or when what is considered proper fathering behaviour is in doubt (Finch, 1989; Noddings, 2002; Simon and Gagnon, 1986). Some fathers seem to consider that their complex presentations of masculinity in this regard constitute significant social changes in terms of their parenting practice. However, the data does not support this suggestion. Instead, their accounts generally 'reaffirm many qualities that typify hegemonic masculine forms and dominance' (Bridges and Pascoe 2014, p. 251) as displayed by men whose power is

undermined. Indeed, gender essentialism enables some men to absolve themselves, without too much criticism, of the less desirable responsibilities that come with fathering on the grounds of gender and age making their participation in some tasks unacceptable.

Finally, men use gender strategically to keep masculinity relevant, this allows fathers to justify their caring as different and necessary at certain times when this is appealing to them (Hanlon, 2012; Pease, 2002). These masculine performances appear to 'blur social and symbolic boundaries [but] they are not necessarily undermining systems of dominance or hegemonic masculinity in any fundamental way' (Bridges and Pascoe 2014, p.248) or at any stage of the father- child relationship. Indeed, the data indicates men place emphasis on time bound practices of fatherhood and masculinity seems to 'respond to increased feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear, so-called ontological insecurities' (Kinnvall, 2018, p.523) specifically because their presence and value as fathers and men is called into question. The small amount of data here suggests that the nature of how men might create a befitting paternal masculinity identity as they age is a key issue for further consideration (Specter-Mersel, 2006).

Chapter 5
CARE

Introduction

Dermott suggests that men's involvement with care underpins the ideology of intimate fatherhood which is 'displayed via the physical and verbal manifestations of the emotional bond which mark out a generational shift in ideals of good fatherhood' (2008, p.7). Yet, Hanlon (2012) points out that despite the opportunity for increasing numbers of men to engage with care, many remain unwilling to engage in some caring practices. This chapter addresses these contradictions in recognising that paternal engagement with some aspects of care is strictly governed by regimes of gender and morality which draw boundaries around what is acceptable for these fathers to do. Further, this boundary drawing has a temporal aspect which overlaps with ideologies of gender and disability in ways that are both opportunistic and disadvantageous for these men specifically (Twigg, 2010). For some men, their willingness to engage with care is a means for them to indicate that they are changing. Men might also enjoy and become fulfilled by care, but their engagement in such practices might be questioned by other people (Featherstone, 2010; Pease, 2002).

Morgan draws on Beck (2002) and Giddens (1991) pointing out the ways in which risk shapes family practices, stating that 'individualized biographies may themselves include some element of deliberate risk management' (2004, p.27) and Lee, Macvarish and Bristow draw on Beck to acknowledge 'the importance of 'parenting' as a key site for the development of the risk-centred society and risk-consciousness' (2010, p. 293). As a result of this ongoing pressure and uncertainty, individuals engage with personal 'reflexive projects' (Giddens, 1991) in which they seek to establish identity narratives which function as 'an anchor for the self' (Weeks, 1998, cited in Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007, p. 53). These identity narratives are often contradictory but reflect the fluidity and temporality which characterises modern family life for these fathers specifically (Morgan, 2004).

The data I present here indicates that fathers' caring includes forms of emotional labour, intimate care, and body work, providing, and the engagement with and organisation of care 'systems' in relation to gendered/ disabled bodies (Hochschild, 1983; Gimlin, 2007; Kerfoot, 2001, Tronto, 1993; 2012; Twigg, 2015). Nevertheless, participants' caring practices 'are patterned by key social divisions, experiences of inequality and intersectional identities based

around age, gender, religion, race/ ethnicity, class, disability, sexuality, and marital and family status' (Hanlon, 2012, p. 36). Therefore, men's reflexive biographies of *the caring self* (Giddens, 1991) tend to reflect risk-averse established social norms (Rose, 1985). Examination of these narratives allows reflection on how men's care is governed, but also indicates that, in some circumstance, fathers with autistic children retain the power to choose which aspects of care they wish to take part in.

Intimate care

My first focus is fathers' engagement with the bodywork that is involved in intimate, physical care. The term 'bodywork' is drawn from work by Twigg (2000) who extends the concept to include work done on the bodies of other people, such as washing or toileting. For most fathers, this is juxtaposed with a different type of body work: that of presenting the self as an appropriately masculine subject (or presenting the body of another, a son, for example) through maintaining distance and independence (Gill, Henwood and Maclean, 2005). Additionally, intimate, and personal bodywork at the interface between fathers and disabled bodies brings issues of embodied sexuality into focus (Featherstone, 2003; Mulvey, 1975; Twigg, 2000).

Fathers are at risk of being stereotyped as less caring than women or mothers but also fear accusations of improper behaviour, most often when they engage in the care of autistic female bodies (Harding, North, and Perkins, 2008). Thus, fathers who engage in such practices will be considered risky (Beck, 2002). Accordingly, these fathers engage in 'a continuous programme of self-monitoring' (Mythen, 2004, pp. 137-8) to distance themselves from accusations of improper conduct and to show their compliance with the overlapping systems of cultural expectations about fathers, and regimes of expert knowledge (Rose, 1985).

Bath Time

Esther Dermott (2008) conceptualises modern Western fatherhood as an intimate relationship between child and father. She suggests this 'is centred on a personal connection at the expense of participation in the work of childcare; because caring activities flow from an emotional connection rather than in themselves constituting the fathering role' (Dermott, 2008, p143). However, for some of the fathers in my study there was, at the very least, the

requirement for them to perform some aspects of their children's intimate care and, for others, a wish to undertake these tasks for their children on a regular basis.

Intimate care takes place at the practical level of 'care giving' (Tronto, 2013, p.22) and involves the management of the self and other at the interface of 'working on or through the bodies of others' (Twigg, 2004, p.68). Intimate care involves 'dealing with human waste', 'negotiating nakedness', and 'direct touch' (Twigg, 2000, p. 395) of other people's bodies. These tasks, of course, have emotional dimensions and carers regulate their emotions accordingly, for example, through concealing embarrassment. However, fathers' engagement in intimate care problematizes the notion of intimate fatherhood and reveals some of the ways in which fathers' engagement in intimate care is governed by ideologies of gender at the interface with the moral, physical, and contextual aspects of care (Stanley and Wise, 1993). The accounts here are therefore 'studies that highlight moral geographies of fathering around a specific context of family space' (Aitken, 2006, p. 214) and illuminate fathers attempts to present themselves as caring subjects in a society increasingly preoccupied with managing risk both internal and external to the family itself (Morgan, 2004; Shirani, Henwood and Coltart, 2012).

Unsurprisingly, David was one of only two fathers in the cohort who discussed intimate care in any great depth. David was recently separated from his wife, and, I had conducted interviews with him several years prior to the breakdown of his marriage. At this point he had gone to great lengths to explain his discomfort in providing intimate care to Rebecca (then aged 10, now aged 14) stating: '*as a dad, you know, it's not right*'. However, after his marriage ended, David became solely responsible for Rebecca's care and that of his son, Paul, and this extended to matters of bathing and toileting. Subsequently, David came under increasing surveillance by social workers, at his ex- wife's insistence, who expressed concern about his engagement with Rebecca's intimate care specifically, although no concerns were raised in relation to Paul, Rebecca's brother, who is also autistic and needs help with intimate care (Scourfield, 2003).

Intimate care is most often provided for elderly people, by paid staff, with the ageing body considered distasteful, burdensome, and unattractive in nature (Twigg, 2004). In contrast, the bodies David, and other fathers care for are the youthful and attractive bodies of teenage sons and daughters. Bathing and showering these youthful bodies is considered a private, gender-

exclusive affair; men looking at the naked bodies of their daughters invoked concerns about perversity, paedophilia, and 'implicit eroticism' (Cover, 2003, p.60) associated with the male gaze specifically (Mulvey, 1975). David's concern about these things is evident in the extract below:

> I give her a bath on a Saturday night if she needs it, you know, if she needs
> it. If she doesn't, I won't, you know, because the girls will bath her, they do
> a fantastic job with her, but if she needs bathing, especially with the soiling
> business, sometimes you've just got to get in the fucking bath.

David is careful to emphasise that Rebecca is only bathed by him when it is strictly necessary, such as when she has had a toileting accident. By indicating that he only bathes Rebecca in these very specific circumstances, he complies with risk-averse discourse and practice (Beck, 1992). His reflections in relation to this reveal the anxiety provoking nature of intimate care for fathers, and his own masculine subjectivity, with its stereotypical associations with sexuality, became an obstacle to be justified and explained away. Risk means that speed and necessity replace touch, trust, and pleasure as the most important aspects of David's care. This is the care that Held describes as relying 'entirely on reason and rationalistic deductions or calculations' (2006, p. 10), as David explains:

> I've never, ever seen it as anything…it's just a function, they need to be
> washed they need to be clean, get in, get done, get out, all done, 10 minutes
> or less. Clean pyjamas, deodorant, back to what you were doing.

According to Furedi (2001) modern parents do not feel they can parent competently without 'help' and guidance from experts. For families with disabled children, a need for help and guidance is assumed, and sometimes welcomed. However, Lee, Macvarish and Bristow point out that 'the relationship between the individual parent and child has become a, and perhaps the key locus for the cultural and political articulation of the idea that society is characterised by the presence of harms to which we must respond in an unprecedented way' (2010, p. 299) and identifying and responding to risk reflects is a means 'to uphold moral orders by means of reinforcing values, norms and lifestyles that are dominant' (Burzynski and Burzynski, 2014, p.10). In specific relation to care, these values and norms are deeply gendered. Therefore, the identification of possible risks posed by parents themselves, which, in David's

case, have problematised his participation in some aspects of Rebecca's care, are gender specific (Evans, 2002) as he clearly understands:

> Its 'cos Rebecca is a young woman; people assume I am having sexual thoughts but excuse me where did that fucking come in? There are women paedos [paedophiles]. You are assuming that every male could be a paedo, and I understand that if she wasn't autistic, she wouldn't want me doing it, she'd have her own agenda, but she's not, so someone has to help her.

My data suggests that being accepted as a father with an autistic child strongly 'depends upon the willingness to comply with the pre-established identity patterns' (Burzynski and Burzynski, 2014, p. 18) laid down by others which extends to the assessment of 'need' and the provision of corporate care although, as Noddings observes, the care provided by organisations cannot replace 'the activation of genuine caring-for, the person-to-person relationship characterized by attention, dialogue, recognition of expressed needs' (2015, p. 76). Accordingly, whilst fathers like David might be aware of the need to conform to expert guidance, they may also be sensitive to its repressive functions and seek to resist its demands:

> So, what do I do? When she needs the loo or a bath or wees herself, am I supposed to ring someone? Fuck off!

The extract indicates David's frustration at this challenge. One aspect of performing a successful masculine self involves the assertion of personal power through resisting being dominated by other people (Connell, 1995). This is one interpretation of David's reaction. However, private businesses and paid carers play a role in the management of potential risks such as those that may be posed by David himself. Indeed, David was so sensitized to this fact and that that often, 'the quality of parenting, rather than the child itself, [becomes] a major focus' (Lowe, Lee, and Macvarish, 2015, p.9) for professionals engaged in child welfare that he kept detailed records on meetings he attended, in the light of investigations by social workers about his competency, explaining:

I use my phone, there's an app, it's called easy voice it's a free app and if I go to the hospital appointment with the kids, I just switch it on, and it just records it, and you can download it onto a pc.

With these points in mind, I suggest that consuming care, or having formal structures of care forced upon fathers, is a 'tool of social integration' (Burzynski and Burzynski, 2014, p. 140) and a method of risk management imposed upon and sometimes willingly taken up by fathers within a framework of gendered social norms and stereotypes which govern care more broadly.

Paid care.

It is interesting that paid care workers (*the girls*- as David refers to them) featured in several fathers' narratives. The frequency of their presence demands an examination of the role support workers and paid carers played in these men's lives. Noddings notes that:

> large organizations such as social services, schools, and nations cannot care directly: that is, they cannot care-for in the sense prescribed by care theory. Caring-for requires a person-to-person relationship in which both carer and cared-for play essential roles. No institution can do this. What it can do is to provide and support the conditions under which caring relations can prosper (Noddings, 2015, p. 83).

I agree with Noddings' statement here. My data suggests that the care provided by organisations did not enable father-child caring relations to grow and develop. In some instances, fathers used carers in 'personal techniques of avoidance' (Mythen, 2004, p. 97) and paid care workers signified compliance with regimes of respectability when paternal involvement with intimate care might be questioned. The following story from Ken, discussing son Ben (18) begins to further these points:

> [At] bedtime he gets to choose a bath or shower, he will go and get undressed, I will come in and make sure he's wiped [after using the toilet] and run the bath or the shower, he's brilliant in the bath, I make sure he doesn't slip and then I get him out, give him a quick dry down and he will

dry the rest of himself off. We [support worker and Ken] wait in the living

room. He rests his head on the door frame and he comes in and gets his

trophy and his reward chart. He gets two stickers, 'today this trophy is

rewarded to Ben for having a top day'. I take him to the kitchen for his

medication, the support worker will [leave] then he gets to brush his teeth

with the Lady Gaga toothbrush, so when one runs out, he gets a new one, he

loves playing the tune on them.

It is notable that, excepting teeth, Ken does not name Ben's body parts or bodily fluids in the extract. Ken's willingness to talk and engage himself with Ben's dental hygiene reveals the contradictions and difficulties he experiences in presenting himself as a good father in a risk society and reflects the policing he experiences in this regard (Gill, Henwood and Maclean, 2005). Ken's active engagement with Ben's dental health is a socially acceptable way for him to demonstrate good fatherhood. On the other hand, engaging with other, more taboo aspects of Ben's care undermines this 'good father' status (Knaak, 2010).

Unlike David, it is interesting that Ken welcomes the help that paid support workers offer in this respect. The touch of paid carers is a sanitized one, their hands represent an 'institutionally guided form of safe contact between practitioners and patients' (Pink, Morgan, and Dainty, 2014, p. 436) that is unlike the informal touch of a paternal, masculine subject on the body of a son or daughter. The presence of care staff formalized care encounters, reflecting the clinical rather than the emotional and relational aspects of intimate care, and thus helps Ken stay indirectly involved with care whilst also managing his discomfort in doing so (Mitchell, 2006; Van Dongen and Elema, 2001).

Morgan (2004) notes that consumption is one way in which families can manage risk, and for these fathers specifically, paid care is one route which enables this. Julie Ann White states that we increasingly see 'care provision as purchasable; we may even have the sense that such care is better exactly because we pay for it' (2015, p.12). However, she goes on to argue that the commodification of care is a feminist matter. Its provision reflects a set of assumptions about who is best to provide care which positions women as the natural providers of such services. Therefore, buying in care on Ben's behalf reveals Ken's risk management involves compliance with dominant ideals regarding the moral and social

standards which govern care. In turn, this enables him to create a socially validated moral and social identity as a male carer specifically (Burzynski and Burzynski, 2014).

Caring about

Ken was not the only father who sketched out a caring identity via the care provided by paid staff. Indeed, Gerrard's (white, married, middle-class) discussion centred on his ability to direct and evaluate the care provided by others. These actions enabled him to display a caring identity with no loss to his masculine status (Held, 2006). As the eldest father in the cohort, Gerrard was unabashed about aligning himself with a gendered division of labour and family life. He expressed strong views about gender and disability, long insisting his son, Anton's (28) diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome was *'complete rubbish'* and claiming that women were *'nurturers'* whilst men were *'organisers',* views he fully expected to be *'lambasted'* for but held onto, nevertheless. Anton's behaviour could be a challenge, but paid support workers took on much of the day-to-day responsibility for his care as they supported him in activities outside the home. This included attending woodwork classes as well as participating in social activities such as playing snooker. However, Anton's unpredictable behaviour meant arranged activities did not always go to plan. Gerrard explains the impact of this on him and his wife, below:

> We are more on call than we used to be. They [support workers] might
> bring him home early when we want the break. You know you think 'he's
> not safe with you', but you are bringing him home to be with us. That's a
> clever thing, isn't it? Sometimes in a four- hour session they might bring
> him home in the first hour, and we are just planning to go and do
> something.

Anton had quite significant, unresolved issues. He had frequent seizures and had also spent time detained in hospital under the Mental Health Act. Gerrard recalls demanding that Anton's doctors take him into hospital for an assessment:

> It costs thousands of pounds to get him in there and it was my records that
> won that argument. Otherwise, he was just too complicated, the doctors
> said, 'We don't know what is causing what'. And my records showed them

that the medication was making a mess of him. They would not believe it

until I showed them the official evidence.

Gerrard's words indicate that to be attentive to and responsible for Anton's care does not necessarily require hands on involvement. Education, professional background, and social class buys middle-class men degrees of respect that working-class fathers might be denied. Therefore, men like Gerrard may be respected as fathers despite a distant style of fatherhood (La Rossa, 1997; Shows and Gerstel,2009). Their privilege, and the confidence that flows from this, allows them to question the opinions of medical and educational experts, and this is an indicator of caring about (Osovold, Aarseth and Bondevik, 2017). Gerrard's fathering practices reflect his ability to manage risk from a distance as a middle-class masculine subject (Tronto, 2013; Morgan, 2004).

Furthermore, Gerrard's narratives about caring were sometimes difficult for me to listen to, suggesting the lack of value he placed on those that provide care. For example, on one occasion I heard a telephone conversation between Gerrard and Anton's carer. Gerrard spoke to the carer in a manner that I felt was disrespectful and unnecessary and explained how inconvenienced he was as a result of having to attend to the carers' concerns about Anton's well-being that day. This is termed by Tronto (1993) as *privileged irresponsibility* a concept described by Zembylas, Bozalek, and Shefer as 'how those receiving caring services for their needs do not acknowledge that they are dependent on these services in order to live well in the world' (2014, pp. 200-201). Thus, the meaning of care differed from father to father, although all were informed by risk in one way or another. Some men's biographies of care reflected alignment with patriarchal ruling relations in ways that allow men to 'direct' care and thus manage risk from a distance, without a great deal of involvement or justification as to why this is so, and with no loss to a masculine identity (Jordan, 2020).

Risk can be identified by others 'who make distinctions between family and non- family…or between functional and dysfunctional families' (Morgan, 2004, p. 19) and a provider discourse is common to fathering ideology and policy and is difficult for men to avoid without being labelled as a scrounger or deadbeat dad (Neale and Davies, 2016). However, men can also attempt to assert masculine privilege or demand they be included in discussions about care through drawing on the 'essential father' discourse (Popenoe, 1996). The next set of extracts from single father, Mark, illustrates some of these subtleties and contradictions.

Mark, who had weekend and occasional weekday custody of his daughter, Tina (14) felt his caring was only valued in terms of providing economically. He explained that:

> The benefits system forces me into work over care, the job centre says [he must work] 35 hours a week. The social worker won't do anything for me. Once I had to take Rebecca in the jobcentre with me and the person in charge of my claim sanctioned me for not going to an interview. I have had an issue with bedroom tax, and I had to go to Shelter [housing charity] The [local council] have been ridiculous, no help whatsoever. They send me bills and penalise me for looking after my daughter, council tax liability order. I have to pay all this, and I had to go and sign on and then I don't get any child related benefits so have to look for 35 hours a week jobs, and all I can actually do is support work as it fits around my childcare, and it interferes with your benefits. I don't get any money for her at all, there are things we can't do because of my financial situation.

Tronto acknowledges 'the construction of "protection" and economic participation as the central aspect of an adult, mature, life' going on to suggest that a 'masculine aversion to some forms of caring is an outcome of some responsibility games' (2013, p 70) which allows men to absolve themselves from caring practices. Nevertheless, single fathers face similar problems to those experienced by single mothers in combining work and care, and as the extract indicates, the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) does not recognise Mark's caring responsibilities. The experience of bring sanctioned (having money deducted from his benefits for a specific time period) affirms that single parents are expected to prioritise seeking paid work over any other responsibilities they may have (Cain, 2016). Socio-economic deprivation affects the types of activities parents and children can engage in and leads to poor long-term outcomes for families overall (Dermott and Pomati, 2016; Marmot, 2010). Nevertheless, it is important to note that Mark only has limited contact with and responsibility for his daughter. Nevertheless, Mark also felt he was denied the opportunity to contribute to the formal systems of care around Tina (14) explaining:

> You end up not being recognised. She [Tina's mum] told me to be quiet at the last meeting [with social workers]. She said, 'these people know more than you', I said 'these people aren't her dad'.

Although social policies which affirm the importance of marriage, family life and paternal economic responsibilities have had a negative impact on Mark, he nevertheless falls back into a similarly right-wing populist narrative which reflects his belief that he should be listened to and provided for on equal terms with Tina's mother simply because he is Tina's biological father (Popenoe, 1986). Other fathers articulated somewhat similar ideas which foregrounded the necessity and sometimes, the superiority of their care in contrast to that of mothers despite not having been present in their children's lives when they were younger until circumstances made this necessary. Smart and Neale (1999) note that this is a tactic some men draw on following divorce or separation, as the following extract from Ken indicates:

> I didn't know how much his D.L.A. [Disability Living Allowance] was and I found out she [Ben's mum] was keeping half, and in the end, I thought 'it doesn't look like he's going back, he's gonna live with me', so I may as well go above board. I got in touch with the benefits people, and they said she should have told us about the changes, so she owed money back. Got it sorted, everything legit, but she was basically robbing her own son and he wasn't getting anything. I was sending food round and into school and I'd make sure there was food in his bag. She wasn't taking him anywhere. It was supervised so he wasn't seeing any of it [the D.L.A.]. Every penny now goes on him, what he doesn't spend is in his bank account, it's his money nobody else's and I've heard parents do spend kids' D.L.A. I think that's wrong, it's for taxis and that.

Although Ben was removed from his mother's care because she had developed problems with alcohol which compromised her ability to provide good enough care, Ken was absent from much of Ben's childhood. However, Ken does not discuss his relatively minor role in Ben's life prior to this event. Similarly, Mark had been through the family courts to gain access to his daughter, Tina, but did not specify why he had been denied access in the first place.

Ken's narrative, like Mark's, touches on themes of women's rights gone too far which in turn allow fathers to justify their engagement necessary and natural but simultaneously draw limits around what this responsibility should be (Dragiewtiz, 2011; Flood, 2004; Jordan 2009, Popenoe, 1996). These responsibilities often aligned with socially validated discourses of

moral fathering, masculinity and male care which may function to offset the 'risks' their positioning as single fathers might convey (Morgan, 2004).

The data I have presented so far suggests that professionals and fathers themselves are risk averse and unclear about what contributions fathers could or should make to the care of their children. I have shown that the care with which these men engage 'is not then below or outside politics, as is so commonly assumed, but intimately tied up with the most basic political question: how can order be established and maintained' (Engster, 2015, p. 244) and at times, fathers draw on these very ideas in order to constitute themselves as effective parents. Accordingly, fathers understand care as a multifaceted concept which intersects with gender, power, and risk. Their direct involvement in some aspects of care invites surveillance as it contradicts with widely accepted social and moral ideals to do with gender and care (Beck, 2002; Rose, 1985). The paid care system allows some fathers to constitute themselves as caring subjects by allowing them to organise direct care or surrender to surveillance and monitoring without fearing criticism, although not all fathers experienced this as advantageous (Connell, 1995; Held, 2006; Jordan, 2016; Noddings, 2015). Accordingly, my data suggests that fathers who use paid carers are considered morally preferable to those who reject their assistance (Burzynski and Burzynski, 2014). Finally, I have shown that as most women, rather than men, continue to be burdened with caring responsibilities and this division 'accord[s] with society's values' (Tronto, 2015, p. 4). Nevertheless, some fathers tended to blame policy systems that privileged women for their exclusion from care and care decisions without reflecting on their privilege in being able to opt out of some care responsibilities (Jordan, 2016).

Things

So far, I have used extracts to suggest that whilst some men can use their masculine status to excuse themselves from some aspects of care, the governance of men also problematizes them as carers beyond their function as economic providers. This limits their engagement with the care of their children, denying them the pleasures of caring's physical and emotional complexity. However, Isaksen observes that some carers develop 'special techniques to distance themselves from those they care for' (2002, p.799).

Various authors, including Barad (2003) have drawn on Marx and Althusser in referring to the processes of 'thingification' described as 'the coalescence of social determinations with

natural-material ones' (Tairako, 2018, p2). In the following section, I want to suggest that 'thingification' allows fathers to distance themselves from the aspects of care they understand to be taboo, whilst simultaneously creating new, more socially valid caring identities through consumption and provision. According to Holt and Thompson, 'masculine ideologies, embedded in mass culture discourses, are understood and used in different ways depending upon the social positions of the consumer. So, in addition to discourse, we must also study socially situated consumption practices, that is, how men variously interpret and act on the mass culture discourse in their consumption' (2004, p. 427). Accordingly, things are tools with which fathers can produce narratives of the self which reflect their awareness of how paternal engagement with care is regulated but also allow them to produce meaningful, sometimes superior identities as carers of autistic children specifically (Barnes, 2012; Lovatt, 2018; Morgan, 2004).

Ben's toothbrush

Ken's reflections on Ben's his dental health were far more detailed than any of his other discussions in relation to his involvement with Ben's care and seemed to provide a vehicle for Ken to discuss care without appearing over involved. Ben's Lady Gaga toothbrush was a particular focus within this discussion:

> He's got a Lady Gaga toothbrush my mum got him one and he loved it that much I said, 'Where did you get it, I don't care what it costs?' So, I got about 10.

On one hand, supplying objects in a material sense ties in with dominant paternal-provider discourses, thus they may enable Ken to attain degrees of ontological security in that they reflect the moral and cultural norms of fatherhood (Bettany, Kerrane and Hogg, 2014). Another way to interpret Ken's words here is to draw on Bourdieu who acknowledges that 'luxury goods, legitimate cultural goods or the legitimate manner of appropriating them' can function as deliberate strategies by which 'members of a group seek to distinguish themselves' from others (1984, pp. 249-250). However, Ken's provision of toothbrushes does not always map onto these theoretical points of consideration.

Corrigan (2004) remarks that things do not always function as simple commodities. Belk draws on Sartre in 'suggesting that doing is merely a transitional state or a manifestation of

the more fundamental desires to have or to be' (1988, p.146). Accordingly, several different 'things' allowed men to engage in 'high tech, low touch' (Bettany et al., 2014, p. 1549) care practices which may be undertaken given their awareness of how some aspects of male care is governed (Rose, 1985). In some circumstances, objects can perform an essential moral function as 'things can, in certain conditions, be or act like persons' (Hoskins, 2006, p.81) and the use of 'things' by Ken and by other fathers from the cohort may be 'linked to the rise in the importance of the body as a project that can provide ontological security in terms of one's individual identity' (Robertson, 2006, p.443). In other words, if engagement with the bodies of others invokes ontological insecurity, fathers like Ken may use 'things' like toothbrushes to distance themselves from notions of the taboo and create narratives of the self that are reassuring and 'safe' (Giddens, 1991).

'My dad had a lecky razor and it took the fucking face off me'.

Bray (2007) claims that objects, technologies, and artefacts generally 'coded as male' allow the exploration of 'how particular gendered identities are attributed, achieved, and performed' (p.37, p.41) and in illustration of this, stories about razors and shaving emerged frequently in fathers' interviews. Growing, and shaving facial hair, and knowledge of the processes of doing so, are markers of masculinity (Dixson, Rantala, Melo and Brooks, 2017). Further, fathers saw introducing their sons into shaving as a rite of passage whereby transition from child to adult masculine status was affirmed (Bjornsen, 2000). In turn, these discussions allowed fathers to draw on an essential father paradigm (Popenoe, 1996) through suggesting a specific need for paternal engagement with tasks involving the care of *some* parts of the masculine body. David explained about Paul:

> See his little 'tash there? That's another thing, I've got to resolve the
> shaving. He watches me when I'm wet shaving. I say, 'come on do you
> want to have a go?' but he backed away the other day. Then he put his face
> on mine 'cos it's all smooth 'feel daddy's face'. But I don't know whether
> to do a dry or wet, I'll have to figure it out.

As David reflected on approaching shaving for the first time, his thoughts on the task at hand and the tools required to carry this out were influenced by his sons' needs as an autistic person. But David's narrative also reflects memories of his relationships with his own father (now deceased) which influence his aspirations as a father in the present:

With the shaving I might have to buy a real good lecky [electric] razor, 'cos when I started shaving, I was a kid, my dad had a lecky razor and it took the fucking face off me, I hated it. Now obviously there will be much better technology so you can get a smooth shave. I dunno, I might have a go showing him it on me first and then trying to approach him with it, but I think I've seen documentaries of autistic adults on the telly, and they've got full beards and there must be a reason for that, the sensory issue, they just don't like people going near them. 'Cos you know I'd have to shave him, and I only wet shave, and obviously, when you start shaving you've got to keep it up you know. It's gonna be at least every week to give him a going over, you know. I still bath him or shower him he still needs help with that.

David's emphasis on the *quality of the razor* he intends to buy for Paul brings David's relationship with his own father into focus. Fathers compare their parenting to the parenting of their own fathers and 'research suggests that the father's relationship with his own father may be a factor either through identifying with his father or compensating for his father's lapses' (Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson, 1998, p.288). Others have argued that whilst not set in stone, a man's own experience of being fathered may be a factor in enabling him to parent well (Brown, Kogan and Jihyoung; 2018; Hanlon, 2012; Von Jessee and Adamsons, 2018). Therefore, David's words illustrate the importance of recognising that 'the gendered aspects of care need to be viewed through the lens of history' (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006, p. 349). His recollections reveal that induction into shaving remains a father-son specific task. However, his reflections indicate how fathering changes intergenerationally. His words reveal his engagement with the relational and emotional aspects of Paul's care that seems lacking from his own father's approach and thus indicate some shifts in how men engage with care (Hanlon, 2012).

In the light of David's discussion, it is interesting that he was not the only father who placed emphasis on purchasing an expensive electric razor for his son. Lucas's father Joel also explained how he went to a high-end department store to buy a top of the range razor which Lucas later smashed to pieces, to his dad's great annoyance, and Ken, Ben's (18) dad, made the following remark:

> I have to shave him. He loves it! I got an electric one, but I give him a wet
>
> shave and he loves it. He stays still as anything.

Pols remarks that 'health care, and particularly health-care technologies, are often put in opposition to warm human care and contact. Technologies are assumed to be cold, rational and functional' (2010, p.143). Additionally, unlike other forms of intimate care, there is little risk involved in providing razors and facilitating shaving, and these objects enable fathers to reclaim lost intimacy, or intimacy denied. Shaving seems a socially sanctioned way for these fathers to be physically close to and tactile with their sons. Indeed, Tomasi states that 'there is an aspect of technology that lends itself to an appreciation of the role of intimacy in the successful use of devices embedded in our everyday life' (2008, p.1) and technological objects such as razors and toothbrushes become extensions of the human body which offer new routes for men to reconstruct male care and display intimacy in line with societal expectations (Robinson and Hockey, 2011).They allows fathers to show care and display intimacy and intimate knowledge about their sons in ways that previous generations of men could not. But these objects have a dual function, allowing fathers to construct themselves as carers in risk- free terms which reflect gendered norms and expectations in the absence of viable alternatives (Finkenauer and Buyukcan-Tetik, 2015; Morgan, 2004; Tomasi, 2008).

'But it's the pleasure in his face.'

What I have tried to do so far is show that these fathers engage with the practices of consumption and provision of goods, services, and people, because 'consumption is a structure' (Ritzer, 1998; p.15) which has permeated risk and affected the gendered division of care for these men specifically. Accordingly, provision allows fathers to construct meaningful caring identities in the light of restrictions placed on them in other spheres of their lives (Holt and Thompson, 2004). In the next set of extracts, I develop this focus further and suggest that giving can be 'described as a means through which individuals communicate the values which they assign to their significant others' (Cheal, 1987, p.150). For these fathers, knowing which 'things' to provide signals personal knowledge and so is a means to express intimacy within relationships and thus may constitute caring in masculine terms (Elliott, 2010; Finkenauer and Buyukcan- 2015; Shanahan, Tran and Taylor, 2019). Indeed, talking about providing things was common to several fathers from the cohort, for example, Mark made the following remark about Tina (14):

She's very fussy with ice cream, you go into Tesco's she's not gonna pick cheap ones, she wants the Cart D'or. Here she is playing the ukulele, she's got a guitar as well.

David made the following comment about Rebecca (14):

She will ask for some chocolate, it's one of the things that she still signs for, chocolate, and we'll have a little game doing that, you know, bringing it over and picking out something. She picks out the same thing every time, a packet of Maltesers. It's always the same but I try to make it a little game.

He also made the following remark about taking Paul (15) to the toyshop to buy a much-wanted toy:

I know, it's really expensive, I tried to get him to pick something cheaper. I gave in eventually and succumbed to his pressures, but it's the pleasure in his face when he gets something he really wants you know.

The final extract is from Ken, in which he is describing Ben's fascination with drills:

He started with a toy drill in school, and it would do his head in 'cos it wouldn't drill and would mark the wall, so I told him the bin man took it. I started him off with a cordless low vault screwdriver and progressed up and now he probably has one of the fastest drills you can buy, he has the bits so he can put screws in as well, and banging nails in, he gets them dead straight, he does some sawing, he's got a proper workbench, and a block of wood indoors. He loves his hi-viz jacket and hard hat, he has also got a tool belt and gloves.

Baudrillard points out that excess and accumulation are considered 'the signs of happiness' (1998, p. 31) and discussing the things they provided for their sons and daughters enabled fathers to meet with socially mandated discourses of fathers as providers. However, these narratives are not really about the provision of ice cream or chocolate, or drills and toys. Cheal (1986) suggests that giving is an expression of personal identity and 'an indicator of

conventional morality. Through their decision to give, individuals make statements about their relationships to the society in which they live' (Cheal, 1986, p. 423) and about their relationship with the recipient of the gift. Cheal also states that 'careful analysis of the structuration of intimacy reveals some important limits to the autonomy of family life in capitalist society' (1987, p.151). These narratives are therefore a means for fathers to indicate the strong emotional bond and loving relationship between them and their child within the dictates that society imposes on them (Hanlon, 2012; Lynch 2007). They suggest that fathers invest in provision as a means to display intimate knowledge and caring masculinity

Love and laughter: 'I can't put it into words.

In this final section, I want to continue my discussion with a focus on the emotional dimensions of things given to fathers by their children themselves. I include an analysis of material objects, but I also want to consider the value fathers placed on non- material experiences, for example, spending time with their children. This is an important dimension of reciprocal care that takes place in most families but is sometimes overlooked in studies where disability is a focus, thus, adding to the idea that disabled people are a burden and that care is one way (Barnes, 2012). This is well summed up in the narrative from David, below:

> I love those little moments when Paul comes and sits in your space. I get so much pleasure from it. He's got such an energy about him you can't help but wanna be in it.

The extract suggests that David, like most of the fathers from the cohort, did not experience their children as tragic, nor did they necessarily see care as something that was only provided by them to their children, rather care flowed both ways between father and child and vice versa (Barnes, 2012). Cheal suggests that 'the reproduction of a private life-world of significant others requires, at a minimum, communicating to those significant others the fact that they are indeed significant' (1987, p. 155). Thus, fathers saw the flow of things from their children as an indicator of their own significance and 'mattering'.

To further illustrate this, I draw next on an extract from Ken, discussing son, Ben (18) to show that things such as greetings cards that are given to us can have deeply emotional significance, becoming a 'happy object' (Ahmed, 2010, p. 33):

> It's when he comes up and says, 'I love you dad, you care for me and look
> after me and feed me' and when I first found out about the autism, I thought
> he won't show affection, but he loves cuddling me. I'm proud of how he
> handled everything with his mum, going to respite and being away from
> me. I can't put it into words just how he's come on. When he first copied
> his name, and he can do it by himself little things like that. The Father's
> Day cards he has made me, things like that…What I had Googled about
> autism was quite upsetting, heart-breaking, 'just show some affection'- so
> it's brilliant that he does, and his manners, I'm very proud. And when he
> goes to bed, he's still saying 'thanks for getting me a subway dad'.

In the extract, the value of an object such as a home- made Fathers' Day card lies not in its monetary value, but in its power to invoke memories and emotions. Cards are metaphors which allow Ken to feel significant when messages from elsewhere render him insecure, as greetings cards can 'reiterate or perform existing statuses and relationships, or to propose or express new relationships and identities in interaction' (Jaffe, 1999, p. 116). But what really brings the significance of the card to life is an analysis of the meanings Ken attaches to it. As Mauss acknowledges, not all gift giving is representative of a 'rational economic system' (1996, ix) and so, a hand- made card serves as a metaphor for the emotionally intimate and personal nature of Ben and Ken's relationship; cards that are shop- bought don't carry quite the same level of significance (Lovatt, 2018).

The emotionally intimate relationship between father and child was a focus for other fathers, often made evident through speaking about their children's sense of humour and the laughter they shared together. Humour and laughter can be subversive and resistant, and humour is a powerful tool of communication; laughter creates bonds between people through shared experiences and interactions (Ansesi, 2018). Albrecht (1999) observes that some forms of disability humour can redefine disability and challenge what some might assume to be a tragic existence. Indeed, fathers often found their autistic sons and daughters to be hilarious. For example, David made the following remark about Rebecca:

> Here's Rebecca on her way back from a walk. She lies on the floor in the
> street and kisses the tarmac on both sides. She's been doing it for years. I
> have no idea why she does it, she's like the Pope.

Additionally, when discussing the difficulties of getting appropriate dental care for the children, David also stated:

> I had meeting with the anaesthetist … All these procedures, it's a
> nightmare, and then it's the recovery. It weighs heavy. It would be great if
> they could just dart them! Fucking get in there get it done.

According to Smith Rainey laughing about disability in this way is 'essential to the psychological health' (2011, p.93) of those in disabled and non-disabled relationships. In contrast to disabling humour which 'reaffirms stereotypes and prejudices, perpetuates oppression and isolation, and functions as an exclusionary practice' (Hamscha, 2016, p.360) fathers jokes about their experiences of parenting an autistic child, and the things their children did and said were not expressed with this intent. However, these are 'inside jokes' which others who have not shared such experiences might not understand or may find distasteful (Albrecht, 1999). Moreover, acknowledging the funny aspects of their relationships with their children allowed fathers to challenge stereotypes of autism and the idea that their relationships were burdensome or lacking in enjoyment. For example, Mark, a single dad who has part time custody of his teenage daughter, Tina, made the following remark about the time they spent together:

> There's so much humour, we have a right laugh. She left chocolate on the
> toilet roll so it looks like poo. But I love that because there are those
> stereotypes about autism and no humour.

He continued:

> She has an odd sense of humour, one fella that watches the band, he has
> Aspergers[7] and he has a brilliant sense of humour. It's not easy to get on to
> but it's very dry. She is very sarcastic, is it a scouse thing? She says she
> likes dogs, but I know she doesn't, so she does things like that to throw you
> sometimes. She just thinks the whole process is hilarious.

---

[7] Asperger Syndrome is a form of autism (see asperger syndrome (autism.org.uk)

Mark's narrative, like most of extracts I have presented in this chapter, challenges deficit models of autism and the persistence of stereotypes which claim that autistic people 'are less able than their non-autistic peers in understanding others (or, in the more extreme cases, being unable to appreciate that others have different feelings and thoughts to themselves)' (Chown, 2014, p.1672). These narratives are examples of what Bogdan and Taylor (1989) refer to as 'the social construction of humanness', a process whereby non – disabled people seek to affirm the humanity of disabled friends and family. Indeed, an emergent theme common to all the extracts in this final section is this two-way process; affirming positive and meaningful identities for, relationships with, and observing happiness and feeling love for, from and in interaction with their children provides fathers with a degree of validation that they need to feel they are fathering well but also challenges the notion of the care of autistic children as burdensome. However, the opportunity for fathers to share these humorous moments seemed rare, and, in illustration of this, Tom told me how he would love to write a book about the funny incidents he and his son Lucas had experienced, suggesting '*we should write one*' (including me as co- author). This statement indicates that most fathers found parenting an autistic child to be an isolating experience and their exclusion was sometimes quite profound.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a rare insight into the values and practices of fathers with autistic children in relation to the concept of care. Discussing 'care' provoked intense and varied responses from my participants, and so it is a useful lens for the scrutiny of masculine subjectivity and governance, enabling an examination of men's attitudes towards care (Hanlon, 2012). I have suggested that men's narratives in relation to this are a means by which they seek to define themselves as carers in the face of the insecurity they feel in the context of the risk society (Giddens, 1991; Morgan, 2004).

The conditions of modernisation have, according to Beck (2002) unsettled old ideas about the family, marriage, and, arguably, have enabled women to free themselves from their 'old' roles within the domestic sphere. Although Beck had less to say about men than he did about women, it could be said that these major sociocultural shifts in contemporary family life create a similar paradigm shift for men, with new possibilities for fathers specifically to 'do' fatherhood in ways that previous generations of men could not (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007). I have suggested that the arena of care is a significant aspect of family life that has yet

to be affected by these ideals. It is precisely through focusing on men's engagement in the ordinariness of care through, examining bathing and sleeping, for example, that we come to see how disability, age, and gender become constituted and policed in relation to one another in the context of care. Disability is just one of many influences which dictate how care is carried out and by whom (Ryan and Runswick-Cole, 2008). Accordingly, the data indicates that fathers' understanding of what counts as 'care' is not clear and cannot be separated from the social, relational, emotional, and political contexts of men's lives (Ribbens McCarthy, 2000). Nevertheless, women, and professional carers rather than men, are still considered the ideal providers of most aspects of care to autistic children (Noddings, 2015).

I began with an analysis of men's engagement in intimate care. Unsurprisingly, there are deafening silences in the literature from fathers who engage with the intimate care of disabled teenage children as it is here that discourses of risk are at their most intense. The data here attempts to speak into this gap, but in doing so, reflects gendered nature of the systems and processes that constitute paternal engagement with the care of autistic children in the risk society (Beck, 2002). Mythen observes that 'risk is constructed via the reproduction of ideas and values' (2004, p. 97) and I have shown that fathers experience 'techniques of social administration' (Beck, 2002; Rose, 1985, p.7) which monitor and shape their caring in gender-specific ways. One of the functions of this process for the fathers in my study was the fairly seamless reproduction of social ordering in terms of gendered practices and engagement with care as the 'psy' gaze was turned on them as well as their children (Rose, 1985).

Further data in this chapter indicates that 'at the heart of consumption [is the] total organization of everyday life' (Baudrillard 1998, p.29) and consumption overlaps with care for these fathers in several different ways. I have shown that professional paid carers function to offset the scrutiny fathers face. David experienced this as highly intrusive, whilst other fathers found that paid carers increased their individual parenting value as masculine subjects as they complied with normative gender regimes. Moving on, I suggested that objects are tools that in some instances, protected fathers against vulnerability and risk, offering men a socially sanctioned way to practice and discuss 'care' and convey intimacy through ensuring any suggestion of inadequacy is managed (Morgan, 2004). A focus on the materiality of intimate care specifically enables us to see the enactment of highly individual socially

acceptable compensatory masculine/ paternal and caring identities specifically by these men (Holt and Thompson, 2004; Robinson, 2014).

In relation to this, the narratives I have offered here also allow a questioning of the place technology plays in fathers' practices of care. On one hand, technology purges the humanity from care (Mitcham, 1994). On the other hand, as Downes, Holloway and Randles remark 'one of the main points emphasized in the recent 'material turn' in historical scholarship is the importance of reciprocity in the object–subject relationship' (2018, n.p.). Thus, things are not always simple commodities, they have their own 'biographies' (Corrigan, 2004, p.33) which tell us about relationships between people and within families, they enable understanding of how patterns of fathering, masculinity, and care change intergenerationally and relationally as David's narrative about his dad's old razor indicates (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006). Further, as Mauss (1950) notes, giving is a complex phenomenon and cannot be reduced to a simple analysis of the value of a material object or the morality of the giver. Thus, objects given to others can be indicative of the nature of human relationships, and these fathers' narratives about providing stuff for their children may be understood as demonstrations of parental love and intimate knowledge expressed through the socially mandated act of giving (Cheal, 1987).

Furthermore, some objects are materially without much value but are emotionally priceless (Downes, Holloway and Randles, 2018). Things that are given to fathers by children can be deeply emotionally and relationally significant (Ahmed, 2010). Providing things, and, being given things in return allows fathers to express love and receive love as an important but often overlooked dimension of their caring relationships (Lynch, 2007; Noddings, 2015). Thus, fathers use 'things' to constitute a 'caring masculinity' and to demonstrate care within their relationships (Elliott, 2016). Finally, I have shown that fathers use narratives of fun and laughter as a vehicle to challenge negative stereotypes about poor parenting, risk, care, and their relationships with autistic people (Shakespeare, 1999).

This chapter theorises in new ways about male care. I have suggested that fathers' engagement with direct care is shaped by their positioning as masculine subjects and in relation to the tenuous concept of risk, and this positioning is both opportunistic and constraining. Men can choose to opt out of care in ways that women cannot with no loss to status (Vuori, 2009). However, this was not something all the fathers wanted to do.

Nevertheless, many of these fathers invested in the material and emotional aspects of care as a means to 'risk manage' their parenting. They understood that their involvement in these practices were less likely to invite scrutiny and questioning (Morgan, 2004; Herz, 2017).

Chapter 6
PLACE

Introduction

This chapter discusses the use of space by fathers with autistic children. Space 'is both a concrete physical product as well as a constantly changing pattern of human relationships' (Zylstra, 2017, pp. 563-54). The design of spaces can reinforce social categories and shape social relations in line with normative expectations regarding who should enter and how entrants should behave. Notably, ideologies of sexuality, gender and morality undergird the heteronormative regulation of space (Hubbard, 2000). On the other hand, people give meaning to space. Through spatial practices, individuals and groups can exercise power and claim as normative their presence within those contexts (Delaney and Rannila,2020). Geographies of disability have recognised the relationship between place and people with disabilities (Davidson and Henderson, 2010; Imrie and Edwards, 2007) just as geographies of gender have acknowledged the importance of understanding the social and spatial organisation of gender relations (Bondi, 1991; Massey, 1994; 2004). In comparison to this substantive body of work, geographies of fathering are fewer, and, according to Aitken, 'remain hidden because they are awkward, rarely fitting the geography of public ventures and power' (2005, p. 207) which have defined masculine/ feminine use of space in clumsy and dichotomous ways.

The data in this chapter uses fathers' narratives of feeling a sense of exclusion or 'belonging' as a lens to examine the fluctuating and contextual nature of men's power (Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Hopkins and Noble, 2009; May, 2013; Morgan, 2011). Hanlon (2012) notes that feeling a sense of belonging is important in shaping men's engagement with care. Therefore, I consider the ways in which gender and disability can have an exclusionary and segregating function which can limit men's engagement with autistic children (Allman, 2012; McConkey et al., 1982; 1983) but an intersectional analysis recognises that men's power is variously strengthened and weakened in different times and locations (Kilvington- Dowd and Robertson, 2020). My research also examines 'how the concept of 'autism' is articulated in different contexts' (O'Dell, 2017, p.170) but also considers how the concepts of masculinity and fathering overlap with disability, age, class, sexuality and morality. The data suggests that some men actively seek out contexts coded as male or working-class (Hörschelmann and van Hoven, 2005). On other occasions, despite experiencing gender and disability

discrimination, some of these men benefit from their marginalised positioning as paternal, masculine, working-class subjects and this enables them to gain affirmation and validation as fathers that they do not receive elsewhere (Broomes, 2020; Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Gueta, Gamiel and Ronel, 2021).

'People don't ever talk in blokes' toilets.'

Foucauldian (1977) analysis of space recognises how disciplinary power works through segregation and control. These insights have been used to good effect in the geographies of disability and gender literature (for example, Graham, Treharne, and Nairn, 2017; Tremain, 2015). A frequently cited point in research is the scrutiny of parents with disabled children face in public settings, although most of this work has had a focus on mothers (Hall, 2004; Power, 2008; Ryan, 2010; Ryan and Runswick- Cole, 2008). Therefore, I want to acknowledge that disablism functions with sexism as systems of exclusion that, at times, made the lives of these children and their fathers extremely difficult.

As Groce (2004) observes, disabled children are often excluded from in the leisure activities most children engage in, and these children were no exception, as David (separated, autistic son and daughter) explains:

> When they were younger, I used to take them [swimming] its open
> changeys [changing rooms]in the baths but they were kids at the time.

The extract illustrates the restrictions Groce (2004) discusses. Changing rooms are like public toilets in they are spaces which 'create' gender, age, and disability, enforcing divisions between children and parents and affecting fathers' parenting practices accordingly (Faktor, 2011). The extract indicates that David felt unable to assist his teenage daughter, Rebecca, in getting changed in this context. These are powerful examples of the structural and interpersonal effects of discrimination faced by autistic children and their fathers in the taken for granted contexts of everyday life (Link and Phelan, 2014). Nevertheless, the extract, and the others to follow, also enable consideration of how 'masculinities are socially and culturally constructed and shaped by social relations …by looking at the ways in which masculinities and male identities vary over spaces and across time' (Hopkins and Noble, 2009, p. 814) and how they are variously imposed on and taken up by these fathers specifically.

For several fathers, something as routine as a child using a public toilet presented as a problem that needed careful planning for, as David explained:

> It's a fucking nightmare to be honest. I don't need to be out with Rebecca, she's always with girls [from the residential unit] but prior to that it would have to be a disabled toilet because I can't walk into a ladies' loo and as she's getting older there's the issue of personal care.

James (married, two sons and one daughter, all autistic) stated:

> A lot depends on age, up to 10 or 11 they go in the women's toilets, or in the men's, regardless of gender of the child, they go with us. When it's both of us one or the other will go in and tell them what to do and build it up. We train them to what they are supposed to do so they can do it on their own.

Ingrey claims that 'for all bodies, the permanent structure of the public washroom represents a very potent and living practice of gender regulation and punishment' (2012, p. 799). In accordance with this statement, both extracts suggest these fathers understand and experience gender and age surveillance on an individual and collective level, and it is this, rather than disability, which informs how they constitute themselves and their sons and daughters in the context of a public toilet, and they shape their behaviours accordingly. David continues:

> With Paul, he's more able. If we are out and he needs the loo, he doesn't go himself. If he needs a wee and goes to a urinal in his tracky bottoms and will drop his kecks [trousers], that's not appropriate, a big 15- year-old fella with a bare arse, so what we do if there's a cubicle, we will take him there. If there's a disabled loo, even better. But if he goes for a poo, he doesn't clean himself properly. I will close the cubicle door and stand outside. He needs to go in the cubicle, he can't just drop his kecks, he's got no inhibitions.

Humphreys' (1975) infamous study '*Tearoom trade: impersonal sex in public places'* discusses men's use of public toilets to meet other men for sex. At that that time, homosexual men were considered deviant and their sexual practices taboo. On the other hand, drawing on

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), and Giddens (1991), Plummer suggests that 'what it means to be 'a man' or 'a woman', or 'the truth' of our sexuality' (2003, p.19) are increasingly losing their relevance as concepts of social organisation. Accordingly, for some men, perhaps, 'the cultural association of masculinity with heterosexuality [has been] unyoked from compulsory heterosexuality' (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014, p. 248) with Crookston (2020) suggesting that queer identities are now considered mainstream. Despite these claims, Moore and Breeze state that for most men specifically, 'public toilets are nightmarish spaces' (2012, p1178). These authors draw on Tuan's (1979) concept of 'landscapes of fear', suggesting that public toilets 'take us outside of, or lie at the margins of, regular social space [and] can be particularly fear-inducing' (Moore and Breeze, 2012, p.1172). Furthermore, as public toilets have ongoing connotations with homosexuality, so they require the correct performance of heterosexual masculinity to stave off unwanted attention from other men (Ingrey, 2012; Phoenix, Frosh and Pattman, 2003). David's words mirror these concerns:

> People don't ever talk in blokes' toilets! No-one says nothing. Its peculiar.
> Women are always talking anyway. There is the idea that men are predatory
> and the concept of blokes' toilets, I remember the old toilets and they were
> pick up joints for gays, and if people are hanging around or talking in a
> toilet there's that connotation, so there's that 'just get in don't talk and get
> out'.

Whilst none of the fathers discussed homosexuality in discriminatory ways, the data suggests that public toilets remain a context where a heterosexual masculine identity can be threatened. In these contexts, fathers monitor their own behaviour and the behaviour of their sons to present themselves as appropriately masculine. In doing so, they invest in performances of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Phoenix, Frosh and Pattman, 2003, p. 181) whilst simultaneously presenting as non-homophobic (Deifendorf and Bridges, 2020).

Nevertheless, fathers also acknowledged that in other contexts, a heterosexual masculine identity was problematic for them specifically. James, for example, outlined his discomfort in asking for photographs of female characters at a Cosplay event he attended with his two autistic sons. He stated that he did not want to appear to be a '*perv*', explaining:

I just think that myself, if I was in their shoes, so rather than that, I will leave – I will get a dalek one or something, I will get pictures of that. But when it comes to that [taking pictures of female characters] I will let the boys decide who they want to get pictures with, because there is a sexual connotation. There are guys who go who are really into that stuff, why should the girls trust me, they don't know me from Adam, the boys can get them.

The extract provides insight as to how perception of risk is an organising factor in the spatial regulation of appropriate heterosexual identities for some men, and, how, as Hubbard notes 'heterosexuality intertwines with processes such as sexism, racism, and ageism to empower or oppress different social identities in different ways' (Hubbard, 2000, p. 194) for these fathers specifically. Hubbard focuses on 'the boundary between what is considered as 'normal' and what is regarded as 'perverted'' (2000, p.194) and the data suggests this imagined boundary preoccupied James. These extracts indicate the complex ways in which paternal morality is constructed in relation to but also problematized at is overlap with heterosexuality. The data indicates fathers' ongoing struggles to establish identities which reflect contextually appropriate, risk-sensitive heterosexual paternal masculinities.

Home

Perhaps because of feeling like a 'perv' in some public contexts, my interview data indicates that home was a place where some fathers could 'be themselves' at least some of the time, and as my methodology chapter attests, my most fruitful interviews took place in participants' homes (Bashir, 2018). Felski notes 'we experience space not according to the distanced gaze of the cartographer, but in circles of increasing proximity or distance from the experiencing self. Home lies at the center of these circles' (2000, p. 85). Accordingly, in this next section, I analyse the meaning of 'home' in fathers' narratives.

Link and Phelan (2014) suggest that staying at home is an indication of the stigma some individuals feel in public places. Although it could be said that staying at home is a further example of the separation from others that is a feature of the stigmatizing aspects of disablism, my data attests that there are reasons not related to stigma and exclusion which explain why some autistic people may choose to spend time at home. For example, Bertilsdotter Rosqvist et al., state that 'autistic spaces allow those involved to have distance

from the mainstream NT[8]world, which is seen as chaotic and alien' (2013 p.373). The home has long been associated with domesticity, the feminine and maternal practices (Oakley, 1974). Aitken contests this somewhat, urging research which focuses on the private and 'awkward spaces of fathering' (2005, p. 208) in which different paternal masculinities might emerge. Further, Miller states that 'most of what matters to people is happening behind the closed doors of the private sphere' (2001, p.1) and with these points in mind, my interview data suggests that father-child relationships at home were very different to the relationships played out elsewhere. Sometimes, fathers expressed their awareness of this difference in stark terms. For example, Gerrard (married, one son with autism) showed me a photograph of his son, Anton, standing outside a hospital, explaining:

> This is now obviously the other side of his life; this is the hospital. We are waiting to see his neuro-consultant, it is our second home. Well, it's probably our 3rd as A & E is our second home after he has a fall from a seizure. He's had 128 big seizures and about a quarter have been when he's not with us. And the other people are not as quick to catch him as we are. If he drops without warning, then no- one can figure that out. But normally there's 4 or 5 seconds and you know he's gonna fall. Then you have to get behind him and loop his arms.

O'Dell et al. observe that 'our cultural contexts give rise to different kinds of knowledges of autism' (2017, p. 166) and the extracts suggest that when their sons or daughters were in a medical or care context, they were defined using clinical terminology which did not 'fully account for the skills, abilities and identities of people with autism' and 'the complex personhood of individuals on the spectrum' (O'Dell , 2017, p.169).

Further, Kenkman et al. (2017) found that care homes are not perceived by residents in the same way as the 'family' home, indicating that residents experienced these places of residence as prison-like and wished to escape. The data suggests that although some fathers sought to present care homes as a necessary to the clinical well- being of their children and themselves, in contrast, 'home' was a space where their sons and daughters were temporarily

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[8] NT is an abbreviation of the word 'neurotypical' which is a term defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as a person 'not having or associated with an unusual brain condition, especially autism' (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/neurotypical accessed 13/09/2020)

free from discourses of disability and medicalisation. Although Joel felt that his son, Layton, was happy in the care home during the week, he explained a difference in his behaviour when he came home each weekend, stating:

> He comes in and puts his slippers on and runs round the block, down the street parallel. It's got to be in his slippers, and it doesn't matter if it's raining or whatever.

Paid work is an indicator of masculinity which encroaches on men's ability or willingness to spend time at home (Robinson and Hockey, 2011). However, as most of the fathers who took part in my study were single, or did not work, or both, there were opportunities for them to try out 'performances of heterosexual masculinity at home, comprising diverse relationships, some more 'traditional', others producing new masculinities and domestic imaginaries' (Gorman- Murray, 2008, p. 370). The fly in the ointment for some of these fathers was that electing to put their child into residential care or respite, also required that they sustain a masculine identity which also reflected the 'part-time' nature of their commitment to fathering. The data, therefore, shows how some fathers used domestic space in justifying their parenting post-separation or divorce as fathers with autistic children specifically (Philip, 2014).

The first extract, from Ken, describes Ben's return from respite care to spend the weekend at home with his dad. Ken explains:

> He counts the sleeps down to come home, I speak to him every night and count the sleeps down in residential. I get a break and I get to spend quality time at the weekend.

Ben's return home from respite is a vehicle through which Ken can construct a meaningful identity for himself as a divorced man with an autistic son. The emphasis he places on 'quality time' infers the special nature of the time he and Ben spend together at the weekend, which enables him to boost his self-identity through foregrounding the engaged and active (but temporal) nature of his fathering (Philip, 2014). Quality time does not suggest increased paternal responsibility, rather 'fun things at weekends and holidays' (Smart, 2004, p. 107). In that respect, the extract shows how fathers like Ken continue to 'subscribe to the "new father"

norms of involved fatherhood' (Mc Gill, 2014, p. 1103) as weekend parents whilst retaining typical attitudes to fathering elsewhere (Creighton, 2014; Dermott, 2008).

Nevertheless, research also indicates the pressure men feel about presenting themselves in moral terms following separation or divorce. Smart and Neale note that 'the adjective 'bad' is [often conferred on] separated parents' (1999, p. 89) and post-divorce fathering is often intensely scrutinised (Rose, 1985). Fathers' moral concerns about appearing 'good enough' overlap with concerns about risk, and, as I have discussed elsewhere, this has a deeply contextual nature which shapes their practices as masculine subjects. In these circumstances, 'typical' fathering may seem to be the least risky option (Morgan, 2002).

Unlike Ken, single father David is deeply unhappy at his daughter, Rebecca, being in residential care. In the following extract he is describing her return home for the weekend:

> Typical Friday, after school she gets dropped off and she comes running in. It's just me and her I give her a big kiss, a big hug, she'll wanna get changed, all her stuff is ready, she's got a bowl of strawberries ready, very routine, and I'll get her pyjamas on, and she'll sit on that chair there, she'll eat her strawberries, play on her ipad, and I'll be finishing off her tea. She'll have her tea, and she'll sit down there, and then, a little bit later, she will ask for some chocolate. It's just me and her, it's quality time.

Esther Dermott notes 'that feeling an emotional connection is important for men in grounding the relationship with their child and that displaying emotions through expressions of closeness is viewed as necessary for successful fathering' (2008, p. 5). Like Ken, David also makes specific references to the 'quality time' he spends with Rebecca at the weekend. This has less to do with activities, but rather the qualitative differences in the father- daughter relationship contrast with the relationships Rebecca has with staff during her time in the residential unit (Boccagni and Kusenbach, 2020). Further, Ott (2014) notes that:

> the boundaries of disability also shift from person to person, depending on
> things such as where a person is, what she or he is doing, whether a person
> is feeling safe or excluded, or what and how many resources are available.
> Disability is also dynamic and contextual. No one is always disabled for all

things; disability depends on the person, the environment, and the activity (Ott, 2014, p. 121).

David went on to discuss his son, Paul, stating:

> He is always going on his computer and watching You Tube clips. He'll ask for something like Scooby Doo or something and I'll put that in the search engine for him and he's away, [he] navigates his way through all different clips and you can hear him, he'll be roaring laughing at them and stuff like that.

In relation to this point, Molony notes that men may 'be invested not only in the physical space [of the home] but also in the cherished objects found within' (2010 p.292) and in that respect, home and the objects provided by David within the home enable him to create a disability positive identity for Rebecca and Paul and 'practice' emotional closeness to them as a father in socially mandated ways (Dermott, 2008).

In this respect, it was notable that several of the fathers focused specifically on bedrooms. For most young people, their bedroom 'whilst still located within the family home supports and nurtures personal autonomy and independent selfhood' (Carey, 2017, p.280). Yet, autistic children's autonomy and use of space inside the home may more complex than this. Research with autistic people has shown that a 'safe space' within the home can be important, providing respite away from the sensory overstimulation some autistic people can experience elsewhere (Rosquvist, 2013). Further, control over personal space signifies the autonomy and independence many autistic people are denied and allows fathers to suggest that they have enabled this to happen (Kinnaer, Baumers and Heylighen, 2016). These narratives therefore stand in contrast to conventional deficit models which frame autism as a disability and show that the cultural context of the home is a space where alternative understandings of autism and autistic identity might develop (O'Dell, 2016). What these extracts also convey is how fathers used the spaces in their home, the objects in them, and the activities that took place there, as a mean to do identity work for themselves. For example, Gerrard (married, retired) showed me a photograph of his adult son, Anton, remarking:

Here he is in his bedroom. Total obsession with trains. He's had that since [he was] 3 years old. I'm not that interested in running them [the trains] I'm interested in the technology of them, and he likes me up there with him in the loft. We made it into a space which we could almost live in and that took me a good 6 months and there was a lot of building work to be done. All the boards it's on have to be absolutely level all the geometry has to be perfect.

Unlike David, Gerrard's discussion does not directly reflect the emotional aspects of giving or fathering (Cheal, 1987; Dermott, 2008). Gerrard is a married man, and his discussions indicated that wife took on most of the emotional care in their home, a division of care that he felt was natural, but the installation of a train set was a means for him to engage with his son and 'do' care and intimate fathering in a specifically 'masculine' way.

Consider the following extract from Mark (separated, weekend custody of Tina, 15) also about bedrooms:

I can see teenage stuff: when she's here she stays in bed! She's being a normal teenager. She likes her lies in. She will be up there [in her bedroom] listening to her music and I can ring her up [on her mobile phone] it's the best thing for an autistic girl, she can sit there listening to Madonna like a normal 15-year-old girl, she's got speakers up there…She's just a normal 15-year-old, she just thinks differently, she just doesn't speak, that's all. How frustrating it must be if there's a brain the size of a planet in there, so I have to make allowances and step back. She will kick me out of her room, it's her space, that's exactly what she wants.

In the extract, Mark emphasises his emotional connection to Tina and in doing so, infers that she prefers his fathering to her mothers' mothering. He marries up discourses of autistic citizenship with discourses of gender, age, place, and 'fun dad' new fatherhood ideals 'which reinforce existing [gender] stereotypes rather than innovative …representations of gender relations' (Gregory and Milner, 2011, p.588). Moreover, in the process of foregrounding his emotional engagement and sensitivity to Tina's needs, he does not demonstrate his responsibility and responsiveness to 'illness, food, and clothing… the tangible signs of caring

activities' (Smart, 2004, p. 107) but suggests that he is more permissive, understanding, and accepting as a parent. It could be said that Mark seeks to foster a post-divorce paternal identity which reflected the importance of fathering for emotional well- being of children (McLanahan, Tach, and Schneider, 2013). In doing so, he was able to assert his relevance when he felt this was undermined, an experience he regularly spoke about throughout his interviews.

'I read a thing once you don't bring them into your world you go to theirs'

The next set of data examines fathers' experiences as they and their children moved through environments external to the family home. The extracts show that in many contexts, fathers maintained their affirmative attitudes to autism and were sensitized to the 'personal geographies' of autistic people, which are 'are characterized by rich, rewarding, and meaningful relationships with the wider more-than-human world, and that aspects of their lives can be undeniably, agreeably, `social' in this broader sense' (Davidson and Smith, 2009, p.8980) as illustrated in this extract from an interview with David. As he shows me a photograph of his daughter Rebecca and son Paul, standing outside their house, he states:

> Here they are in the morning waiting to go to school. We are looking for the cat, [Paul] always has this lovely smile on him. We don't wait in the house for the bus even in the rain. When you get them big cloud bursts in the summer, when it's dead heavy he dives straight out there, interacting with it. He loves the weather, when its windy he likes that as well, it's almost like it's around him and in it. He's attuned to his environment, the natural environment around us. The times we have had heavy snow the kids have been out there for ages. It's a natural phenomenon they want to be in it not out of it. It is a thing with autistic kids, his friend loves the thunder he goes and stands in it, they get something from it that is maybe soothing them.

Autistic authors such as Davidson (2010) have been vocal in their criticism of parents who they claim have little sensitivity to the sensory needs of autistic people. David's narratives contradict this idea, and this is further illustrated in the extract below taken from in interview with Nigel. Here, he is showing me photographs of his son Sean, aged 10:

This is the beach. He loves playing there. It's the texture of the sand, it's sensory. He jumps in the water, it's all sensory with him. He finds things on the floor, little ants, or an acorn, it fascinates him, he feels them, they feel different. One day we had an ant's nest, [in the house] and he would pick them up and they tickle his hands, one day he was covered in them they were absolutely everywhere he was going 'ha, ha, ha', it was funny. Look at him smiling, he's seen something crawling there. He likes to make himself sneeze, so he puts things up his nose [he laughs] he likes the sensation.

And in a similar vein, this next extract from Mark, showing a photograph and discussing Tina:

She's doing her flappy hands there, she loves the beach, the sensory thing with the water and the feeling of the sand. She's got her hat and her earrings. She loves stuff like that.

David also stated:

Here's another one, fluid and movement. That's a mister, it makes mist, I captured that [the image] she looks like a fairy. She's interacting with the water. She looks very ethereal. It's the perfect moment, she looks like she's seen a vision or something, it's the perfect moment of her interacting.

These extracts show that fathers were keen to provide their children with 'a space within which to develop autistic identities…the purpose is not to develop social skills for face-to-face (NT-dominated) environments, but to offer a challenge to the need to 'fit in' to the NT world' (Rosquvist, 2013, p. 375). However, some of these extracts are also a means to examine the ways in which fathers used 'specific sites like schools, churches, supermarkets, parks, beaches … as settings for heteronormal performance' (Hubbard, 2000, p. 206) in relation to creating identities for themselves as fathers with autistic children and as masculine subjects. Therefore, the data presented here reflects how fathers combined autism-sensitive fathering with spatial performances of paternal masculinities in more public settings.

Community

Previous research on class-specific fathering practices has tended to focus on middle-class men's engagement with children's leisure time and its overlap with 'new fatherhood', although disability has not been a specific focus on this work (Gregory and Milner; 2011; Vincent and Ball, 2007). In contrast, the work I present here discusses the experiences of working-class fathers as they moved through the spaces of the working -class neighbourhoods where they lived. Stenning states that:

> Working classness is placed. It is performed and constructed within communities and, in turn, shapes the spaces of community, economy, politics and much more. It is often within the spaces of community—local and not so local—and the spatial practices of work and life that subjectivities and materialities intersect. Practices, strategic or otherwise, enacted within homes, workplaces, communities, and the myriad other spaces of everyday life reflect the articulation of gender, generation, and race, in particular, and the employment of resources—economic, social, cultural; tangible and embodied—in the negotiation of economic, political and social lives (2008, p10).

Accordingly, whilst previous research on working-class families with disabled children has tended to focus on their economic and social exclusion, my interest here is the phenomenon of class, or how, the experience of being classed in context shapes fathers' behaviour and sense of self (Bourdieu, 1990; Charlesworth, 2000; Lamont, 2000). My data suggests there are many valuable aspects of working-class culture, context and relationships which seem to benefit these fathers and children specifically.

Johnson has argued 'the concept of community involves a subjective emotional sense of being linked with others on the basis of similar values, interests, or experiences' (2011, p.253) and, as I have indicated, familiarity in the community means Joel can run round the block in his slippers without fear of criticism. Similarly, another father, Danny recalled an incident when the local window cleaner 'told off' his son for not looking properly when he crossed the road. Such actions by community members convey care and personhood, and this seemed to foster feelings of belonging and mattering that these fathers valued (Chen and Schweitzer, 2019). However, it would be a mistake to assume that fathers and children were

universally welcomed by everybody in their communities; their isolation from others, at times, was striking.

Most research on the ways in which intellectually disabled people engage with their local communities reveal isolation and exclusion (McConkey et al. 1982; 1983). My data suggests that fathers experienced 'stares, glares or comments to inform children and their caretakers that their behaviour is not acceptable' (Ryan, 2010, p.868) on occasion. For example, Mark, Tina's dad, explained that Tina had a phobia of stepping on the cracks in the pavement, and so a short trip to the supermarket less than a ten-minute walk away could take a couple of hours or even require a taxi. Nevertheless, Mark felt that it was good for Tina to walk '*as it helps with her not doing stopping and starting*' although they were an unusual sight when they first moved to the area as Mark goes on to explain:

> She [Tina] used to get in the back of my long coat and I'd have to walk
> along with 4 legs ha, ha. The kids [playing in the street] were looking and
> the kids followed me and apologised for the kid staring, they said 'we have
> told his mum'.

As Ryan (2010) observes, autism is a hidden disability. Subsequently, fathers often feared being judged as incompetent, and have their children labelled as naughty and disruptive if their behaviour is misunderstood. Fathers' feelings of being observed, and feeling self- doubt, or discomfort allows for a contextual examination of the workings of stigma, which according to Goffman (1963), will "spoil" your identity, and so individuals are likely engage in strategies to minimise stigma's negative effects.

An unusual but favourite hobby of Ben's was drilling using power tools. He would take bags of wet washing to the local park to peg out to dry on washing lines he would make and put up himself. Ken would provide the equipment and accompany Ben on these trips, and showed me a photograph of them together explaining:

> That's in the park. 99 % [of the time] we go to a tree stump that he likes
> drilling and a block of wood he likes. It's full of holes that he's done and
> screws he has put in. Someone asked the other week what he was doing,
> and this fella stopped, and I explained 'he loves the drill'. You get people

that look but not being horrible. If anyone says I would explain it's a dead
tree. He used to make washing lines indoor and outdoor tying string around
things and pegging washing up, but he tends to do the washing in his Nan's.
He loves rinsing things in sinks and then it's all dead neat pegged out.

 Ken is aware that his parenting is being observed. His explanations contradict the oversimple
idea that men should be able to access public space unchallenged and show the scrutiny faced
by parents in public places with autistic children extends to fathers also (Ryan, 2005; Schrock
and Schwalbe, 2009). Ken, like several of the fathers I spoke with, had expressed concerns
about being taken seriously as a father and as a carer and lacked confidence in his ability to
parent alone. Unable to draw on dominant fatherhood ideologies available to most men, and
in the absence of a partner to 'share' the responsibility with, Ken is vigilant in modifying his
behaviours to comply with codes of conduct to do with demonstrating moral fatherhood in
juxtaposition to disabled children as he moved in community spaces where he and Ben lived
their everyday lives (Ryan, 2010).

Nevertheless, as Coston and Kimmel (2012) observe, men like Ken who may be unable to
draw on tropes of hegemonic masculinity to exercise privilege never totally refute using
gender in the exercise of power. As I have explained elsewhere, Ken is able to 'use'
masculinity and, to a degree, the stigmatized position he occupies to his advantage in other
contexts, gaining packages of support that other fathers, and, indeed, most mothers with
autistic children cannot access, simply because he is a single male (Link and Phelan, 2014).
Although the extract suggests that Ken feels scrutinised and stereotyped in the park with Ben,
conforming to those same stereotypes can bring advantages in other areas of Ken's life.
Rather than seeking to make up for any perceived shortcomings in his parenting, Ken
sometimes embraces them, as in some ways, this allows him to avoid undesirable
responsibilities and simultaneously garner sympathy and respect.

That is not to suggest that all fathers bowed under scrutiny. In contrast, the range of activities
Mark and Tina accessed were quite striking:

Her interests change, it depends on what she's feeling. She's a funny one
her latest is the ferry she loves a bench on the ferry. She used to love the
museum and 'kids art' in the art gallery, and she knows the lady in there

and cafes we go to, she's always gone to. She always picks the same things it's where she must feel relaxed. She likes curry and pizza but her 'fave' is all you can eat buffet; she loves it in there. She thrives off her own autonomy, and that's the thing about it she can choose what she wants to have. She loves food and she love tasting different things, it depends. Sometimes she can be fussy, I cook with her, so we know the ingredients and do it together and it's the whole process. Very normal kid stuff.

In a further example, David showed me a photograph, stating:

Here the hosepipe is on, and Paul is watching it go down the grid, and he will do that for ages watching water flow. I take the hose out in the summer and put it up in the tree and there's a cascade of water, people have to walk under it, and cars go through it, but he watches that for hours.

The relationship between stigma, identity and space is complex, and the overlap of space with masculinity and disability even more so. These fathers' actions could be interpreted as 'a de facto form of resistance' (Wade, 1997, p.25) or a form of activism, through which they use public space in ways that meet with their children's needs, although their power to act in this way may be geographically limited to the places where they are well-known. In that respect, the data develops my earlier arguments in relation to belonging and shows that 'who and what we are surrounded by in a specific locality may also contribute in important ways to both choice and constraint' (Forrest and Kearns, 2001, p.2130), or what Ryan refers to as 'the familiarity effect' (2005, p. 209).

Perhaps because their children behaved in unusual ways, a desire to raise awareness of autism, obtain adequate resources for autistic people, and explain the isolation that families with autistic children often experience underpinned Joel's decision to engage with the study in the first place, as he explains in discussion with me:

The bottom line with me is, with autism there's no awareness, or lack of awareness, so when you rang up and said would I be in the study I feel obliged.

JH: Well, you don't have to.

But I feel an obligation if everyone does their little bit there will be more awareness.

Parental desire to raise awareness about autism has been well documented, for example, by Gray (2001), Langan (2012), and Oprea and Stan (2012) but the dominance of mothers' voices both independently and collectively in these studies is notable. In relation to this point, one of the most significant and personally frustrating findings that came out of my fieldwork was my growing awareness of the isolation these fathers experienced from other fathers, generally having no contact with others in similar situations. One especially unfortunate example of this involved Mark who told me that his daughter Tina was collected for school in a minibus with another autistic girl called Rebecca. Mark wished that Tina and Rebecca could be friends outside of school. Rebecca was David's daughter, but neither Mark nor David had contact with the other father. This anecdote shows how the gendered nature of the special school system demands that mothers engage with children's lives and with other mothers in ways that are not expected of fathers, points I have addressed in other chapters (Fletcher, Bridges and Hunter 2007).

Robert Putnam (1995) laments the decline in community cohesion, relationships with neighbours, and breakdown of the family unit. Putnam considers that social changes including increasing numbers of women entering the workforce, the welfare state, television, and immigration as amongst the culprits driving forward this disengagement. On the other hand, Forrest, and Kearns state that 'close family ties, mutual aid and voluntarism are often strong features of poor areas. It is these qualities which may enable people to cope with poverty, unemployment and wider processes of social exclusion' (2001, p. 2241). For Joel's family, community support had enabled them to take the Local Education Authority (LEA) to tribunal over Layton's poor standard of education. Joel explains:

> The tribunal cost £6.5 k., we had a fundraiser for that. Well, to be honest, it
> was weird because my sister and her mates organised it in the local social
> club, we didn't know nothing about it, we only found out a few weeks
> before when my mate from London rang me for a ticket. I said, 'what are
> you on about?' So, they had a band on, they had unbelievable prizes, they

had Mike Tyson gloves, a weekend in Amsterdam, it's a bit embarrassing, a
bit humbling you know what I mean.

Joel's narrative is a clear example of the power of community networks to organise in the pursuit of social action (Nardi, 2001). The family went on to win their tribunal, and Layton's mother became well- known in the city for her activism – although Joel was quick to acknowledge that she, rather than he, was the 'expert' and could answer any questions about autism better than he could. This subsequently begs the question why Joel himself remained on the side-lines despite his desire to raise awareness about autism. Although Runswick-Cole and Ryan have recognised a need for a 'shift away from the mother–child dyad as the primary site of activism' (2019, p.1125) that is characteristic of many families with disabled children, there is little in Joel's narrative to suggest such a shift.

One interpretation is that working- class women continue to play a key role in terms of organising to meet the needs of children and families (Digby, 2015). In many ways, this activism mirrors the expectation and responsibility placed on women for the care of children generally as reflected in much of the literature. However, as Wellmann (1996) points out, people's social relationships within neighbourhoods are not uniform, and it is important to remember that whilst the ideal of the working-class community may be based on the sharing of traditional values of reciprocity and collectivism, and a commitment to families and hard work, the working class is not a homogenous group (Beider, 2011). Working -class fathers who breach the general expectation that they should work hard in paid employment may have difficulties in defining themselves as good enough fathers and men (Lamont, 2000; Lupton and Barclay, 1988; Roy, 1999).

'I took that selfie outside the carwash'.
Allen and Daly claim 'identity work done to sustain the symbolic image of being an involved father was not typically worked out in a public place, because the public spaces men tended to occupy in the community were closely tied to their work or leisure behaviours' (2002 p. 62). This was not always reflected in fathers' accounts. Indeed, all the participants recalled occasions when they had been out in public with their children, who had often breached social rules of normative behaviour because of the difficulties with social interaction associated with autism, or because of their sometimes highly unusual interests and hobbies.

On the other hand, for several fathers, 'working-class sociality', as Skeggs (2011, p.496) describes it, seemed to provide degrees of 'safety, security and confidence' (Goodsell, 2005, p. 36) that some fathers could not always obtain through other relationships and in other contexts. As Massey suggests, experiencing belonging in a spatial sense is a relational matter and so the 'identity of place is in part constructed out of positive interrelations' (1994, p.13) with others. Whilst fathers felt a sense of exclusion from contexts such as schools, they seemed to feel acknowledged in other community contexts.

A sense of belonging at a community level ran through Mark's interviews, indeed, Mark enthused about the area where he lived, stating *'this is a community'* and enjoyed the close ties that he and his daughter, Tina, had with other residents in the street and people in the neighbourhood who often stopped to chat, and give Tina money, sweets, and other gifts, stating:

> I have noticed there's good interaction between pensioners and kids with autism, they are really good with her. People see her as a thing and there's no point in talking…the people next door give her pyjamas, slippers, dressing gown all matching [for Christmas.] People over think the condition, it's not easy but it's a lot simpler. In reality, it's really quite simple because pensioners, they don't have a problem.

It is unsurprising that these fathers are appreciative of those individuals who see their daughters as more than a '*thing*'. However, the focus on pensioners suggests a need to consider the significance of these intergenerational interactions for Mark specifically. Nilsen and Brannen (2014) observe that trajectories of parenting alter, and it is probable that the pensioners next door consider Mark to be more engaged as a father than men of their generation.

Mark's discussions often included references to people he met out on his walks with Tina. In relation to this, Loukaitou- Sideris and Ehrenfeucht note that the sidewalk is a significant context for studying how individuals 'develop and display identities, indicating similarities and differences through…spatial practices, as well as claiming a right to be included' (2009, p. 38). Social hierarchies and cultural and personal values are reflected through contextual

spatial practices which may, on the surface at least, appear minor, such as allowing a person to pass, one of the points Mark makes in a further extract:

> Round here people get used to seeing her. I get the opposite [to usual treatment experienced elsewhere]. The residents in the church, they wanted her to come in and they gave us our own room. Even the kids, there were two riot vans on bonfire night and all the kids were shouting at the police and they saw her, and they calmed down till we went past and then restarted the abuse again.

Mark's recollection about the incident may be a means by which he suggests that he and Tina are afforded 'basic respect' (Loukaitou-Sidens and Ehrenfeucht, 1009, p. 86) as recognisable faces in the area. On the other hand, Yuval- Davis (2006) observes how feeling a sense of belonging can reflect status and power. In that respect, Mark's discussion about being recognised on the street and given special treatment by other members of the community is a means by which he seems to disavow stereotypes of disinterested male parenting, but also affirm he feels he is worthy of special recognition as a man specifically (Wetherell and Edley, 1999). Stigma thus brings degrees of privilege to Mark (Herman and Miall, 1990).

The data presented so far suggests that working class streets, shops, communities and neighbourhoods are increasingly culturally diverse 'local places of social encounter' (Philips and Robinson, 2015, p.409; Hoekstra and Pinkster, 2019) and therefore, unlike other contexts where fathers felt scrutinized, the working-class communities in which they lived provided opportunities for some fathers to 'make sense of themselves in a broader social context' (Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst, 2001, p. 884) as fathers with autistic children and as masculine subjects whose presence might be questioned.

In the following section, I develop this further with focus on stigma. Goffman states that 'the central feature of the stigmatized individual's situation in life… is a question of what is often, if vaguely, called 'acceptance' (1963, p. 19). The stigmatized will find 'sympathetic others' (p31) who provide support and a sense of belonging. In the extract below, I address how and why fathers might do this, with a focus on David, discussing his nightly walks to the car wash with his daughter Rebecca. Watching the activity at the car wash is one of Rebecca's favourite activities:

The carwash down the bottom there, we have a little route and [Rebecca will] stop there for about an hour, she's watching the traffic. It doesn't matter what the weather's like, so I took that selfie outside the carwash, it just represents her you know she's just …I got her smiling actually. She's just so quirky but don't question her. Fuck it. I know loads of people from standing there they sit by me and chat. Even if it's raining it's got to be done. They [the carwash staff] are eastern European all of them and to be honest in the summer they'll give her ice creams and stuff like that you know what I mean. They know her, they obviously know there's something not right 'cos we are there and we're just standing there really.

JH: What are the people at the car wash like?

They are all Eastern European, they are busy doing all the cars you see, they get loads of cars coming in, but if they see Rebecca, they'll give her a lollipop or something you know, they are really kind. I took them a load of mince pies for Christmas.

The negative portrayal of immigrants (and the disabled, and the working class) in the media promotes a rhetoric often founded on distortion of crime figures, scroungerphobia, and concerns about the undermining of community and cultural identity (Garthwaite, 2011; Meltzer et al.,2017). My data suggests that encounters between such diverse groups might have positive effects through building 'greater appreciation and understanding of diversity and difference and promote positive social interactions. These encounters might only be mundane and fleeting in form but can be an important positive precursor to more open and inclusive cultures' (Philips and Robinson 2015, p.414).

However, taken together, these extracts also reveal that men were able to construct themselves as masculine subjects by aligning the performance of hegemonic masculine practices such as eliciting respect from others, with sometimes quite vulnerable presentations of caring masculinity (Gueta, Gamliel and Ronel, 2021). This combination afforded them special recognition as fathers. My data indicates that for some fathers, in some contexts, being stigmatized can bring advantages as well as problems. A marginalised identity can

elicit patterns of support and social recognition for these fathers specifically through 'exemption from normal social roles and obligations[and] provision of interpersonal and social opportunities' (Broomes, 2020; Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Herman and Miall, 1990, p. 251).

'I'm deffo turning into my dad'.

My focus in the concluding section of this chapter is those contexts where fathers engaged in leisure pursuits with their children. As I have already established, fathers are parenting in the wider context of the risk society (Beck, 2002) and so their parenting may be constrained to those contexts they identified as non-risky, such as environments where acceptable leisure activities between fathers and children took place (Shirani, Henwood and Coltart, 2012). With these points in mind, the data attests that there was not a great deal of difference between the places that some autistic children went with their fathers, and what 'typical' children do, but also, importantly, there was often little difference between what these fathers themselves did and the activities they engaged in with their own fathers (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006)

Pickering and Keightley describe 'the past as a set of resources for the future' (2006, p.937) and May suggests that specific places may hold a special place in our minds, which 'form a sort of multidimensional landscape of belonging that exists not only in the present, but also evokes past memories' (2013, p.153). In relation to these points, prior research has suggested that contemporary fathers seek to ensure 'that they are doing a better job of fathering that their own fathers' (Dermott, 2008, p. 71; Shirani, 2013) and this reflection was common to several fathers' narratives. For example, Tom explained:

> I am 'deffo' turning into my dad. He was very hands on, he used to do shifts and when I was little…I don't sleep much, and I would be awake, and we would have a story, so I would stay awake for him. But my mum got a job in bar and on a Saturday morning and me and dad would go 'what's on today boys?' And we'd go to the park or museum and the library and that was my dad time and I still do that now and it's the same places! What really surprises me is it's not about money. They are the best memories I've got.

Pickering and Keightley observe that 'uncertainty and insecurity in present circumstances create fertile ground for a sentimental longing for the past, or for a past fondly reconstructed out of selectively idealized features' (2006 p.925). Accordingly, Tom's recollections about his own father suggest that he considered him to be something of a maverick, what might now be referred to as an 'involved father' or a 'new man':

> My dad wouldn't say or do much but when he did it was so profound, when we were little, it was like 'Woah!' He would have been brilliant with [Lucas] it was tough for his generation as they didn't have labels, but he was a bit of ahead of his time.

Tom saw his father very much as a role model, stating:

> We used to go to the museum, and we used to see the Tommy gun, and it was a 'Cannon and Ball' gun [TV show]. It was our thing. We were in stitches. It was our thing. We have copied that. We go in the museum, and I have my own 'Rock on Tommy' [a catchphrase from Cannon and Ball TV show].

For Tom, the suggestion that he has inherited or learned traits, practices and values from his own father are ontological tools which he can use to justify his own parenting in the face of the doubt and insecurity he had experienced elsewhere about quite what he should be doing as a father with an autistic child (Giddens, 1991; May 2016). Nevertheless, the extracts indicate that patterns of care and gendered responsibilities within these families, broadly speaking, remain the same as they were for previous generations (Bornat, Dimmock, Jones and Peace, 1999; 2004). Hook and Wolfe suggest when fathers spend time alone with children they are 'more likely to be substituting for mothers' at the weekend (2012, p. 418) and fathers like Tom might consider themselves to be pushing the boundaries of fathering with no real evidence to support this claim (Shirani, Henwood and Coltart, 2012).

Several other fathers drew on their own memories of being fathered during interview and engagement with sport was a frequent topic of conversation in relation to this specific point. Sociology has shown that sport plays a role in the construction and maintenance of masculinities via the initiation of younger men and boys to masculine norms (Messner and

Subo, 1990; Swain, 2000). That sport functions as a tool for father- son bonding has been well established in the literature (Kolbe and James 2000). In that respect, it could be said that the processes of fathers taking their sons to watch sport reflects 'fairly typical standards of masculinity and father-son interaction' (Power, 2008, p. 842) as sport functions as a ritualistic 'masculinizing project' (Whitson, 1990, p. 22) through which younger boys transition to the world and ways of older and wiser men (Turner, 1969). In the following extract, Danny is discussing taking his son, Jack to their regular match day pub that they visit each time they go watch their football team play:

> The fella behind the bar knows what he drinks, he said 'is it for that lad
> there? He always has J20'. He sometimes remembers the songs the away
> supporters are singing. He comes home singing Russian or something.

Danny was introduced to football, and its culture and values by his own father. He was also a passionate supporter of Liverpool FC. Further, football culture overlaps with ideas about social class and moral identity; Gottzen and Kremer- Sadlik (2012) note that one of the functions of sports is the intergenerational transmission of values. Supporting specific teams remains strongly associated with working-class values and cultural practices such as inclusion, recognition, justice, and solidarity with others (Scraton, 2009; Walsh, 2015). For Danny, taking Jack to the football is a means for him to reflect on how his fathering has been shaped intergenerationally, in the pub, the football terrace and the takeaway, and use these ideas to justify his practices of parenting in the present.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that engagement with sports and leisure function 'as an arena for men to meet increased cultural expectations of being involved in their children's lives' (Gottzen and Kremer- Sadlik, 2012, p. 639) and fathers' claims to involvement may not indicate progress any meaningful way (Bornat et al., 1999; 2004). Furthermore, in contrast to other responsibilities, sports are activities fathers enjoy (Marsignio, Roy and Fox, 2005). For example, James fondly recalled his own childhood experiences of watching vintage wrestlers Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks on *World of Sport* on a Saturday afternoon, before explaining how his sons are now also fans of the sport, stating:

> Well, I have always liked the wrestling. Billy likes the wresting. I asked
> him 'do you want to see some?' I took him a few years ago but we were

miles away from the screen, it's called MXT but it's where they train all the wrestlers, but their wresting is less storylines and more on the wrestling, which is what I enjoy. Billy likes the characters, hopefully [indistinct - name of wrestler] will be there tonight cos he will freak out. It's all scripted but the moves are very hard, the way he portrays himself in the ring, it's not clear if he is supposed to be gay or straight or what, it's really funny, he's a big character. We will grab something to eat and then go out there.

The extract supports Allen and Daly's claim that fathers 'are more likely to seek out and occupy spaces in the community that were more congruent with personal interest' (2005, p. 61). The data overall suggests fathers can construct involved paternal identities whilst indulging in activities that they themselves enjoyed (Gottzen and Kremer-Sadlink, 2012).

In drawing this chapter to an end, this final extract, from David, shows that a sense of belonging in the contexts of the present for fathers themselves could, to a degree, be facilitated by their children. David is talking about taking his two sons to a Halloween 'Fright Night' haunted house event, explaining:

I didn't want to go but [older non – autistic son] was going so I took Paul and he loved it he wasn't fazed at all, things like that don't scare him. It was a bleeding nuisance as well you know, just fucking jump out as us will you, and let's get through this fucking bollocks. But they loved it.

For David, who rarely mentioned his own father during any of his interviews, his present relationship with his sons, and the emotions they elicit become the foundation of a sense of belonging when the past does not offer a means for him to orient himself in the present (May, 2013; Pickering and Keightley, 2006). They enable him to 'know' that he is parenting well through emotional interactions and expressions which affirm feelings of belonging and mattering (Hanlon, 2012).

One important point of consideration in relation to this final section is the overlap of disability with gender. The data indicates that the spatial and social opportunities available to autistic boys and their fathers seemingly far outweighed the opportunities available to autistic girls (Preston and Ustundag, 2005). Whether this indicates the structural discrimination

experienced by women with disabilities (Meekosha, 2002) the scrutiny faced by fathers alone in public settings with female children (Braun, Vincent, and Ball, 2010) or fathers' preference for activities which reflect the specifics of typical masculinity (Marsiglio, Roy and Fox, 2005) is unclear.

Conclusion

This chapter shows the ways in which gender can 'inhabit many of the same material spaces as disability. Their relationships to power, normalcy, and access to rights and civic experiences have physical, three-dimensional manifestations' (Ott, 2014, p. 122). However, I have also shown that 'belonging manifests through intersecting social identities and is characterised by fluidity' (Chen and Schweitzer, 2019, p. 1978) and I have used participants' narratives to examine how they interpret and respond to the experiences of belonging and exclusion as fathers with autistic children, and as men. Accordingly, I have extended previous work on geographies of disability and fatherhood to suggest that exclusion for these fathers and their children is not always related to disability per se. Whilst structural exclusion remains a significant barrier to be tackled, fathers and children are positioned within 'a variety of settings and groups, within and between which claims for belonging are negotiated' (May, 2013 p. 151).

I have shown that these men parent in the broad context of the risk society (Beck, 2002). They are aware of the scrutiny they face, and some aspects of their fathering are governed as a result. The data suggests there are specific contexts where fathers engage in significant degrees of reflexive self-monitoring in relation to this, and it is in these contexts that fathers have no real recourse to effect change and no tools to describe themselves and their fathering as acceptable or even normal (Braun, Vincent, and Ball, 2010; Elliott, 2016). The data indicates that in some circumstances, fathers fell back into conventional ideas about heterosexual masculinity in relation to their own behaviour and the behaviour of other men to manage this. Their fears about being thought of as sexual predators were pronounced and limited their engagement with some aspects of fathering (Hubbard, 2000).

I have disputed the idea that home is a place where autistic people are contained. Home enables the establishment of positive identities for people with autism which might not be possible in locations where autism carries different meanings (Bogdan and Taylor, 1989; Easthope, 2004, Ott, 2014). The data suggest that fathers recognised the importance of

spending time with their children in activities that 'reframe the autistic subject in ways that appreciate the complex personhood of individuals on the spectrum' (O'Dell et al, 2016, p.169). Father's roles in facilitating this often reflected fairly typical practices of fathering (Bornat et al., 1999; 2004). Sometimes, this was to affirm their significance as men who felt unacknowledged as parents (Jordan, 2020). On other occasions, this typicality reflected the governance men experienced. Indeed, subsequent chapters will show that even emotional fatherhood is governed for these specific fathers.

Coston and Kimmel note that working -class men are commonly viewed as the male equivalent of the "dumb blonde"—endowed with physical virtues but problematized by intellectual shortcomings' (2012, p.108) and I have used class to examine men's subjective experience of parenting autistic children in a community context. I have suggested that it would be a mistake to assume being a working-class father with an autistic child is a universally difficult experience for these fathers specifically. I have shown how familiarity, culture and 'working-class sociality' (Skeggs, (2011, p.496) might foster feelings of acceptance and recognition 'through less privileged spaces, on the street corners, subway stations, buses, public plazas, and back alleys' (Sheller and Urry, 2006, p. 213) but at times, and in some contexts, working-class heterosexual masculinity can be advantageous, enabling fathers to avoid some aspects of care, or, to garner support and validation from others (Coston and Kimmel, 2012). Furthermore, Yuval- Davis (2006) observes how feeling a sense of belonging can reflect status and power.

A lack of role models means these fathers are often parenting without a map, and this comes across in the narratives. Fathers relied on memory to help them navigate their way, and so their own recollections of belonging in an emotional sense, often with their own fathers, were often utilised in the present in evaluating and giving meaning to their parenting practices (May, 2013). These fathers might consider themselves to be reshaping cultural configurations of fatherhood through engaging in visible practices which they felt reflected personal and social change and increasing commitment to their children (Hanlon, 2012). Nevertheless, most fathers and children's use of space and feelings of belongingness within them has as much, if not more to do with enduring ideas about masculinity temporality, fathers' personal biographies, and past family relationships as it does with autism or the preferences of the child.

Chapter 7

EMOTIONS

I have just finished interviewing Joel and I have turned off the Dictaphone when he begins to tell me a story about his teenage son, Layton. Slowly, stuttering with emotion, trying to stay composed but with tears in his eyes, which he tries to hide, he recounts a tale about a time when Layton walked onto a park football field when a 'kick about' game was in progress, and was met with a barrage of abuse from players and spectators. He tells me he found it extremely difficult not to react to Layton being called names like 'retard', but he isn't an angry man. As he slowly collects his thoughts, he tells me he has never told anybody this story before, not even his wife. So why did Joel respond in the ways that he describes? Why doesn't he consider himself to be 'an angry man' and why has he never told this tale to anybody before?

Introduction

The emotional dimensions of fatherhood and autism have been the focus of numerous psychologically- informed studies which have done little to develop our knowledge beyond suggesting that 'autism' affects fathers' subjective well-being in negative ways. This interpretation of the emotional experiences of fathers with autistic children infers that men's emotional behaviours are a result of men's biological make-up which is sometimes thought to be incompatible with disability (Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson, 2012). In addition to misrepresenting men, such assumptions also present a distorted and deeply negative view of autism and autistic children. From a feminist perspective, the lack of meaningful research about the emotional lives of these fathers is politically concerning, reinforcing the notion that fathers are unable to feel and express emotion in the ways that mothers might do, and implying that maternal emotions are more valuable or natural, thus affirming that women are the preferred carers of autistic children (Huppatz, 2009).

The ideologies of the 'new father' and the 'new man' are touted as evidence which suggests that men are becoming more comfortable in expressing themselves in emotional terms. According to Dermott, 'recent commentaries have highlighted the emotional significance of the relationship between parent and child for men and it is this 'emotional turn' which most markedly delineates the alleged transformation in father-child relations' (2008, p. 65). The data I have presented in this thesis so far generally supports this claim. However, the

emotional dimensions of fathering cannot be separated from the emotional dimensions of masculinity as, in contradiction, displays of emotion are a key part of the social organisation of masculinity and 'signify what kind of man one is' (Anderson, Adley and Bevan, 2010; Connell, 1987; Vaccaro et al, 2011, p.415; Vandello and Bosson, 2013). Gender matters, and gendered 'feelings rules' may influence the emotions men are willing to or permitted to express (Hochschild, 1983; Holmes, 2015; Robinson and Hockey, 2011). Therefore, tensions remain in terms of how to 'do' emotion as a father and sustain a masculine identity (Mc Queen, 2017).

In contrary to many previous studies, the idea that autism is an upsetting thing was not discussed directly in any of the interviews I conducted. That is not to say fathers were not, at times, upset, by things that happened to them because of the ways in which other people reacted to their children being autistic, for example. In what follows, I discuss fathers' experiences in events and situations they found to be upsetting, disputing the idea that masculinity itself is a determining factor shaping men's emotional behaviours, and rejecting the notion that autism is an upsetting 'thing'. Instead, I focus on how 'macro-societal processes as well as individual psychology' (Pease, 2012, p.127) affect fathers' emotional practices as they are caught up in a web of ideologies to do with disability, gender, sexuality, class, age, marital status, power, and risk (Burkitt, 2012; Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Crenshaw, 1989; Lupton, 2013; Morgan, 2004; Waling, 2019).

Lupton (2013) notes that the relationship between risk and emotion has not been adequately developed in the sociological literature. She observes that risk shapes the emotion we express in a multitude of ways, for example, we might feel anxious when we are at risk, or others might perceive our presence in some contexts as risky. Further, expressing emotions can also be a risky process. But others might judge our emotional expressions as inappropriate and identify that we need to be risk managed as a result. Thus, emotions indicate identity in terms of our interpretation of how we might present ourselves in the light of our perceptions of others.

As I have made clear throughout this thesis, the participants in this study have a heightened sense of uncertainty about what they should be doing as fathers and as men. This uncertainty informed their emotional expressions, often because they were concerned about how their emotional expressions would be received by others, and what the consequences of this might

be. In this chapter, I develop these points, drawing on Foucault's (1991) work on technological practices and governmentality. I recognise the influence of the gaze of other men (Kimmel, 2001), of professionals (Robertson; 2006; Rose, 1985), of women (Goddard, 2000) and a distinctly classed gaze (Skeggs, 1997). I examine the subjective effects of this using Goffman (1963) and Bourdieu (1990) whose theories enables us to recognise emotions expressed to be 'performances' or 'practices' which say something about the effects of power on how individuals understand themselves, feel, express and strategize as working-class men and fathers as they are situated in particular cultural, situational and relational frameworks (Bourdieu, 1994; Cottingham, 2012; Huppatz, 2009; Scheer, 2012; Thoits, 1989; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

My data suggests that most participants in my study do emotion 'based on what will enable them to get along best in that context' (Baumeister and Muraven, 1996, p. 405) as fathers and as masculine subjects. Accordingly, the stories from research I present here are messy and often contradictory. Some of the stories reflect shame and stigma because of the social organisation of masculinity and femininity. Others reflect men's powerlessness and the politics of emotional control at the interface with social class, and a few reflect men's ongoing beliefs about their entitlement, status, and power.

'I'm not an angry man': Emotions hidden.

At the start of this chapter, I recalled Joel discussing his emotional reactions when his son, Layton, was called a 'retard' by a group of young men playing football in the park, a story he has never repeated before. Joel's story is one of the most striking stories shared with me during fieldwork. It is a story of contained anger and hurt in the face of the abuse his son faced. It is unsurprising that almost all participants in my study discussed feeling anger in situations when members of the public stared or commented on their children's behaviours. However, as the data attests, discussing these events and acting on this anger was a difficult matter for individual men.

In the context of my study, anger is an interesting and dichotomous emotion; on one hand anger is considered as a signifier of hegemonic masculinity, a resource to assert dominance through intimidation and threats (Brody, 1999; Connell and Messerschmidt, 1995; Kupers, 2005). On the other hand, as Michael Kimmel (1996) points out, contemporary masculinity is less defined by these ideas. Fathering identities have shifted, so has the expectation that

fathers display anger and perform the disciplinarian role. The harmful effects of paternal aggression on children and families have been well documented (for example, Devaney, 2008). Therefore, my research indicates that for these fathers specifically, expressing anger was not a straightforward matter; and the men in my study experienced anxieties over how best to present themselves as masculine subjects and as fathers on occasions when they felt angry.

So, back to Joel. There is something particularly interesting about Joel's narrative as he claims to have never told his story before. It has been his secret. Why is this? And why has he chosen to tell me about it? In making sense of Joel's story, I first acknowledge that masculine/ paternal emotional identities are complex and multi-faceted; in part they are subjectively constructed in the light of what other people might think of them. Consider the following extract from Joel's interview in which he is explaining taking Layton on holiday:

> We used to go on holiday a lot – it was stressful, but the big picture was good, I'm glad we went. We took him to Butlins, even abroad a couple of times, we even went to Florida. It was difficult on the plane, the last time was traumatic as we got to passport control where you wait to go through the door, and he done one, he ran, and he's got this thing, he will run away in the park, run round a tree, and come back. Run round the aisle in Tesco's and come back. So, we were just a few places off going through and he just leaped over the thing, it bleeped, he ran through everyone, and everyone ran after him but he's that fast, leaping over everything, he's got this amazing flexibility he's like a gymnast, you know, and he was that quick that by the time they, you know, [tried to catch him] he was back. I laugh about it now but not then.

What underpins Joel's words (and Joel's silences) is a prevailing concern with the management of stigma and shame not solely because of Layton's behaviour, but because of how Joel himself might be perceived by others at that time in terms of his handling of the situations he describes. Therefore, Joel's stories are, to an extent, not just about 'doing' emotional masculinity, they are also about the emotional dimensions of keeping secrets. According to Bedrov and Leary 'secrecy is the conscious commitment to withhold information from others' (2020, p.3). People are motivated to keep secrets to protect other

people from emotional upset or to avoid being thought of in negative terms. Keeping secrets is also a coping mechanism by which individuals protect themselves from recalling difficult events and the specific emotions connected to these occurrences, because they feel ashamed, for example (Scheff, 2014).

Kimmel states that 'masculinity is a *homo*social enactment. We test ourselves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because we want other men to grant us our manhood' (2001, p.275). This is an important point in relation to the data here. Joel's stories indicate that his decision to keep secrets is a result of how men construct emotional identities according to what they think various other people might expect of them (Goddard, 2000). Accordingly, different gazes influence men's emotional expression and ability to act. This might be why the research interview seems to have (eventually!) provided a novel and safe opportunity for Joel, and the other fathers, to subject themselves to a different female gaze which encouraged a different masculine subjectivity, where discussing and exploring their feelings about their conflicting experiences as men and fathers carried fewer risky consequences (Lewis, Sligo, and Massey, 2005).

In understanding this phenomenon in more depth, I turn again to Goffman (1963) and his work on stigma. According to Goffman, fear of being seen as deviant motivates individuals to perform identities based on what they judge to be appropriate for a situation. Joel's concerns, and the concerns of other fathers from the cohort, reflect that worries about being judged by others inform men's emotional responses to the incidents they describe. The emotional incidents discussed reflect men's decisions 'to display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie and not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when and where' (Goffman, 1963, p.57).

'They stop and stare': Emotions observed.

At this point, I want to acknowledge the body of work reflecting the emotional experiences of mothers of disabled children. Much of this draws on Hochschild's (1983) work on emotional labour; Ryan, for example, discusses 'the emotion work parents (mothers) conduct in public places both to make their children more acceptable within the space and to reduce the discomfort that others experience' (2010, p. 868). In a similar study, Runswick-Cole draws on Hochschild, concluding that mothers are 'wearing it all with a smile' when they anticipate and manage the emotional reactions of others in response to their disabled children (2013, p.

105). Robinson and Hockey (2011) also draw on Hochschild's work, noting how the gendered nature of 'feelings rules' affect men specifically. These are important points of consideration. However, Hochschild has been criticised for a lack of political bite in failing to consider how power, class and context shape gendered emotional behaviour, also important points in the context of the work I present here (Tyler and Slater, 2018).

Using Joel's narrative as an example, I have begun to establish so far that within anger-provoking situations, the fathers who participated in my study are not universally powerful, and expressing emotion is not always driven by the pursuit of a masculine identity, rather, it is strongly dependent on audience and context. Social privilege brings with it a moral authority which can legitimise the display of anger by certain individuals, in certain situations, but not by others (Ridgeway and Walker, 1995). Consider, for example, public reactions to the anger expressed by Liverpool FC supporters following the Hillsborough tragedy. The 'unsubstantiated impressions and questionable assumptions' (Scraton, 2009, p.146) made about them developed out of the stereotyping of football supporters and their low status as generally working-class men, with a presumed biological and cultural predisposition to violence and aggression often touted in the media. Therefore, producing a respectable paternal identity at the interface of gender and class can entail exhibiting self-control and the management of class-specific characteristics deemed morally repellent, such as anger (Skeggs, 1997). In illustration of this, the next set of extracts shows how participants in my study managed their anger as fathers with autistic children and as working- class men in the public contexts of fathering.

The first extract is from an interview with Ken (divorced, 40's) who has a teenage son, Ben, aged 18. Theirs is an interesting case, as Ken and his partner, Ben's mother, split up when Ben was young. Ben went to live with his mother but returned to his dad's care some years later when it emerged that mum had developed problems with alcohol. Ken is now Ben's full-time carer. In the extract below, Ken is discussing an incident that took place on a train on the way home from a day out, when Ben had a meltdown[9]. He explains:

> I had the police one time. They stop and stare [the public] the police at first
> thought it was a fight, a train guard on the way home came down and said

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[9] A meltdown is defined by the National Autistic Society as 'when an autistic person gets overwhelmed by everything around them, and may begin to shout, scream, cry or lose control' National Autistic Society (autism.org.uk)

there had been a disturbance and I explained [about Ben becoming

distressed] and he wouldn't leave it he said it was a disturbance he said he

was getting the manager.

Public perceptions of the incident on the train suggest not only a lack of awareness about autism, but also that unaccompanied fathers like Ken may be considered inadequate. The belief that fathers should 'control' children through discipline remains an important indicator of 'good' fatherhood (Henwood and Procter, 2003). Ken continues:

I said, 'your train guard needs training about special needs', the people

behind us had heard the squabbling, but they reported it as a fight as they

hadn't heard the full story, I asked 'do you do special needs training?' but I

didn't follow it up, but I should have done.

Fathers with autistic children may experience courtesy stigma, a process which 'leads the wider society to treat to treat both individuals in some respects as one' (Goffman, 1963, p.43). Others' reactions to the incident undermine Ken's sense of competence as a father and as a masculine subject through inferring a loss of control. Dolan observes that on occasions, men can reassert a sense of control by expressing 'knowledge about their children' (2014, p.11). Explaining that Ben is autistic allows Ken to deflect the idea that his behaviour is a result of inadequate parenting (Ryan, 2010).

The data from Ken also indicates that the right to express anger and have perceived injustices recognised and acted upon is not a simply a matter of gender, but is strongly power and class dependent (Holmes, 2004). Ken is a working-class man, and Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst claim that 'class is not an innocent descriptive term but is a loaded moral signifier' (2001, p.889). Working class fathers do not always have recourse to display emotions such as anger in public settings as they are conscious of the specific ramifications for them in terms of how parenting and masculinity may be judged. They seem to struggle for recognition beyond suspicion and scrutiny, and this can result in difficulties in being heard and being treated respectfully (Kirk, 2006; Skeggs, 1997). Ken's decision not to '*follow it up*' afterwards reflects the powerlessness he feels but his decision not to pursue the incident with the train company may serve to protect him from further emotional distress (Bedrov and Leary, 2020).

To illustrate these dynamics further, I turn now to an extract from an interview with Nigel, discussing his 10-year-old son, Sean. Nigel is a middle-aged white working-class man, and a full-time carer. He lives with Sean, his wife, his own elderly mother, and his elder son in an overcrowded home on a deprived working-class council estate in the northwest of England. For this family, eating out together is an event reserved mainly for special occasions. In the following extract, Nigel is telling me about a recent family trip to an American pizza restaurant when Sean picked up a tray of food and spilt it on the floor. He explains:

> We went and said [to the staff] 'he is autistic'. We told him [the waiter] where to put the food and he put it right in front of him and it went everywhere. Everyone was looking and he said 'Hey! What did you do that for?' And I said 'Hey! Who are you shouting at?' He shouted at him. The boss came over and said 'Hey! you little horror!' I felt like punching her face in and the manager apologised and said she forgot to tell the waiter and she never apologised. The tray had landed down, all our food was gone. The other meals [for the children] were salvaged [but] they said if we wanted more food we would have to pay, and I said, 'no mate we will just go and we tell everyone to avoid the place you have been terrible asking us to pay again'. We went without so we let the kids eat theirs and we went. I don't know how I kept my temper you just do.

Bourdieu (1990) acknowledges that we are judged by others according to our tastes and dispositions. Leisure activities such as where we choose to eat are indicators of economic, social, and cultural capital which individuals can mobilise in the achievement of social recognition and power (Bennett, 2009). In relation to these points, working-class individuals 'quite noticeably bear the mark of their status in their speech, appearance, and manner and who, relative to the public institutions of our society, find they are second class citizens' (Goffman, 1963, p.173). Further, Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst state that 'people's articulation of self is closely related to access to cultural capital and resources' (2001, p. 889). Nigel does not have the capital to construct a valued fatherhood identity that a middle-class father might have. A good father identity for him specifically, like so many of these fathers, involves managing risk by concealing 'dangerous' emotions such as anger, in order to avoid stereotypes and moral panics linking working class dads, poor parenting, and male violence (Freeman, 2003). Perhaps had the incident Nigel discusses taken place in a high-class

restaurant, and had involved a middle class, articulate family, then the outcome may have been a different one.

The scenarios I have used so far show autism can overlap with stereotypes and 'certain social and cultural expectations associated with working-class masculinity' (Dolan, 2014, p.5) to affect how others interpret autistic children's behaviour and perceive the quality of men's fathering. The data suggests that fathers felt unable to display anger in challenging others' behaviour, thus supporting the notion that 'emotional capital is inextricably linked to variations in power and privilege in contemporary society' (Cottingham, 2016, p.452). As these stories illustrate, in circumstances where masculinity and class capital overlap in their insignificance, 'the petty mundane everyday humiliations and slights of social class' (Reay, 2005, p.917) means that working class men such as Nigel and Ken may have their anger dismissed as insignificant, or it can be used to label them as problematic or dangerous. Both interpretations affect the way in which these men respond (Taylor and Risman, 2006; Brown, 1999).

Ryan points out: 'the way in which [parents of autistic children] retain poise, rather than expressing their feelings about the responses of others towards their children or themselves' (2010, p.875). The extracts show that men with autistic children perform anger as classed and gendered subjects, often in the shadows of ideologically and politically informed concerns about their mediocrity (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007). For these fathers specifically, maintaining 'poise', to use Ryan's term, indicates powerlessness and governance as it manifests through gender and class (Kimmel, 2001; Plummer, 1995).

'People say stuff I just ignore it'

The stories from research I have drawn on throughout this thesis exemplify how contemporary society is characterised by modes of everyday surveillance (Rose, 1985, 1990). Social sorting is a by-product of this surveillance; groups and individuals become labelled and classified, and the power of other groups to label and classify comes to the fore (Lyon, 2001; 2008). As I have explained in other chapters, fathers are parenting in a risk society (Beck, 2002). As a result, all fathers experienced multiple forms of public and private surveillance described by Foucault as a 'permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible…thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert' (1977, p.214). The literature suggests

that parental scrutiny is an experience more common to women, but ideas about the gender order are embedded within interpersonal systems of surveillance that maintain this system, and men experience this also (Connell, 1995; Schippers, 2006). The next set of extracts continues to focus on men's reflections on the subjective experience of being watched, but indicate the ways in which, at times, men resisted this by identifying with and investing in more conservative ideologies of patriarchy, masculinity, and fatherhood as a result of these experiences.

I examine this first using extracts from an interview with Mark, a working class, white, middle aged single dad who works part time and has part time custody of his 14-year-old daughter, Tina. He recounts a disturbing tale when he was brought in for questioning by the police following a member of the public reporting a man attempting to abduct a child:

> I was once walking through a park with [Tina] and I was getting her back to her mum's, and I went in the supermarket and the next minute - two riot vans and the police helicopter. They had had a report of a child acting strange. I said, 'are you having a laugh she has autism'. I had to go in the [police] van to her mums to check she was ok. That's probably the worst thing. It took 3 hours getting questioned. I don't have any choice I can't even think about it. I have to just get on with it. People say stuff I just ignore it, the worst ones are people in shops with trolleys that sort of thing. I just have to get on with it really.

Like Ken's earlier narrative, a man with an autistic child in a public place invites public scrutiny. But for Mark specifically, the image of a man in a park with a child behaving in a non-typical way affords him a potential abuser label (Scourfield, 2006). According to Herz, 'an approach whereby masculinity, by definition, results in being [identified as] a risk makes it hard for boys or men to free themselves from such a position' (2017, p.41) and this is clearly a very real issue for Mark. However, experiencing gender stereotyping in this way does little in terms of increasing Mark's understanding of gender oppression or the nature of patriarchy as it disadvantages mothers and fathers as gendered subjects. As next extract shows, Mark's experience of being identified as potentially risky lends credence to his belief that women have too much power and men too little. In a further example, Mark recounts an occasion that took place when he was sitting in a café with his friend, and his daughter, Tina

(15). A woman he had never met approached Mark offering 'help' with Tina, which Mark did not need. He goes on to explain:

> It was a mum, with a daughter, with a granddaughter. I can see exactly what you are you are, a family of no men, and you read your signs through everybody else's lives, and that's what my mate had seen as well. I couldn't believe it. She didn't even stop to qualify what she had said she just disappeared. You get a lot of that.

Goddard suggests that:

> the female gaze is no longer the most important factor determining how fathers react to bringing up their children. Lack of the wife's presence often means that the man does not have her eye upon him while he decides what to do next with his child, even if he does only have it with him on weekends or for a few hours in the day. This may be the beginning of a masculine independence and self-acceptance (Goddard, 2000, p. 38).

Yet, Mark's narrative does not support Goddard's claim. Indeed, a masculine or a paternal presence was rarely enough to signify competent caring. On the contrary, female subjects are likely to have degrees of capital which legitimate their ability to judge the caring practices of men (Huppatz, 2009). Unsurprisingly, Mark experiences the 'female gaze' as intrusive and undermining (Goddard, 2000) but his emotional reaction to the event helps us to understand the ways in which he conceptualises masculinity and gender relations more broadly. Being controlled by others is antithetic to masculinity (Connell, 1995) and Coston and Kimmel suggest that working-class men who feel aggrieved at status loss and powerlessness in the workplace look for ways to 'effectively "compensate" for being underlings' (2012, p 108). Mark falls into a similar pattern of behaviour following the 'attack' by the women in the café. To reposition himself as powerful in the face of attacks by women specifically, Mark falls back into 'the rhetoric of extremism' (Edley and Wetherall, 2001, p. 448) stereotyping and blaming women, implying that they are lesbians or man-haters who have eroded men's power (Burn et al., 2000; Dahl, Vesico and Weaver, 2015).

Managing oneself is an indicator of masculinity (Connell, 1995) but this can be a contradictory and difficult process for fathers who are deeply concerned about their children's well-being. This is reflected in David's words below, where he recalls an incident where his daughter, Rebecca was stared at in the supermarket:

> My hackles are just up straight away and I'm just staring at him my eyes are boring into him and I sort of, almost, I just wanted him to make a gesture, just make one gesture towards my daughter and I'll fucking steam into you, and I'll fucking kill you.

And in the following narrative, again, from David, recalling being in the city centre with Paul:

> When we are in town, he can be quite vocal, you are walking up the road and he makes a noise, it sort of echoes (he laughs). People look, they get spooked. But by God no nobody says anything if they did, they would (pause) ...have something from me you know.

Physical display and aggressive behaviour are key indicators of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Most men do not have the ability or the desire to perform masculinity in this way, nevertheless, the pressure to live up to these standards is intense, and 'controlling and transforming one's own or others' emotions—especially fear—is key' (Vaccaro et al., 2011, p. 415) to sustaining a befitting masculine performance in emotional terms. On the other hand, demonstrating paternal responsibility and morality requires self-reflection and the containment of such risky behaviours (Morgan, 2004). Therefore, David must manage several competing demands- appearing fearless about entering into physical or verbal disputes and managing feelings of shame or victimhood that arise from walking away from confrontation, whilst simultaneously presenting himself as a good father through displaying emotional sensitivity. According to Dermott (2008) this dilemma is one of the paradoxes of contemporary fatherhood.

Paechter states that 'those oppressed by a particular local gender ideology are nevertheless caught up and invested in it' (2018, p. 123) and in illustration of this, David falls back into 'imaginary positioning', a discursive strategy which functions as 'a source of fantasy

gratification' (Wetherell and Edley, 1999, p. 337) and through he attempts to demonstrate hegemonic masculinity through speech acts. David's words allow him to identify with the fantasy of acting on his anger which allow him to 'say something concrete about [himself] and how [he] would like to be regarded' [as a masculine/ paternal subject] 'in a particular situation' (Snow and Anderson, 1987, p. 1360). In the extract below, David emphasizes his increased ability to control his emotions and behaviours and affirms that age has allowed him to develop increased wisdom, sagacity, and tolerance as a masculine subject (Spector-Mersel, 2006), stating:

> I've mellowed significantly over the years yeah, but when I see people mocking her and laughing at her ...there was one incident over on the park one summer, you know Rebecca, she's obviously very different, a group of kids, teenagers were looking at her. I could see they were sniggering a bit, but I thought 'you know what they don't understand I'll just let it go let her do her thing', and a little stone come over, someone had thrown a little stone. And that's when I just turned, and I just flew at the kid. He ran for his life 'cos I would have just throttled him and funnily enough the strange thing, the next day we were going for our walk, lovely summer evening, it was about five o' clock maybe, and by the station there, this kid is coming towards us. You can only go one way and I thought 'oh aye' and he seen me, and his whole demeanour just changed, his head dropped and he...he shit himself really. But rather than grab hold of him and give him a fucking belt I just said, 'listen have you got a brother and sister?' He said' yes'. I said 'well imagine if you were like her, you couldn't express how you felt to your family. lf you weren't feeling well you couldn't talk; imagine how you'd feel' and I sort of got through to him. I could see the change and that he understood, and I'd sort of educated him and that's the way I try to do it now.

Wetherell and Edley (1999) suggest that even when men discuss themselves in 'alternative' terms which seem to distance them from the hegemonic ideal, 'what is being celebrated in this discourse is…the courage, strength, and determination of these men *as men'* (1999, p 350). Taken together, both sets of extracts indicate that Mark and David are aware of how gender stereotypes make their involvement with the care of autistic children somewhat

dubious. Nevertheless, their self-presentation strategies incorporate the situational and imaginary accomplishment of masculinity regardless as a way to address this challenge.

'I was gonna end it, but they didn't recognise it': Emotions unheard?

The Children Act (1989) places a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the interests of disabled children, although, as I have discussed, fathers often feel excluded from these processes (Prynallt-Jones, Carey, and Doherty, 2018; Runswick-Cole and Hodge, 2009). Nevertheless, there is a dearth of support services for families with disabled children, and the struggles that many families (aka mothers) have engaged in in order to have their needs met have been well documented (see, for example, Derbyshire, 2013). In this next section, I want to develop themes in relation to exclusion, masculinity, emotional distress, and masculine privilege with a focus on fathers' recollections about engagement with such services. From a Foucauldian perspective, one of the functions of social services is to maintain regimes of social order, thereby justifying the control of disabled people and their families. There is a deeply gendered aspect to this control, and Herz argues 'that if social work is going to be able to help men and boys, and help others victimized by men and boys, it cannot be through a practice whereby certain masculine ideals are reproduced' (2017, p. 44). Some fathers were well aware of this, David, for example, stated:

> It's a neurotypical world of behavioural psychologists and social workers
> looking through those eyes with the underlying assumption that all males
> are potentially a predator but if you switched it round there'd be fucking
> murder, it's a form of sexism really.

The data indicates that single fathers especially were aware of the scrutiny they faced as parents with autistic children. But, whilst some fathers felt stigmatized by this, and managed their behaviour accordingly, other men experienced such interventions advantageous. For example, in the extract below, Ken is discussing his engagement with social services. Herz (2017) observes that 'bad' mothering is one way in which fathers come on to the radar of services and Ken obtained custody of Ben following removal from his mother's care. He explains:

> My life changed massively as [before Ben came to live with him] I could
> come and go so it hit me like a ton of bricks as a single man, no other family

members it was all on my shoulders. Gradually I started getting support getting respite but that's took a while to kick in. I had to beg for it because I was gonna end it all. I had a breakdown, I was in tears, I was ringing the hospital and they helped. Given my situation as a single man apart from my mum and dad who social services knew couldn't really help me out, it was just too much.

However, following Ben's placement with his father, the social work support made available to them lessened, as he explains below:

Social services was aware I am a full-time carer and can't work, but they let me get to the stage where I was gonna end it, but they didn't recognise it.

Heaton draws on Foucault in suggesting 'the ways in which carers are conceptualised and classified in policy can have far reaching implications for individuals thus defined' (1999, p. 774). It is interesting that Ken describes himself as *'a full-time carer'*. The ability to cope is, of course, an indicator of hegemonic masculinity, but as Ken places emphasis on the extreme nature of his circumstances, he implies a sense of distance between his caring responsibilities and 'normal' fathering, and identifying as a full -time carer, rather than as a father, allows Ken to position himself within the field of caring work, which is different to parenting. Thus, Ken implies no father could 'cope' with the situation he found himself in.

Furthermore, expressing his difficulties as he does in the extract does not degrade Ken's masculine identity, rather, it enhances it. Ribiero and Paul (2008) observe that men can be acclaimed for engaging in caring practices that women regularly perform without acknowledgement. Further, Wetherall and Edley note 'that sometimes one of the most effective ways of being hegemonic, or being a 'man', may be to demonstrate one's distance from hegemonic masculinity. Perhaps what is most hegemonic is to be non-hegemonic!' (1999, p.351).

The extract suggests that expressing distress specifically is an emotional capital that can be deployed to legitimise interventions and the provision of services which are of benefit to some men (Reay, 2004). At first this appears a curious presentation of masculinity, given that coping is a key signifier of a masculine identity, and given Ken's previous narrative about the

incident on the train. But the stigma men experience is contextual, and, on occasion, stigma can have positive effects, offering men opportunities for special recognition, and, for some, justifying their avoidance of caring responsibilities that women would be expected to take up (Broomes, 2020; Herman and Miall, 1990). By voicing his inability to cope, his vulnerabilities and his need for help, Ken positions himself as 'other', inviting the moral judgement of others (Lupton, 2013). As a result, Ken gets his support needs met. Given that approximately 90% of single parents in the UK are mothers, demanding support on the grounds of being a single father is an audacious demand for Ken to make. Therefore, another way to read the extract is to acknowledge that emphasising the link between emotional distress and risk is a means for some fathers to exercise masculine privilege (Coston and Kimmel, 2012).

'He can't cope and all this type of stuff'.

Playing down emotional distress is considered a key signifier of masculinity (Buzzanell and Turner, 2003) and a participant in study by Dolan states 'outward displays of emotion are still something that if men do it, you are considered a bit of a prick … a bit of a wimp' (2010, p.589). On the other hand, Carlson, and Hall state 'a lack of an emotional outward sign of distress or emotional upheaval can be misinterpreted' (2011, p. 192) and for fathers this can be mistaken for an indifferent attitude to children, and thoughtless parenting. Emotional intimacy is widely considered an instrumental aspect of contemporary father-child relationships for many men (Dermott, 2008) but the data also attests that for some of the fathers in my study, acting on or acknowledging some of the emotional aspects of fatherhood invited surveillance which some fathers feared (Heaton, 1999), as David explains:

> I have to be very careful, so in terms of when people look at [Paul] cos he does look odd sometimes I just have to blur that out cos it's easy to get in to a confrontation if you are being defensive I have to be ultra- cautious because the social workers are looking for slight chinks in your armour and they will, no question about it, they fucking will go to court.

Herz suggests that social workers should create 'spaces for change' (2017, p.45) which allow men to explore alternative notions of being a man and a father. However, no fathers from my study were encouraged to reflect on this aspect of their lives. Rather, emotions expressed that might indicate men's willingness to explore change were considered somewhat problematic,

considered instead as a sign of men's instability and riskiness. These accounts indicate that the disciplinary gendered gaze influences not just bodies, but the emotions that are connected to them (King, 2004). For example, in the extract, David is discussing his feelings when his daughter Rebecca is collected following a weekend spent at home, and taken back to the residential unit where she lives during the week:

> It's like I have to come down and reflect on what's happened. It's not easy for me to let her go, you see, it's not easy at all. I need to be alone and she [ex-wife] was in my face saying I need help, psychological help, you are depressed and all that. Fucking check out the big brains and all that you know what I mean, and in the end, I said you're gonna have to go, I can't fucking deal with it, and I think that's where she has got really shirty and got onto the social workers saying he can't cope and all this type of stuff. It's opened a can of worms.

Nikolas Rose (1985) suggests that the "psy" disciplines have enabled identification of conditions such as autism, and legitimised intervention by professionals in these children's lives. What is also apparent is how this extends to justify the monitoring of these children's families. The data suggests that fathers may be required to present themselves in emotional terms to meet with the expectations of others that demand compliance with gender stereotypes (D'Aoust, 2014; Dolan, 2014). In David's case specifically, a good father identity remains associated with prevailing ideas about heterosexual masculinity and emotional restriction, or at least, emotional control (Curran, 2010; Tyler and Slater, 2018). Emslie, Ridge, Ziebland and Hunt (2006) point out the harmful effects of emotional containment on men's mental health and emotional well- being. Nevertheless, research has shown that fathers who reach out for help to social workers either go unheard, or fear overbearing scrutiny (Storhaug and Oien, 2012).

Despite a lack of clarity as to what counts as an appropriate expression of paternal emotionality, the 'real men don't cry' ideology is a yardstick with which to measure and cast aspersions on David's competency as a father (Mc Queen, 2017). Indeed, in later interviews David disclosed that social workers had used a blog he had written on his experiences as a father with an autistic child to build a case against him, claiming that they had concerns about this inability to 'cope' because of his status as a single man, and because of the deeply

emotional nature of some of his posts. It has been argued that the virtual world provides a context for 'undoing gender' (Butler, 1990) and Donna Haraway's cyborg promises liberation from categorical essentialism. However, the data presented here reveals the limits of this idea, at least for David (Darling-Wolf, 2008).

In relation to this, the narratives indicate that despite claims to emancipation, social work is a powerful force in the creation of gender regimes and oppressive social relations between fathers and disabled children and between women and men (Curran, 2010). They also indicate the power available, and the responsibility placed on David's ex-wife in ascribing the limits of what is emotionally acceptable for David specifically. Mothers may purposely draw on gender stereotypes to undermine men's relationships with their children; as Margaret O'Brien suggests, a 'stronger father-child relationship might mean a less intimate mother-child bond' (1988, p.121) and some mothers, purposely or otherwise, may go on to obstruct fathers from engaging in particular aspects of parenting (Allen and Hawkins, 1990; Fagan and Barnett 2003). In this way, mothers and fathers are polarized and policed to ensure compliance with normative expectations about gender and are dictated to in terms of how this is in the best interests of disabled children (Morgan, 2015).

In relation to this, we can also understand that emotion is a capital but the contexts where it is deployed and the ways in which is 'done' places different levels of value on men and women. For example, Huppatz (2009) suggests that skills and dispositions associated with femininity, such as sensitivity to the feelings of others, emotional openness, and the ability to empathise are resources that buy women influence and value in the care arena. This is a double-edged sword; by privy of gender, mothers are likely to have emotional capital which buys them influence and power, but crucially, this ascribes them with the responsibility to care for children and monitor what fathers do. This may be why mothers are more likely to be listened to and respected by social workers, and fathers may not (Dominelli, 2002).

On the other hand, the combination of sexism, surveillance, and lack of understanding in terms of his emotional behaviours and needs has had potentially devastating effects on David's relationship with his daughter:

> I see my brief on Monday, there's gonna be what's called a gatekeeper
> meeting where they review the care package 'cos the social worker thinks

Rebecca shouldn't come home, she thinks she should stay in the place [residential care] seven days a week 'cos it's better for her and I don't visit. The manager of the place doesn't think that she said that when they explain to Rebecca that she's going home on a Friday her face lights up, she's dead happy. I know she's happy coming home for the two days, but I let her do her own thing and chill out, she's on her ipad, it's very easy going, it's quiet 'cos obviously conversation is one way, but the social worker thinks she should be [tails off]. I couldn't go and visit her and that's part of my argument. I know if I went to visit her, I know she would want to come home with me 'cos any time I've seen her in school or anywhere in those situations she's come running up to me wanting to go home. It's just her nature. I'm her dad ...erm...so her being there 7 days a week is absolutely devastating I would have lost her 'cos I couldn't go and see her it's fucking end game for me.

In David's words we can see the continuing influence of ideologies which frame men as risky, incapable, or potential abusers, and the lack of value his fathering affords (Scourfield, 2006). Margaret O'Brien suggests that 'any transformation of men into competent and emotionally sensitive partners [or fathers] begs the question: what areas are left in which women can excel and derive meaning?' (1988, p.121) and David's access to Rebecca specifically is influenced by the beliefs and motivation of his ex-partner and social work team who constructs him as emotionally unstable and thus a risky dad, despite mum no longer wishing to be involved in Rebecca's care. Subsequently, there are ongoing suspicions about his competency and his motives, as previous chapters have attested.

Conclusion

My goal in this chapter has been to allow a deep interrogation of how social class, gender, disability, and power shape emotional fatherhood/ masculinity specifically for fathers who have autistic children. The account I have produced is a richer and more sophisticated reflection of the emotional lives of fathers with autistic children than has been presented in previous research. I have rejected the idea that men find 'autism' distressing, and I have also attempted to move away from conceptualising emotional masculinity as something individual men undertake only in the pursuit of dominance and control, although I have not completely rejected this idea. Instead, I have drawn out the contradictions in fathers' negotiation of

emotional identities, holding onto masculinity but recognising how men are emotionally policed. Using empirical examples from interview data, I have suggested that in knowing more about these men's emotional identities, 'we need to understand how certain configurations of emotional capital align with [their] distinct social location in terms of race, class, and gender, as well as space, time, and structural/ occupational demands' (Cottingham, 2016, p. 281). The emotional narratives presented in this chapter help us to understand the emotional impact of how gender functions at the individual, social and political level (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Accordingly, I have emphasised a need for an intersectional understanding of these men's emotional lives (Crenshaw, 1989). For working class fathers, in particular, the data suggest the power of 'the stereotypic construction of masculinity among the working class celebrates their physical virtues [but] also problematizes their masculinity by imagining them as dumb brutes' (Coston and Kimmel, 2012, p. 107). As the contexts these men enter into with their children is 'contradictory terrain' (Dolan, 2014, p.5) they are caught in a crossfire of ideas about class, masculinity, disability, and fathering. Men's emotional narratives reflect their reactions to judgement by others. This leads to tensions and discrepancies as they attempt to articulate appropriate, but often contradictory responses to this judgement as they negotiate different spaces and individuals alongside their children.

Nevertheless, for most men displaying too much of the 'wrong' emotion, is taboo and carries penalties according to where the emotion is displayed and to whom. For example, Joel, who we met at the opening of the chapter, exemplifies the management of 'emotional manhood,' (Schrock and Mc Cabe, 2011, p.414) a performative technique through which tries to maintain a masculine self in line with dominant cultural standards (Buzzanell and Turner, 2003; Vaccaro et al, 2011). However, Joel's behaviour is not indicative of masculinity in and of itself. Rather, he is caught in a web of ideologies about how good fathers should behave. The data in this chapter also demonstrates some of the benefits of hegemonic masculinity and I suggest some possible reasons why these fathers seem to persistently embed hegemonic masculinity within their identities, using narratives from Mark and Ken as examples. Ken's configurations of emotional masculinity could indicate his compliance with externally imposed norms of how men should behave (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). But, on the other hand, they could be recognised as manifestations of 'practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the re-production of patriarchy' (Demetriou, 2001, p.337), enabling him to garner paternal significance and special treatment (Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Wetherell and Edley, 1999). Mark's anger at being publicly challenged by women might

suggest an investment in male privilege, but, on the other hand, might be a response to the vulnerability he feels and the scrutiny he experiences on a regular basis as a direct result of being a male carer.

Finally, although McQueen (2017) suggests that men might suppress their vulnerability as a way to reclaim control when there are risks to masculinity, it is my view that suppressing emotion is not done solely in order to 'do' masculinity for personal gain, although as the data shows, masculinity remains important. Participants' emotional containment sometimes results from institutional and interpersonal demands made of fathers specifically (Ridge, Emslie and White, 2010). Contained emotional expression can reveal the stigma and governance of men by others as they enter into a world perceived as feminine (Huppatz, 2009). Men expressing emotional pain, as David does, can be seen as problematic. In the light of this, men's emotional reflections might reveal the limited nature of the gendered emotional scripts available to them as fathers with autistic children, and thus allow us to question men's emotional agency. Moreover, given the intense focus on risk, and the lack of clarity as to what was acceptable paternal behaviour, it is perhaps unsurprising that, as Seidler suggests, at times, fathers who took part in the study developed 'a particular conception of their individual masculinity as 'the enemy' (1995, p. 218).

Chapter 8
CONCLUSION

Introduction

The chapter draws together the project in its entirety, beginning by recapping the aims of the project as a whole and outlining the originality of the methods approach used. I provide a short overview of each chapter and explain how the data collected has developed what is known about fathers with autistic children in new and novel ways. I then provide a concise summary of the main points drawn from the project as a whole and ask what has the study achieved. Following this, I reflect on the implications of my findings for fathers themselves, for policy makers and service providers, and, importantly, for those carrying out feminist research with men. I then address the limitations of the study and make some suggestions for future research in the field.

Key aims of research and original contributions to knowledge.

The key aims of my research were to make new contributions to research on fathers with autistic children through answering the following research questions:

- What can the practices of working-class fathers with autistic children tell us about how fatherhood, gender, and masculinity are constructed in this specific context?
- To what extent is masculinity a barrier or problem, or, on the other hand, a resource for these men specifically?
- How might other social divisions such as class, age, or marital status intersect with masculinity and what are the effects of this on fathers' practices?
- What are the methodological issues that arise when researching working-class fathers with autistic children?

Firstly, in addressing issues of methodology, I have shown the limitations of previous research on this topic which does not begin to address that masculinity and fatherhood are socially constructed terms. In contrast, my approach to the study of fathers with autistic children widens the focus of the research beyond conceptualising 'autism' or 'man' in problematic terms, instead aiming 'to critically analyze the entire gender system' (Garland-Thompson, 2005, p. 1557) as it creates differences, inequalities, and advantages for mothers and fathers in the specific context of parenting autistic children. Additionally, my research

has benefitted from an intersectional approach which recognises the diversity amongst men and people with autism, the plurality of masculine identities, and the ways in which masculinities shift over space and time (Crenshaw, 1989; Robinson and Hockey, 2011).

Through examining the parenting practices of working-class fathers with autistic children, I have been able to move beyond the bland accounts previously presented to find out more about what fathers 'do' and don't do not only as men but as classed paternal masculine subjects. A focus on practices allows the identification and analysis of how influences and beliefs, personal, relational, cultural, ideological, material and policy-informed, held by fathers and about fathers, shape what these individuals do in their everyday, routine actions (Morgan, 2011). This is a key gap in the autism literature which has previously used 'autism' or 'masculinity' as its key theoretical drivers.

In relation to this, I have developed work on research practice and ethics more broadly and with these men specifically, through focusing on the presentation of self in research, and responding to the criticisms I faced accordingly. An intersectional, 'practices' informed approach influenced the strategies I used in recruitment, fieldwork, and data collection, in acknowledging the relationship between *'the social actor, the individual whose actions are being described, and accounted for, and the perspectives of the observer'* (Morgan, 2004, p. 17, italics in original). My methodology is sensitive to the concerns men had about how they would be perceived or misunderstood. More specifically, I have carried out this project from a unique standpoint as a married, heterosexual, working-class woman with an autistic child. The methods I chose to gather data were reflective of this, as were my relationships with participants during fieldwork. This has required me to produce highly personal reflections in relation to positionality, self-presentation in recruitment and fieldwork, the influence of class and culture on my study, and the nature of rapport and ethics in the context of conducting feminist research with men.

These points of reflection indicate some of the ways in which feminist work with men 'requires that we "ask the man question" to further unravel inequalities' (Dowd, 2010, p.415) but asking the man question is not an easy matter. Therefore, researching the lives of fathers with autistic children has also enabled me to see how inequalities also play out in an academic context through the regulation of what 'counts' as good enough research practice and the writing of thesis has also been a tool or process through which I have attempted to

marry up my personal and professional identities and find 'meaning' as a scholar (Swartz, 1997).

Nevertheless, my approach has enabled a shift away from the idea that 'autism' or' masculinity' in a biological sense is the determining factor which shapes fathers' behaviour, acknowledging instead the influence of wider influences such policy, employment, and marital status, as well as how social divisions and beliefs about age, gender, and class, for example, influences what fathers do, and are permitted to do, in their paternal role. However, within this framework I retain the idea that fathers are also masculine subjects which allows a critical analysis of the benefits and penalties a masculine identity can convey on these men specifically (Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Demetriou, 2001). I address these dynamics by chapter below.

Discussion and key findings

In contrast to the majority of previous studies on the topic, my findings suggest that the ontological status of 'autism' itself goes far beyond clinical definition and 'through a proliferation of people being catalogued within the autistic 'spectrum'…this fact has produced a cultural phenomenon that goes far beyond the limits of medical science' (Barazzetti, Barbetta, Bella and Valtellina, 2016, n.p.). In accordance, I have shown that autism as a 'condition' is a not the determining factor which shapes what fathers do. Nor do fathers express significant emotional distress as a direct result of having an autistic child. Rather, autism is dislocated from the notion that it is a problematic 'thing' and running parallel to this is the recognition that masculinity and fatherhood are complex social and cultural constructions. Accordingly, the work I present here reveals the ways in which the paternal self is constituted in multiple social contexts with others in the contexts of parenting autistic children and shows that masculinity as a set of biological traits or dispositions does not predispose men to behaving in particular ways as fathers with autistic children.

However, men and women both parent within the risk society (Beck, 2002). The increasing prevalence of autism diagnosis and the roles that parents are expected to play as a result provides an interesting lens through which to view how these dynamics play out for fathers specifically in terms of understanding how paternal masculinity is shaped by risk consciousness, or alternatively, by resistance to these ideas.

The data shows that this is an important point of consideration; Burkitt notes that 'the rules and resources we learn and use to put together our actions, along with the personal characteristics, attributes and beliefs we desire from our actions and roles, plus the ways others evaluate us and our behaviour, all go together to make us into the person we are' (2008, p. 61).Therefore, 'autism' and the package of ideologies to do with gender and disability that accompanies its detection and management poses a challenge to the ontological status of masculinity and fatherhood as fathers' identity performances attest (Whitehead, 2002). Fathers do not perceive autism to be a risk, rather the messages they hear infers that masculinity is. Accordingly, the process of autism diagnosis and the positioning of women as central to the processes around caring for the child situates most men on the margins of the action. Fathers had difficulty in establishing a coherent sense of paternal self because of these experiences (Giddens, 1991). They were often not clear what they were supposed to 'do'. That is not to say fathers passively accepted their marginal positioning or dis/engaged with their children in accordance, rather, these identity challenges are a means with which to understand more about how men themselves understand the workings of the gender order in its broadest terms (Connell, 1985).

The methodology that underpins my research on this matter was designed to give fathers the best possible opportunity to present themselves and their children in non-stereotypical terms. In relation to this point, the data in this thesis is a means to examine the social processes that constitute men's understanding of their marginality as fathers with autistic children as well as understand why and how the pursuit of masculinity remains a problem but also a constitutive element of men's ontological (in)security (Waling, 2019). Therefore, my findings stand in contrast to most prior research on fathers with autistic children, drawing out the personhood of autistic children, and, in using an intersectional approach, disrupting the static category of 'father', and recognising variability amongst men and the uneven nature of men's access to and use of power and considering how this affects men's participation in research and in parenting (Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Meth and Mc Clymont, 2009).

The ways in which fathers present as fathers is sometimes indicative of the tensions they experience as a result of the insecurity they face in justifying a paternal/ masculine identity (Neimneh, 2013). In relation to this, in terms of understanding more about to what extent is masculinity a barrier or problem, or, on the other hand, a resource for these men specifically, the findings of this study reveal a complex picture. Some men attempt to 'undo gender'

(Butler, 1990) through trying to engage in some aspects of care considered to be 'women's work' (Tronto, 1987). But these men are aware that transgressing the boundaries of the 'normal' paternal role, context and behaviour invites surveillance and stigma (Goffman, 1963; Rose, 1985). The ways in which men respond to this surveillance provides a lens through which to understand participants' struggle around the negotiation of paternal masculine identities and the deployment of power.

With these points in mind, there is reason to be positive about some of the findings. Fathers expressed a desire to be more engaged with their children and were able to identify barriers, ideological, institutional, relational, and material, which prevented this from happening. Some fathers were pushing the boundaries of what was expected of them, thus providing empirical evidence that some men are changing. Their experiences of feeling excluded and scrutinised provide food for thought for policy makers and professionals in terms of developing 'father friendly' services in line with what men say they want and need. The extracts suggest that the emotional lives of these men are worthy of further consideration in their own right; the data indicates that those men who do not wish to live up to masculine stereotypes may be concerned about displaying emotional fragility as exposing their emotional distress carries penalties which can be used against them.

However, as Demetriou observes, men can blend standard and non-standard masculine behaviours, and it is masculinities' potential for 'constant hybridization, its constant appropriation of diverse elements from various masculinities that makes the hegemonic bloc capable of reconfiguring itself and adapting to the specificities of new historical conjunctures' (Demetriou, 2001, p.348). My data suggests that fathers can use their positioning at the interface of gender, class, marital status, and disability to claim privilege and use their marginalised status to their advantage. They can shift between occupying subaltern and dominant identity positions as men and therefore constitute themselves as gender victims and as gender heroes (Lachenal, 2019). They simultaneously undo and do gender (Butler, 1990).

Therefore, my thesis and its findings paint a messy and contradictory picture, but also point to a need to remain wary of 'the possibilities and potential pitfalls of 'inclusive' theorizing' (Nash, 2008, p.10) in relation to studying men who might be considered marginalised, and caution is needed how the concept of marginality is used in relation to these men specifically

(Billson, 2005; Bridges and Pascoe, 2014). A point of consideration in relation to this is put forward by Connell (2002) who is mindful of acknowledging how change might benefit men, but disadvantage women. She argues that 'men may adopt a strategy that benefits them' (2002, p.167) and my findings indicate that men can indeed use their unusual and unique circumstances as fathers with autistic children to accomplish a successful hybrid masculinity which, on the surface, seems to disrupt gender (Butler, 1990). According to Bridges and Pascoe, these '"hybrid masculinities" refer to the selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalized and subordinated masculinities and – at times – femininities into privileged men's gender performances and identities' (2014, p. 246) and my data attests that some fathers are quite able to present themselves as progressive in their attitude, and this hybridity can conceal the benefits a masculine identity can convey, thus enabling the reproduction of patriarchal systems and garnering men increased status as paternal subjects (Demetriou, 2001). With these points in mind, there is a need to retain a critical feminist edge to recognise intersectional privilege as it functions in these men's lives (Evans and Lepinard, 2019) as 'if "masculinities" is used as a decontextualized, free-floating framework of analysis out of the structural context of gender hegemony and patriarchal, not to mention capitalist, imperialist and further oppressive, power relations [research] can easily take us back to a glorified role theory' (Hearn, 2019, p.54).

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 4: Age.

In this opening data chapter, I add to the small amount of research which examines the temporal practices of fathers who have autistic children over time. One example of previous work on the temporal experiences of fathering autistic children comes from Bostrom and Broberg (2014) who examined how fathers' involvement with young autistic children varies from the time of diagnosis to five years later. They conclude that 'new standards for the father's role do not yet appear to have been established, and the freedom to set individual standards within each family remains' (2014, p.817). My data extends this work by attending to the experiences of fathers as they parent during adolescence and young adulthood, and reflects fathers imagined futures as they comprehend what will happen to their children when fathers themselves become old and, eventually, die. In contrast to Brostom and Broberg's (2014) findings, I have shown that the concept of the 'gendered life course' (Moen, 1995) reproduces gender inequalities and fathers are both governed and liberated by disciplinary regimes of age, disability, and gender.

Through a focus on embodiment and sexuality, I have shown that 'the micro-social power politics of growing up, and of the formation of the self in general, is shot through with disciplines that act on the body, including a regime of disciplines at home and school that involves a regularization of bodily activity in time and place' (Burkitt, 2008, p. 90). These regularizations affect fathers, mothers, and children in different ways over the life course. Thus, some fathers experience this in negative ways, they feel excluded from some stages of the child's life and are policed accordingly. On the other hand, fathers can use the social organisation of time and age to explain and justify their avoidance and their participation as masculine subjects at key moments of their children's lives that they consider to be gender specific.

I have also shown the ways in which fathers use discourses of gender, age, and sexuality as a means to make sense of their lives and their children's lives. This focus produced some interesting and novel findings. I have suggested that fathers attribute gender and sexuality to their children as a means to constitute them as 'selves' in their own right, in a world that affords autistic people little personhood (Bogdan and Taylor, 1989). But fathers also gender themselves, perhaps as a way to also afford themselves individual personhood as masculine subjects in a world that often denies them opportunities for such recognition. On one hand, this reveals the disciplinary nature of disability and masculinity in relation to each other, and the ways in which ideologies about such govern the acceptability of some parenting practices which limit what fathers can do or feel comfortable doing over time. There are few contemporary gender scripts for these men to draw on and so their words and actions may not reflect their intentions, rather, time-bound social and cultural expectations imposed on them more broadly (Gagnon and Simon, 1973). However, it is important to recognise that 'doing gender' (Butler, 1990; West and Zimmerman, 1987) in ways that reflect gender norms can be advantageous to men in some contexts, serving as a tool for men to assert privilege and reclaim the recognition they feel has been denied to them as masculine subjects (Jordan, 2020). These are themes I further address in the following chapter in which I focus specifically on men's engagement with and understanding of 'care'.

Chapter 5: Care.
Whilst previous work on the emergence of a caring masculinity has generally sought to demonstrate men's rejection of hegemonic masculinity and an embracement of more

'feminine' traits which reveal men's 'softer side' (Elliott, 2016) the work I present in this chapter begins with considering the barriers to this by examining the governance of men's care. Through my focus on men's reflexive biographies of *the caring self* (Giddens, 1991) I have shown that fathers understand and practice care within disciplinary regimes and their activities as paternal carers of autistic children specifically tend to reflect established social norms as a result (Rose, 1985). Therefore, what constitutes 'care' cannot be defined in simple terms, and the practices of care undertaken by these fathers cannot be divorced from the emotional and political contexts where care takes place (Aitken, 2004). In accordance with this, men's narratives are contradictory as they seek to present themselves as caring men in the face of the uncertainty they feel; a masculine identity can provide opportunities for them to avoid some aspects of care, but also exclude them from caring relationships of their choosing (Kaufman, 1999).

I have shown that through participating in care activities, some men challenge stereotypic ideas about the ontological meaning of 'care' and disrupt gendered notions about who is best to provide it for autistic children specifically whilst also embracing the hegemonic aspects of masculine practice such as providing, protecting, and resisting domination by others. I develop this first through focusing specifically on men's engagement with the embodied care of disabled children over time, and in doing so I have brought embodied masculinity into temporal focus. I have shown that to care for a child with autism involves managing one's own body because of the assumptions others might make about men who engage with embodied and intimate care (Harding, North and Perkins, 2008). I have shown that fathers engage in a range of caring practices such as directing the care of others, and here I have examined fathers' relationships with support workers and paid care staff. I have indicated that these staff carry an air of care 'professionalism' that is generally attributed to women and girls. Thus, these staff help some fathers to manage those aspects of care that trigger feelings of discomfort, often in relation to matters of gender, age, sexuality. This use of carers does not always indicate male power, rather, the engagement of these professionals also indicates concerns held by others and about men themselves about men's ability and motivation to engage with embodied or intimate care (Twigg, 2010).

I also suggest that, for some men, stating that one is struggling with some aspects of care and inviting 'help' can be understood as a contemporary reconfiguration of hegemonic masculinity through which men can be acclaimed for their non-standard behaviour, and so

they develop a kind of anti-hero masculinity which affords them recognition as fathers specifically (Demetriou, 2001; Ribiero and Paul, 2008; Wetherell and Edley, 1999). Such practices constitute men's 'emotional engagement with the notion of caring and embracing of an identity as being 'men who care' (Morrell and Jewkes, 2011, p.9). In doing this, I have drawn on Link and Phelan's (2014) concept of 'stigma power'. These authors suggest 'stigma is a resource that allows [individuals] to obtain ends they desire' (Link and Phelan, 2014, p. 24) and some fathers can use their stigmatized or marginalised identities as single fathers/ carers as tools with which to claim support, privilege, and recognition, both formally and informally. Thus, I have established that in some circumstance, fathers with autistic children retain the power to choose which aspects of care they wish to take part in, often with no loss to their status as 'good fathers' or masculine subjects, whilst others do not. Finally, I have addressed how fathers show care through socially validated norms of providing. I have termed this care giving, but I suggest this set of practices involves much more than meeting with the socially mandated norms of breadwinner and provider. I have argued that for these fathers specifically, giving is a manifestation of intimate fatherhood (Cheal, 1987; Dermott, 2008).

Chapter 6: Place.

So far, I have indicated that fathers are scrutinised in many of the contexts they enter with their children. I have used the links between stigma (Goffman, 1963) and the contextual nature of men's power to examine how men constitute themselves as men and fathers as a result (Burkitt, 2008; Coston and Kimmel, 2012; Hopkins and Noble, 2009; May, 2013; Morgan, 2011). Moreover, I have shown that as contexts change, so does men's practice, and so a different 'masculinity' is 'done' within each social and cultural setting (Robinson and Hockey, 2011; West and Zimmerman, 1987). In considering the reasons for this, I have shown that fathers are governed as masculine subjects, most significantly in those contexts where heterosexual masculinity is made problematic (Hubbard, 2000). Although fathers experience this as a problem, they often engage in the same behaviours in the pursuit of an individual heterosexual masculine identity for themselves and also for their male children specifically. In relation to this, I have suggested that fathers construct themselves as masculine subjects as individual men and in relation to their children in ways that enable them to feel ontologically secure. Fathers did this in contradictory ways, for example, through complying with good and moral father ideology or through demonstrating their mastery of public space on those occasions when this presented itself as an opportunity.

I have shown that fathers are deeply sensitive to the sensory needs of autistic children. However, I have suggested that some fathers consider their engagement in hobbies and leisure activities with their children to be somewhat maverick specifically masculine parenting practices. However, many of these activities have as much to do with fathers' personal interests, biographies, and past family relationships as they do with autism or the preferences of the child (Power, 2008). I have explored the reasons for this and suggested that even though these fathers are parenting in 'new' and unchartered territory as fathers with autistic children, their practices are reflective of their own memories of being fathered and recalling their own childhoods and relationships with their fathers' functions to orient them in the present (Pickering and Keightley, 2006; Shirani and Henwood, 2011).

This chapter has also focused on the contexts of social class and here I have developed a specific and novel set of suggestions in relation to considering the matter of what can the practices of working-class fathers with autistic children tell us about how fatherhood, gender, and masculinity are constructed in this specific context. My data indicates that these men are far more engaged as fathers than middle-class men whose narratives have dominated previous research with fathers who have autistic children (Shows and Gerstel, 2009). Moreover, working-class fathers specifically are able to construct social roles and identities in relation to others interactively in particular places within communities where they live. I have shown that fathers experience degrees of recognition, acceptance, and scrutiny in these contexts. However, this can provide fathers with a means to attract social and personal capital. These men can benefit from, and feel they deserve, considerable public recognition and prestige (Frisk, 2018; Holt and Thompson, 2004) and this can be contextually advantageous, enabling men to garner support, sympathy, and validation from others as fathers with autistic children specifically (Coston and Kimmel, 2012, Link and Phelan, 2008).

Chapter 7: Emotions.

Finally, I have developed my work on place to incorporate the contextual nature of men's emotions. I do this as a means to understand identity and power and to examine the processes which shape men's emotional expression and emotional containment (Hemer and Dundon, 2016). I have refuted the idea that autism is a terrible thing that men find emotionally difficult. On the other hand, I have suggested that the ways in which these fathers present themselves in emotional terms as fathers with autistic children is connected to cultural norms of masculinity, social relations, and context. I have shown that emotional containment is

sometimes a result of institutional and interpersonal demands made of fathers specifically that they behave 'like men' and that some fathers find this extremely difficult (Ridge, Emslie and White, 2010). The data in this chapter indicates that some men want services to support them, or at least recognise their existence and the contributions they make as fathers.

I have also suggested that men's emotional containment is a direct result of class and gender oppression. Fathers' management of anger can be a result of the powerlessness they feel as working-class masculine subjects, whose morality and capacity for good fathering might be questioned by others. Nevertheless, fathers' emotional reactions continue to embrace some aspects of hegemonic masculinity, even if this is not directly expressed, for example, by falling back into imaginary positionings whereby they constitute themselves as appropriately masculine through discussing physical violence or blaming women for their inability to act as 'men'. I have suggested that these emotional practices are a means by which these fathers attempt to attain ontological security through discussing in imaginary terms what they would 'do' should they have the agency to act (Laing, 1990). I have also shown that, on occasion, it is in men's interests to weave emotional vulnerability into their masculine repertoire; to do so affords them special recognition or hero status (Link and Phelan, 2008).

Limitations

This study has limitations; the sample size is small, and the participants are relatively homogenous in age and cultural background. The limitations of this are offset by the richness and depth of the data obtained, however, future research should extend this dissertation in the following ways. Firstly, there is a need to consider the recruitment of men to qualitative studies and the methodological innovation that might be needed to improve men's interest and participation. This is a complex matter; for example, in the early stages of recruitment some potential participants expressed a preference for a questionnaire to complete, and others dropped out of the study having 'offloaded' their experiences onto me prior to the organisation of a formal interview. How might we respond to this? Would some fathers prefer the rigidity of structured interviews, or should researchers conduct their interviews during the first meeting to avoid letting participants 'escape'? Would fathers prefer to be interviewed by men, or by other fathers and why? And how might this be done? What do these points of consideration tell us about the dynamics of power and powerlessness in a research context and how might attending to this link with feminist research goals to do with gender equality and consciousness and feminist research with men specifically? (Hearn,

2013; Pini and Pease, 2013). In reflecting on some of these points, I have raised points of concern throughout this thesis as to how the research focus on mothers with autistic children risks affirming as natural this division of care by gender. I also have discussed in earlier chapters my experiences of meeting mothers with autistic children, including the partners of participants, during the course of conducting fieldwork, and it is important to return to this to consider the implications of including or excluding their voices from research.

The data attests that fathers with autistic children do care, and the increased participation of fathers in childcare and in research can be of benefit in acknowledging the contributions fathers do make and highlighting the barriers to greater participation. My data also indicates that sexist attitudes are held by men and also towards men, and maternal gatekeeping in a research context, as anywhere else, is reflective of 'sexist ideologies [which] are translated into daily behaviors that help maintain a gendered social structure' (Gaunt and Pinho, 2017, n.p.). Thus, gatekeeping is indicative of the pressure on mothers to present themselves as competent and responsible parents. Addressing this by encouraging mothers and fathers to reflect on how and why specific beliefs about gender are upheld and performed in the contexts of parenting autistic children and in the contexts of research *about* autistic children might be an important step towards achieving gender equity amongst parents (Robinson and Hockey, 2011). Furthermore, there is a need to include autistic children in future studies to understand their views, experiences, priorities, and needs, although ethical sensitivity and methodological creativity is needed here also in order to do this well (Adams and Stephenson, 2016).

There is a need to attend to cross cutting themes of race and ethnicity. There is a small, developing body of work which examines the practices of culturally diverse families with autistic children (Ben-Moshe and Magaña, 2014; Burkett, Morris, Shambley-Ebron and Manning-Courtney, 2017; Chamba, Ahmad, Hirst, Lawton, and Beresford, 1999; Lloyd and Rafferty, 2007) but the experiences of fathers specifically has not been a focus of these studies. There is also a need for greater attention to how matters of class and culture affect parenting practices and sociological inquiry, in terms of considering methods, epistemologies and issues of middle-class bias (Barker, 1996; Casey, 2003).

Where do we go from here?

I want to return to one of the key points of consideration raised at the start of this thesis, which is what might this research achieve, and how might any findings be used to improve the lives of those the 'issues' affect. Hesse- Biber posits that feminist research seeks to 'challenge knowledge that excludes, while seeming to include …Feminists ask "new" questions that place women's lives and those of "other" marginalized groups at the center of social inquiry. Feminist research disrupts traditional ways of knowing to create rich new meanings' (2007, p.3). In accordance with this starting point, I have focused on working-class fathers with autistic children to examine their marginalisation in research and the effects of this marginalisation on their practices. The data suggests that the exclusion some fathers feel is profound (Cosson and Graham, 2012) and I agree with Flippin and Crais (2011) in their call for greater father involvement. However, a crucial point in relation to this is what might 'involvement' 'inclusion', 'equality' or 'egalitarian parenting' look like for fathers (and mothers) with autistic children? (Hankivinsky et al., 2010).

The findings I present here paint a complex picture. On one hand, UK education and social work policy has increasingly focused on engaging fathers where it is safe to do so and has argued that this improves outcomes for children and families. However, the data suggests that men's engagement with services are shaped not only by their perceptions of who these services are for- the 'estrogen filled worlds' that Doucet (2006) discusses, but also by stereotypes about men held by service providers themselves, and vice-versa (Roberston, 2006). Therefore, the barriers to father-inclusive practice are real but extend far beyond merely 'inviting' fathers to become more involved.

Furthermore, research with men can be 'hijacked' by men whose political and personal agenda is the furthering of men's rights rather than the pursuit of more egalitarian goals (Jordan, 2020). My data indicates that men are quite capable of blaming 'women' for their issues, and vice-versa. This reflects a lack of awareness broadly in relation to those 'social structures that systematically and powerfully operate to advantage some individuals and groups while harming others. It is the dominant ideological stance that is employed to "justify" — that is, to normalize and to sanction — hierarchical systems of race, class, gender, sexuality and other forms of oppression' (Hankivinsky, 2014, p. 30). What is needed is a culture shift in relation to the gendered dynamics of parenting autistic children, a culture shift which needs to extend beyond a focus only on fathers themselves.

APPENDIX

Participants' information

Example Interview Transcript

Recruitment materials

Participants' details

Pseudonym	Children's details	Marital status and residency	Occupation	Number of interviews
Roger	Craig (M, 18)	In process of divorce. Craig moving to residential care	FT employed	Initial meeting only. Dropped out of project citing 'marriage problems.
David	Rebecca (F, 14) Paul (M, 15) Older son, not autistic.	Separated. David is main carer of the children. Wife lives nearby and has weekend contact with sons. Rebecca lives in residential unit Monday-Friday	Carer	3
Mark	Tina (F,15)	Divorced. Weekend custody of Tina.	Carer/part time employed	3
James	Rose (F,12) Ian (M,18) Billy (M,14)	Married. All children live at home with mum and dad.	Carer	2
Jason	Harry (M, 14)	Married	Carer	Initial meeting only (fieldnotes)
Tom	Lucas (M,12)	Married	FT employed	2

Ken	Ben (M, 17)	Divorced Full custody. No contact with ex-wife. Ben expected to go to supported living at age 18	Carer	1
Gerrard	Anton (M, 25)	Married. Lives at home with wife and son.	Retired. Previously full time employed	1
Nigel	Sean (M, 10)	Married. Lives at home with wife, son, and extended family	Carer	1
Joel	Layton (M, 18)	Married Layton lives in residential care and comes home at weekends	Carer/ part time employed	1
Danny	Jack (M,16)	Married Son at school.	FT employed	1

Sample Interview Transcript
'James'
Date: 14/3/16

An ordinary bike rally you have tents you have comedy bands on some rallies you might have strippers on

Is it all fellas?

Oh no.

Is it a club how do you join it?

Well basically you have a club that organises it and you pay like ten or 15 quid to get in you put your tent up go to the beer tent meet a load of people you have met before it's a load of bikers getting drunk having a laugh

So, is it about the motorbike?

Not entirely no. People will go on their bike, and you have bike contests you know, best cruiser, best rally bike.

You'll have to tell me what it means!

Cruiser is like your Harley type thing, best classic bike is like bikes over a certain age like from the 60s, rat bikes like Mad max,

So, have you got a bike?

No, I want one, the first one I had was years ago, the bigger ones about 8 years ago, I had my licence about 15 years ago, but the PIL rally (pervs in leather) is a totally different rally from all of the others. Same thing with beer tent and all that, no children, so that is so freeing it's unreal. Friday some people dress up, Saturday, most people dress up, a bit like the cosplay except there's no rules. There's no morality there's no 'this is offensive'. The first one I went to was the year some FBI guy had been found chopped up in a suitcase there was a guy dressed as that, this year we had suicide bombers, there's really crude stuff and there's fetish wear (shows picture)

I bet he's a geography teacher

He probably is its just for a laugh Facebook covered it up, his bits were all covered you couldn't see anything but there was so much flesh it got censored but a lot of it is sort of crude you have a wet y front and a wet t shirt contest

So, there's something for everybody!

Yes

Does [wife] go?

No, I sort of see it as it's my rally but basically bits are out all over the place its hilarious. There's one woman she's in her 60 s big girl (tells story about t shirt with hole in that is unclear)

Can I ask you is it because it's such a freeing environment?

That's what it is yeah, and there's a sexual thing going on, people hook up quite a lot from what I've seen, they keep it to themselves, go off camp.

That's only what people would do in a pub

Yes, exactly so the PIL rally is either loved or feared in the biking community

How many people go?

Couple of hundred, but there are bigger rallies, there's one called Farmyard, it will have a couple of thousand, it's like download or something like that but the core of it is exactly the same. I think of the costume before I go. This is the wet y front thing

So why do you enjoy it so much?

It's just a laugh you get to mess about be childish and all that see this guy his outfit you might say its racist

What is it?

It's a big gollywog wig he's playing off that racial thing but the guy on the right he printed off a race card

Whats a race card?

It's 'playing the race card'

Ohhhhh

Cos people do that, so he did it just to wind people up – some of it you know it isn't for everyone. And if you are a PIL virgin you are going to get collared. And that's why people fear it but there are that many people there every year that if you don't want to, they will go 'oh fair enough' so they spotted my sister the first year and she gave them a hard stare and they went ok cool.

Let's go back cos I want to talk to you about the rally you took the kids on

Ok. They found out about out about it from the guys I knock around with I was working in a bike training school

Do you think people have stereotypical ideas about people on motorbikes?

I have found the whole biking community is more inclusive than anything else I have ever encountered its everywhere if you look on the internet, in America a horrible situation, a girl was being brought into court to testify against a paedophile who had abused her. There's a biker organisation specifically about abuse, so what they did, they are big scary looking guys,

12 of them went into that court room and they were just there, and she knew they were there for her, and they took her off afterwards, all that thing, she knew if they tried anything, they were all willing to sort him out

I've seen them doing that thing with teddy bears to Alder Hey [Hospital]

I've been on a couple of them. There's loads like that again in American there was boy getting bullied and 40 or 50 bikers rode him into school on their bikes, and there was another one a boy with problems, MS or something, and they helped him so he could hold the throttle and rev the bike, bikers have got their bad side there are negative sides to everything there are idiots going around on scramblers and scooters, they have stolen the bike those aren't bikers they have stolen someone's pride and joy. Some bikers ride like idiots in public places, but other bikers don't like it. But the vast majority, going back to the rally thing, when I took (son) to Farmyard rally, which isn't for disabilities it's just a massive rally, he was about 14 at the time, so I just gave him some money and said off you go, and I knew he would be perfectly fine, and he was. Went round with him a couple of times first so he got used to it, and there was one of those mechanical bulls and the fella twigged that there was something 'wrong' and he just sort of nodded 'yeah you are ok' I have yet to find any group of bikers who have any negative e view of disability.

Will you take [another son] when he is older?

Yes, he's at the age now where I can start taking him.

[Daughter] wouldn't enjoy it so much and trying to get her to behave and she has a tendency to misbehave and from a safety point of view plus I'm looking at getting a different bike that can take both boys and a load of gear as well cos before I had a cruiser they are (unclear-details about bikes)

So that's the only reason [son] hasn't been he will go next year

Some of the time we just sit in the tent talking but sometimes you just take your own food, or you go over and see the bands and music etc. There has never been an issue with autism, even in the PIL rally there's a lady with no legs, she's known but she just stands up with rest of them. It's very diverse there's people from all over the place, its great fun, there's lots of little bike clubs all over the country, they are fine, but then you have other clubs (talks about bike membership/ patches) I've got plenty of them. (Talks about placing of patches and ranks and structure within the clubs)

Hells angels etc are very different (1%) very regimented- rules in the club, the likes of sons of anarchy, they go for the darker side of what MC clubs are as there are criminal elements they have a reputation and they have turf wars and they get involved with guns and crime and all

that, not all of them do, chapters all over the place, you get invited to be a hells angel, I have never been one, the rules are very strict, but say a hells angel has a problem, the rest of club will band together and help them, the level of loyalty of phenomenal, the outlaws have areas in north Wales, and then there's other ones….(more bike stuff)

Women are not generally in it and that's another problem, their attitude towards women is very antiquated, our clubs don't see people like that, it's just people having a laugh.

I never knew it was that complicated!!

Talks about how to join hells angels etc…

It sounds like the masons!!

The masons have their own bike club (both laugh!)

I am not an authority on these clubs by any means and most people who are in them don't talk about them. Most people who write about them books are written by coppers who have infiltrated. There's lots of stereotypes. Perhaps when I was about 19, I would have been interested but not now I'm too old too many other things to worry about (both laugh)

Tell me about the wrestling

Well, I have always liked the wrestling, [son] likes the wresting I asked him do you want to see some I took him a few years ago but we were miles away from the screen, it's the WWE it's called MXT but its where they train all the wrestlers, but their wresting is less storylines and more on the wrestling which is what I enjoy

Is it real or is it pretend?

Its real in that the moves are real they have names, but the results are decided beforehand, but the things they do are real so if someone jumps off a cage onto you from 20 feel that's gonna hurt so that real everything they do causes minor injuries—I'm not sure if is a sport but there is an element of skill because you have to make it look like you are hurting people without really hurting people all kinds of things

Does son?

(Pre empts question) No, he has been told not to

BOTH LAUGH

I tried when I was a kid, I nearly broke somebody's back, and I got into trouble

Was this in the days of Big Daddy?

Yes, I used to watch it with my grandad we couldn't afford sky or anything so for years we didn't see the American wresting. Cage fighting MMA is totally different, it's not my son's thing and that's all real (talks about MMA for a bit) some of the moves are very similar but I'm MMA it's all real it a legitimate sport, but its human cock fighting, the Americans tried

to get it banned, like Mary Whitehouse, it's safer than boxing I love the boxing, but I won't let the kids watch it though. When you look at boxing people have been killed but there has only been one MMA death. I don't think boxing is something I want the boys to duplicate I used to love it but that was before MMA I used to go and watch the SUMO

My husband loves the sumo

I'd rather they looked at doing MMA or wresting its dangerous contact sport, it can go wrong people can get paralysed, a WWE wrestler killed his family and himself, they had a big tribute show and then the details came out and he has been erased from their history, the problem was concussive head injuries, he was found to – they could not believe he was functioning – there was so much damage to his brain so this suicide thing was down to the head injuries he got as a wrestler, he would do these flying head buts, and I don't want the kids practicing that, (talks about wrestling moves) they can go wrong and do their spine in and that. A lot of moves have been banned. [Son] likes the characters, hopefully [unclear-name of character] will be there tonight cos he will freak out, it's all scripted but the moves are very hard, the way he portrays himself in the ring, it's not clear of he is supposed to be gay or straight or what, it's really funny, he's a big character, we will grab something to eat and then go out there

[Son] got us into cosplay. Years ago, I wanted to go to a convention in Birmingham and COMIC con was attached. There were people there I wanted to meet – hammer films stars [talks about a 70-year-old polish hammer star who became a horror film actress-name unclear] she did the first ever full frontal in a horror film – she did countess Dracula, vampire lovers and all that I have always loved horror films I like the real cheesy ones I like tales of the crypt there's loads of them like that

Talk about tales of the unexpected, hammer house of horror, etc and childhood memories of watching tv

So, they are at the cosplay thing?

It varies you get sci fi fantasy horror and that, [son] wanted to go, the next time he dressed up as a character after he saw all the cosplay, he's fully into it now

So, is everyone in your house into the cosplay now?

Pretty much, he's really into it, [daughter] likes dressing up she always has, she goes as a Disney princess, there's always a few of them, [son] went one year as Slenderman

How did you think of the costume?

I just did, he scared the hell out of people, he knows how to play act, Manchester comic con is coming up soon, get the priority tickets and bypass the queues, they want the memorabilia,

[son] has his own money now, he has about £100 [other son] has £50 [daughter] can get whatever she wants because if there was something she wants she can have it because it's a miracle! They buy swords, costume, original artwork – [son] clocked the fella that designed sonic the hedgehog and spoke to him, and the cosplay community are awesome are very accepting

The percentage of people with disabilities involved in cosplay is higher than normal, there seem to be a lot of people on the spectrum too

The only thing that has come up is people dress as superheroes but generally speaking female superheroes don't wear very much and it came out the last couple of years there have been instances of girls being uncomfortable of people trying to touch them there Have been campaigns look don't touch kind of thing, I don't go and ask for a picture I look like a dirty perv at my age, [son] can he is still young he is still pretty

Why do you think people think you are a perv?

I just think that myself, if I was in their shoes, so rather than that I will; leave – I will get a dalek one or something, I will get pictures of that but when it come s to that I will let the boys decide who they want to get pictures with, because there is a sexual connotation , there are guys who go who are really in to that stuff, why should the girls trust me, they don't know ow me from Adam, the boys can get them, [son] is terrible, I give him loads of stick cos he goes for all these pretty girls, but they are good looking lads too, they know what the rules are though

What are the rules?

Look but don't touch if you want to touch the gun or see what the costume is made of that's ok.

what do you do when the kids need a wee?

A lot depends on age, up to 10 or 11 they go in the women's toilets, or in the men's, regardless of gender of child, they go with us. When it's both of us one or the other will go in and tell them what to do and build it up, we train them to what they are supposed to do so they can do it on their own, we did it with C from age of 14 we gave him lots of freedom , we let him go down town, the mums in school would day how can you let him do that, so we would let him go to forbidden planet and we would follow him down a bit later, then we let him go on the bus and he would pay, we would just go with him, and the same with D, doing jobs, earning a bit of money. They do jobs in the house, and we pay them, so we give them things to do and give them money, mow the lawn, babysit, cook, clean, wash up …

I am obviously going about this all wrong…

The first thing to do is show them how they can get money! That's how you get them to do it. On one hand you have got DLA but it's also about teaching them how to live, and it works, I know that [son] can be totally self-sufficient, and his work ethic is unbelievable- money can get me my things and if you do work you get money. That's a life skill. They won't sit round all day watching the telly. I never did any housework when I was growing up, so I am still rubbish at it now.

He is doing performing arts at college, and has just got his first gig, he's got 3 days of practice, then filming, he gets paid for all this, dollars in his pocket, he's probably an extra in a telly programme.

What's his next step?

Well it's a job for his CV and ultimately its theatre work and tv, he has mates at college, he as a few friends he facetimes from school, he goes out with his mates, they don't have disabilities, when he was in a special school he only had autistic friends, we didn't want him to only have disabled friends, but we can't let them out to play, too many scary things, but this has brought him new horizons, he went out for a drink, I went to pick him up. But yeah. So that's what his money thing is.

Do school ever ask how he is now?

No, they aren't interested. Individually, yes, but as a school the volume of kids, it's just get them in get them out. [son 1] was more popular, but [son2] is like a Tasmanian devil! And he has very firm ideas, so if someone breaks the rules of the game, he will go mental! He will take the aggression out on something, not someone.

End of interview

Recruitment materials
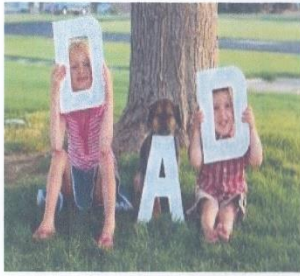
Please contact me if you would like further information or an informal chat about the project. I am happy to come along to any parent/ carer groups to talk about how people can get involved.

Contact me:

Phone: 07849543597

Email:

jh1625@york.ac.uk

Who I am

My name is **Joanne Heeney.** I am a mature student from Liverpool, living and working in the city.

I am studying for a part time PhD at the University of York, and this research will be written up into a thesis to meet with the requirements of my PhD.

This research project has had full ethical approval to go ahead. If you have any comments or concerns my PhD supervisor is Professor Vicki Robinson and she can be contacted on:
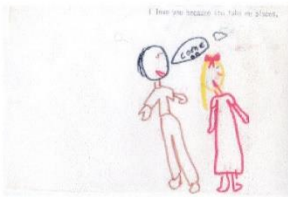
vicki.robinson@york.ac.uk

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*   ARE YOU DAD TO SOMEBODY WITH AUTISM?

Always

Unique

Totally

Interesting

Sometimes

Mysterious

ARE YOU DAD TO SOMEBODY WITH AUTISM?

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES

My research is about the experiences of fathers of people with autism – from childhood through to adulthood. Often, fathers of people with autism are ignored by researchers, or are compared to mothers of people with autism. My research focuses on the things that fathers do rather than the things that they don't do, as well as any difficulties dads might experience.

Modern family life often involves mothers and fathers taking turns to work and care, or you may be a single father caring on your own, or you might be an older father with adult offspring. You may be a stepdad, or from a minority ethnic background. Whatever your family situation, I would love to hear from you.

The North West has been badly affected by cuts to services. Changes to welfare benefits, tax credits, PIP, DLA and the bedroom tax have made life difficult for families affected by autism. Sharing your experiences of parenting in this context is an important way to challenge media stereotypes. This research is also designed to show that people with autism face challenges but are active individuals in their own right, who have relationships, interests, likes and dislikes like anybody else.

What is involved?

You will have heard the saying 'every picture tells a story'. We use a method called photo elicitation - this is just using your photographs during interviews to help you to think about and discuss your daily life as a dad and the things that you do with your son/ daughter. Photos capture the details of daily life that we often forget to talk about.

Nobody will be publicly identified at any stage of the research and photographs will not be reproduced in any way without your written permission. You do not have to give me the photographs at the end of the interview if you are not happy doing this.

You can use your camera phone, or I can give you a disposable. You can use old family pictures and take new ones. You do not need to photograph special events or places although you may want to take pictures of these things. You can also use the objects you and your son/ daughter use every day that help you to talk about your relationship. This can be anything at all.

How will my information be used?

The information you share will be confidential and you can choose to drop out of the study at any time.

I will meet with you to answer any questions you may have about what is involved and to give you further information to help you decide to take part in the study.

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