Working-Class Masculinities at the Nexus of Work, Family and Intimacy in the Age of Neoliberalism: Or, Are the Times Really A-Changin'?

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INTRODUCTION

Neoliberal discourses are becoming increasingly pervasive in Australia. Constructions of the individualistic citizen, a meritocratic social and economic order, and personal responsibility have become 'mainstream' common-sense knowledge (Howson 2006). Politically, the acceptance of neoliberalism as the prevailing discursive 'truth' has allowed for widespread market deregulation, a weakening of the social safety net—and the continual stigmatization of those members of Australian society who rely on the welfare system—and changes to industrial relations policy. Changes in the labour market have seen employment opportunities for working-class men increasingly shift from largely traditional modes of blue-collar labour (including manufacturing and semiskilled trades) to service sector work, as explored by Roberts (2013). Such labour market shifts are common in postindustrialized societies. However, the Australian experience of labour-market deregulation and the increasing hegemony of neoliberal discourse

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are different from other postindustrial societies in several ways. First, Australia has thus far weathered the Global Financial Crisis relatively well, in part owing to a robust resource sector. Furthermore, Australia has a unique relationship with working-class masculinity, one that has allowed mainstream discursive constructions of such to shift and adapt to neoliberal discourse. Working-class masculinity occupies a position of hegemony in Australia (Beasley 2008; Whitman 2013), allowing for it both to be absorbed by and to absorb neoliberal discourse. This chapter will explore this, considering the hegemony of working-class masculinities (for they are both multiple and changeable), and the neoliberalism embedded within mainstream cultural and political manifestations of them. The main focus of this chapter will rely on both theoretical and empirical research, undertaken during the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis. This research showed that in terms of engagement with discursive constructions of working-class masculinities, working-class men largely 'stuck to the script' in their relations with and to the labour market. However, normative gendered dichotomies were more likely to be either challenged or disrupted within the private sphere of the home, the family and intimate relationships. Using these data, the chapter will explore this phenomenon and deconstruct the way in which an increasingly neoliberal labour market may actually be seeing progressive shifts occur in the ways that people 'do' and 'undo' gender and class in the private sphere (Lyonette and Crompton 2015).

WORKING-CLASS MASCULINITY IN AUSTRALIA: CONTEXTUALIZING HEGEMONY, INDUSTRIAL CHANGE, THE 'PRIVATE SPHERE' AND EMOTION WORK

With the focus of this chapter being on how working-class men engage with working-class masculinity in Australia in relation to neoliberal industrial change and involvement in the emotion work of the 'private sphere', it is necessary to unpack the complexities around this area of inquiry. Before looking at the data supporting a claim that men may be finding new spaces in which to 'do' gender and class, I want to engage with the theoretical frameworks around which working-class masculinity can be defined as hegemonic, ongoing changes to the Australian industrial landscape, the role of the 'private sphere' and the theoretical construction of 'emotion work'.

I have previously argued that, in Australia, a very narrowly constructed (white, heterosexual, aspirational) working-class masculinity occupies a position of considerable hegemony, one that is both coercive and achieves consent, not only about what it means to be an Australian man but about what it means to be the ideal Australian citizen (Whitman 2013, 2014). Within masculinity studies, the theory of hegemonic masculinity is one of the most widely debated. This theoretical construct is, however, important to this chapter in terms of the argument that working-class masculinity does occupy a socially and culturally hegemonic position *in some spaces.* While it may not occupy a position of hegemony in all spaces, even in those where it does not, it is still complicit. Complicity and hegemony are closely intertwined. Australian working-class masculinity operates between hegemony and complicity, in a constant state of what Gramsci defines as 'unstable equilibria' (1971: 182). Like all such discursive constructions, working-class masculinities are never static but shift in terms of practice, being and process. Whether it is occupying a position of hegemony, or complicitly working class, masculinity is always ubiquitous in relation to an increasingly neoliberal Australian national identity in a way that helps configure the hegemony of masculinity itself. Raewyn Connell argues that

> At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (1995: 77)

Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity as the answer to the 'legitimacy of patriarchy' is a key theoretical concept, albeit a highly contested one (Demetriou 2001; Beasley 2008). The hegemony of working-class masculinity and its legitimacy bolsters neoliberal discourse and supports a neoliberal social, political and economic paradigm. It is how hegemonic identities, *as discourse as well as practices*, create spaces in which neoliberalism is 'common sense' (e.g. in most workplaces) and yet is simultaneously challenged (e.g. in the gendered structures within working-class families) that this chapter will explore.

Working-class masculinities in Australia do indeed occupy a position that is somewhat central to discursive constructions of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and national identity. The everyman 'battler' archetype (Beasley 2009) can be represented in positive, negative or highly ambiguous ways,

but his image informs the way Australians are invited to identify with socially sanctioned or 'normal' ways to do masculinity. As Elder argues, 'the trope of the working man centralized what were regarded as unique and positive characteristics of being Australian' (2007: 43). However, as neoliberalism has become the commonly accepted paradigm, working-class masculinities have morphed in ways that have absorbed its central tenants of individualism, personal responsibility and meritocracy. Increasingly the collectivism associated with more traditional modes of working classness has been replaced with this more aspirational, individualistic version of working-class masculinity in Australia (Whitman 2013, 2014).

While neoliberalism 'dominates primarily through a combination of economic and extra-economic coercion' (Cahill 2008: 215), discursive working-class masculinity is often employed to gain consensus. Indeed, as Damien Cahill argues, neoliberalism has a harder time creating the consensus needed for social and cultural hegemony than it does being coercive (2008: 214). Therefore, working-class masculinity is extremely useful as a political tool because it encourages social and cultural consensus through its position as highly legitimized. In particular, the individualistic neoliberal version of Australian working-class masculinity encourages cultural consensus to systems of privilege and inequality.

This takes up Beasley's (2009) assertion that hegemony rests in legitimacy. It is not the dominant position. Indeed, the anti-elitism that is such a part of working-class masculinity cannot operate as a dominant position. Legitimacy is granted though *authenticity*, and it is the subjective white, male, heterosexual and often working-class position that is portrayed as truly authentic in terms of Australian national identity. As Beasley argues, 'the notion of an idealized working-class-inflected 'every-bloke' may work in certain contexts as a generalizable representation of proper, honoured manliness—that is, as a form of hegemonic masculinity' (Beasley 2009: 61).

In their content analysis of an online forum for the partners of mining industry employees, Pini and Mayes (2012) found that overwhelmingly, despite some challenges to mainstream ways of 'doing' gender, gendered norms were often upheld within these relationships. In research on emergency service technicians and gendered divisions of labour within the private sphere, Shows and Gerstel (2009) found that often for these couples traditional modes of 'doing gender' were challenged. Brady et al. (2017) found that class was also a deciding factor in how gender was 'done' with regard to bonding with infants and gendered roles within families. Lyonette and Crompton (2015) also found class to be highly salient in shaping the

time spent undertaking domestic duties. Previous research considering the relationship between gender, class and approaches to paid and unpaid labour have often argued that in working-class households, the necessity for both partners to work allows for various challenges to the ways that these couples 'do' gender in terms of parenting and intimacy (Shows and Gerstel 2009; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Brady et al. 2017; Liong 2015; Lyonette and Crompton 2015; Hunter et al. 2017). Furthermore, these challenges to normative gendered expectations of who will do 'what' within the private sphere may also be challenging neoliberal narratives about the importance of labour market participation and the devaluing of the unpaid labour that is associated with the private sphere, and is still often undertaken by women (Pocock 2005). Before teasing this out, the gendering of intimacy and the private sphere needs further exploration.

Jamieson (1999) notes that intimacy is often a site for the reiteration of gendered divisions, and that often, even in relatively egalitarian sexual relationships, the focus is phallocentric and that women are often posited as the 'sexual carers' (1999). Beasley argues, however, that heterosex can be a site for challenging gendered and sexual norms (2011). Furthermore, she posits that heterosexual intimacies can challenge normativity and that heterosexuality is not automatically heteronormative. One assumption that such non-normative heterosexuality may challenge is that men are more concerned with sex and women more concerned with intimacy (Jamieson 1999). Emotion, specifically emotional maturity, is often constructed as feminine, or, as Whitehead posits,

> The idea that emotional maturity is the province of the female, and that men are emotionally incompetent, only serves to further reinforce the gendered public and private dualism at the heart of most societies, modern or otherwise. (2004: 175)

The relationship between intimacy and sexuality becomes fraught when intimacy and sexuality are separated along gendered lines. Connell (1995) found that intimacy, sexuality and equality were difficult for men to reconcile in light of embodied masculinities. Working-class masculinities in Australia are constructed as being tough and unemotional (Murrie 1998), while also being represented as sexual (in an aggressively heterosexual, phallocentric sense). Such constructions are limiting in relation to sex and sexuality (Beasley 2011). However, this is beyond the scope of this chapter. What this chapter does explore in more detail is the tension between

constructions of the stoic, unemotional 'Aussie Bloke' and emotional intimacy within familial groups, in relation to intimacies with both children and partners. It is here that constructions of work (both paid and unpaid), family and gender collide, creating new spaces in which to 'do and undo gender' (Lyonette and Crompton 2015).

As previously discussed, class is an important factor in how people navigate paid and unpaid labour, particularly in relation to family, childcare and intimacy (Hunter et al. 2017). In turn, class intersects with ethnicity, ability, sexuality and age to influence approaches to the balance between paid and unpaid labour. This is further complicated by national neoliberalism. In countries such as Australia, where neoliberal constructions of the 'good citizen' are tied directly to engagement with the labour market, unpaid labour is often devalued. In Australia this has been manifested in a punitive and paternalistic welfare system (Brady and Perales 2016), and cultural narratives about the 'problem' of mothers not being engaged in the labour market. Furthermore, much of the research on parental engagement around gender has focused on middle-class families (Brady et al. 2017). Liong (2015: 2) takes a Bourdieusian cultural capital approach to the study of 'doing' parenting at the intersection of class and gender, arguing that in relation to cultural capital, 'class, therefore serves as an important social dimension that differentiates fathers and their fathering practices in a hierarchy, as indicated by the concept of hegemonic masculinity proposed by Raewyn Connell'.

It becomes clear that the link between middle-class gendered and classed constructs of family with working-class masculinities creates a significant tension. However, it is resolved in a variety of ways. For example, Gillies (2005b) notes that working-class parents are expected to raise middle-class children in order to have access to narratives of the 'worthy' parent, reflecting neoliberal discursive constructions of the 'worthy' citizen being one who is economically successful. Political, media and cultural representations of working-class fathers are sometimes less than flattering—particularly when being working class is correlated within such mainstream cultural and political discourse with 'being poor' and the stigma of unemployment (Liong 2015). Within neoliberal discourses, poverty is constructed as a direct result of having made 'bad' choices, and the poor and welfare reliant are constructed as being in direct opposition to the 'good' citizen who is engaged with the labour market and pays taxes (Morris 2016). In relation to families and parenting, provision of a middle-class lifestyle, or the aspirational striving to achieve a middle-class lifestyle, is posited as the best choice,

while working classness is defined as a 'lack' (Skeggs 2003). Gillies explains how this results in some choices being included as right or 'worthy' while others are not:

> the 'included' worthy citizen subscribes to middle-class values and ambitions and can therefore be trusted to raise the next generation. The excluded, however, are destined, through their own personal failings as parents, to reproduce their poverty. (Gillies 2005b: 840)

A reduced focus on providing could arguably allow for new, more involved ways to be engaged with parenting. Yet, for working-class fathers in Australia, the desire to establish themselves as 'good' fathers by involvement with their children may be tempered by the lack of family-friendly workplace policies. While workplaces may be argued to be becoming more family friendly, this is often not the case because, as Pocock argues, 'public policy discussion about the 'family friendly' workplace, and men's changing roles, is revealed as more rhetorical than real' (2003: 258). In their research on primary caregiving fathers, Hunter, Riggs and Augoustinos (2017) found that the role of the engaged father is still embedded within hegemonic masculinity:

> Families that have a primary caregiving father may not be breaking away from traditional norms, and rather, may be enacting understandings of masculinity and femininity in a similar way to more traditional understandings. (5)

If this is the case, are working-class fathers indeed more likely to subvert gendered roles within the family, or are they merely engaging with a different iteration of hegemonic masculinity?

While there are some limits to working-class fathers' abilities to subvert gendered discourses about parenting, particularly the importance of the 'breadwinner' role as part of a socially constructed set of Australian working-class masculinities, there are also several opportunities for them to do so, as explored below. Discourses about parenting, and specifically fathering, are changing. Pocock argues that

> some commentators assume that a slow and inevitable convergence between men's and women's sharing of domestic work will occur in countries such as Australia, as young women assert their right to a fair sharing of work and care. (2005: 91)[1]

The desire for more equitable parenting practices is becoming more common. The 'new father' takes a more hands-on role as a parent, as Wall and Arnold explain: 'the "new fathers" of today are ideally more nurturing, develop closer emotional relationships with their children, and share the joys and work of caregiving with mothers' (2007: 509). In circumstances where a father is unable to fully perform the breadwinner role, owing to unemployment, part-time employment or lower wages, taking on the 'new father' role is more likely (Shows and Gerstel 2009; Liong 2015). Men are more likely now to want to spend more time with their children (Western et al. 2007; Elliot et al. 2017). However, often fathers are more likely to undertake what Shows and Gerstel deem 'public parenting' (2009), as is explored in the next section. What needs further exploration is the fact that despite women's increasing role in the workplace and men's increasing desire to be more hands-on, women are still more likely to do more in terms of caring for children (Western et al. 2007: 248; Elliot et al. 2017).

In Australia there are several reasons why women continue to carry most responsibility for unpaid labour. Workplaces are becoming less flexible, making it harder to balance work and family (Pocock 2003). The Australian Council of Trade Union's *50 Families* report by Pocock et al. (2001) on unreasonable working hours found that for many men and women neoliberal workplace policies had severely affected their family lives: 'limited time at home affected intimate relationships, and relationships with children' (34). In fact, the implementation of WorkChoices, the neoliberal Coalition Government's key industrial relations policy, that was implemented in 2006 and led to sweeping changes to industrial relations law that saw an erosion of worker's rights, increased use of indidivial contracts, and the removal of unfair dismmisal laws for businesses with less than 100 employees, had further negative effects on the work–life balance (Muir 2008). Even with WorkChoices having been largely overturned, work–life balance is still a major issue for many Australians Peetz (2006). One factor is arguably the ongoing cultural ubiquity of neoliberalism. Despite challenges to the gendered nature of parenting, the image of the working-class 'bloke' as a 'provider' still lingers (Hunter et al. 2017). Furthermore, in Australia, working-class masculinity is often used to reinforce notions of workplace loyalty (Whitman 2013). Culturally, individualistic neoliberal attitudes to work are still deeply entrenched in the Australian psyche, particularly in relation to masculinity. Challenging the gendered nature of families, and the gendered nature of parenting, is difficult to achieve when more traditional, conservative

and highly individualistic models are so often reinforced culturally, socially and, most importantly, in the workplace itself.

The theorizing of class often concentrates on employment and economic issues, while paying less attention to the more intimate, personal ways of doing class. However, class impacts on the intimate and personal. As Johnson and Lawler explain, 'when related to personal issues such as love, class is ruled out of an analysis of matters deemed more 'cultural' than economic' (2005: 1.2). Yet they state that it is

> doubly important to analyze class in terms of the personal and the domestic ('home'): first because class has *always* been forged in the private sphere, as well as the public; and secondly because we need to investigate the ways in which class continues to matter despite a rhetoric which would place inequality 'within' the person. (Johnson and Lawler 2005: 1.5)

Indeed, Johnson and Lawler (2005) found that class is still a major structuring force that determines how people will enact and experience their personal relationships. The limited research available on class and relationships has shown that people tend to partner with members of their own class grouping (Weis 1990, 2004, 2008). Furthermore, when heterosexual couples come from different classed backgrounds, it is more likely to be the woman who comes from a working-class background and the man who comes from the middle/upper classes (Johnson and Lawler 2005: 5.5). Indeed, Johnson and Lawler found that heterosexual romantic relationships were not only based around class but also maintained classed and gendered hierarchies within them (2005: 5.9). Class then exists as a determining factor in creating an intimate relationship, while it is also replicated within intimate relationships. Research on working-class students' experiences of higher education found that for working-class women, the challenge that undertaking university study posed to gendered and classed power structures within their intimate relationships often led to familial breakdown (Habel et al. 2016).[2] For working-class men, their gender and their class intersect in ways that shape their intimate relations. Furthermore, their class and gender are embedded within each other in ways that create unique spaces for the forging of intimate relations and sexualities that may either maintain or disrupt gendered and classed intimacies.

Research considering the links between gender, class, intimacy and unpaid labour has become more prominent since the mid 2000s, with several studies exploring such diverse areas of inquiry as parenting at the

intersection of gender and class (Shows and Gerstel 2009); young men 'doing' hegemonic masculinity in the UK (Roberts 2013); masculinity and class in representations of stay-at-home fathers in Hong Kong (Liong 2015); partner earnings and the division of domestic labour (Lyonette and Crompton 2015); men's narratives of fathering young children in the UK (Elliot et al. 2017); and primary caregiving fathers in Australia (Hunter et al. 2017). In their 2009 paper, Shows and Gerstel explored class and fathering, and compared the fathering practices of working-class and middle-class men. They found that working-class men employed as emergency medical technicians were not only much more flexible in their parenting practices than the middle-class medical practitioners they interviewed but that their parenting styles were much more likely to challenge gendered notions of parenting. In particular, they found that the working-class men were more likely to engage in what they defined as private parenting, while the middle-class men were more likely to engage in public parenting. They define public and private fathering as follows:

> we distinguish between 'public' fathering, which entails primary involvement with children in leisure activities and events outside the home that are visible to the larger public; and 'private' fathering, which entails a primary focus on the quotidian tasks of families, typically less visible to the larger public because much occurs at home. (2009: 169)

For the working-class men in Shows and Gerstel's study, family time was a carefully considered part of doing overtime in order to earn more money, whereas the middle-class fathers were largely reluctant to sacrifice money for more time with their families. Lyonette and Crompton (2015) also found that class played a role in the division of domestic labour, finding evidence of 'a larger contribution [to housework] by men in lower-earning families' (36). Their findings differed from Shows and Gerstel in that they found that families from both upper-middle and working-class backgrounds were more likely to share domestic labour, but for different reasons. The upper-middle class families had access to resources, most specifically the paid labour of working-class women. This allowed them to offload domestic duties and therefore decrease the need for either partner to undertake much of the unpaid labour (2015: 37). Their findings were particularly interesting in that they found that upper middle-class men were more likely to engage in '*spoken* egalitarianism', whereas working-class men were more likely to engage in '*lived* egalitarianism' (Usdansky 2011 in Lyonette and Crompton

2015). In both cases, working-class families' lack of access to material resources led to equality by necessity.

The lack of access to resources that is a common reality for most working-class families as a factor influencing the gendered division of unpaid labour is further supported by Brady et al. (2017) and by Legerski and Cornwall (2010), who find that working-class families often need to rely on dual incomes to get by. Cha and Thébaud argue that men's attitude to gender 'is distinctly related to their individual breadwinning experiences, not just the degree to which women have an overall presence in the labour market' (2009: 237). Thus, as indicated above, Shows and Gerstel (2009) argue that some middle- and upper-class men who earn more and are therefore more able to be the sole breadwinner of a single-income household may be more likely to have traditional views than men from working-class households (which are often dual income). However, as Lyonette and Crompton (2015) found, many middle-class men have highly educated middle-class partners who are invested in their careers, and indeed, for inner-city, younger, middle-class couples, adherence to traditional gender roles may be something they actively avoid. Liong found that for men in Hong Kong where the breadwinner role remains privileged, working-class men were far more likely to adopt a nurturing role outside hegemonic masculinity discourses. In contrast to this, Elliot et al. (2017) found that class didn't have much impact on the likelihood of men taking an active nurturing role with young children, although they do argue that it is an area in which more data are needed. While this is a burgeoning area of inquiry, research considering the emotion work involved in family life, and the intersection of class and gender on intimacies, is still relatively new.

METHODOLOGY

The data discussed in this chapter come from a series of qualitative interviews undertaken with self-identified working-class men, looking at the hegemony, or what I argued were, in fact, hegemon*ies* (Whitman 2014), of working-class masculinities in Australia and how this informed and enmeshed with the lived experiences of those men who did identify as working class. I undertook qualitative, semistructured interviews with seven working-class men in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis and after the election of the first Labour government in Australia in more than ten years, utlilising a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006). During these interviews we discussed several key sites at which gender and

class are 'done', including experiences with education, the labour market, families and intimacy. Data collection relied on a grounded theory approach, one in which a reflexive and subjective researcher stance was employed to permit the recognition of the subjective position of both the researcher and the participants (Gomm 2004). The open-ended, conversational interviews considered the 'micro-histories' of the participants (Hughes 2012). In doing so the data reflect how participants 'experience the world and/or make sense of it' (Gomm 2004: 7).

The data gathered from the interviews was then analysed using critical discourse and textual analysis (Charmaz 2006). Critical discourse analysis allowed for a deeper understanding of how socially constructed working-class masculinity reflects a cultural shift towards individualism as one of the more distinguishing features of neoliberal society in Australia. In considering the data from a critical perspective, I was able to explore both what was said and the silences in between, recognizing the subjective nature of participants' discursive constructions of themselves and those around them (Charmaz 2006). Reflexivity allowed me to recognize my own position as researcher, but also as a white, working-class women who is also highly educated. Researcher subjectivity is an increasingly important factor in both gender and class research (Mauthner and Doucet 2003; Stahl 2016b). Most important to the collection and analysis of these data was the utilization of a grounded theory approach. I was not originally looking for data about intimacy and emotion work; indeed, I doubted my participants would be overly forthcoming in this area. However, as shown by the following responses, it was when discussing intimacy and emotion work that I received the richest data, and that gendered and classed constructions of working-class 'blokes' were most challenged and disrupted.

WORKING-CLASS MEN AND NEOLIBERAL INDIVIDUALISM

The data from interviews reflected the type of individualism that is typically a factor in neoliberal constructions of the idealized citizen (Stahl 2016a). This was particularly notable in relation to participant responses pertaining to work, education and the opportunities they were afforded as working-class men. For example, T discussed his relationship with education as follows:

> Uh, one, I was going to fail so I didn't want to deal with the concept, and also I had probably reached the stage where I realized I wasn't going to be that

academic, so it was take the easy option out and perhaps look at a trade and that sort of thing, so I looked in those areas and came across a pre-vocational course at TAFE and, uh, and went and did that in carpentry and that's how I started my working life I guess. (T, union worker, 41, married)

Another participant, B, discussed how his working-class high school failed to provide the opportunities for him to move in to the science, technology, engineering and medicine fields he was interested in:

K: If you could do it again would you make any different decisions regarding your education?

B: I wouldn't go to [Adelaide Northern Suburbs Public High School], because they stuffed me up big time.

K: Did you want to expand on that?

B: My classes weren't the classes that I chose. I chose IT courses and stuff like that and they couldn't put me in there because of lack of funding and they basically didn't have the resources so I was stuck in courses which I had no interest in and they wouldn't help me at all which pretty much didn't help me find a job. For example, my psychology class didn't have a teacher. I was just left in the library the whole lesson, I had no work to do, and I couldn't pass at all but I still got Ps (pass grades) because the teacher said 'we'll give you an average grade of B even though I did not work at all'. (B, Unemployed, 18, living with partner and her family)

In this narrative, B was aware that he 'missed out' on specific educational opportunities as a result of the issues with his very working-class school. Yet most participants still constructed their educational selves in neoliberal

fashion, blaming their lack of opportunity on personal failings and 'bad choices' as opposed to structural social, cultural and economic factors that often make it difficult for working-class men to engage successfully with education (Aaltonen and Karvonen 2016; Loveday 2016).

As Stahl explains, neoliberal educational systems work to shape the ideal neoliberal citizens, 'who must espouse values of 'self-reliance, autonomy and independence' in order to gain 'self-respect, self-esteem, self-worth and self-advancement'' (Davies and Bansel 2007: 52, in Stahl 2016a: 665). For example, T blamed his failure to go beyond high school on a failure to 'try':

> *T:* Um, yeah, I'd probably try a lot harder, you'll probably find that a lot of people say that! . . . Um, yeah, if I had my time over I'd probably study harder, do all the right things, you know, and perhaps reach my full potential which I didn't think I did in terms of an academic education. (T, union worker, married)

He viewed his 'choice' to work in labouring roles, which have become increasingly insecure, as a personal one. However, he also recognized the inequity in educational opportunity in Australia:

> We had a culture of haves and the have nots and, look, we're always gonna have it, particularly in terms of a university education . . . If you have the smarts and the drive money shouldn't hinder you from being a better person than you are. (T, union worker, 41, married)

Structural inequality, gendered and classed norms (which are closely linked to Australian national identity and are therefore socially and culturally sanctioned and monitored) are ignored. In these arenas, neoliberal discourse is peppered throughout the participants personal narratives. They construct themselves in neoliberal terms: as having 'failed', as having made 'bad choices', as needing to own complete personal responsibility for the outcomes of their lives. While these participants didn't find blame with a constructed 'other' (e.g. women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) people, and people from non-white cultural and ethnic backgrounds), other research has found that often if blame is

allocated, it will be with individuals and groups that are further maginalized, as opposed to overall structures of power, inequality and privilege (Reay 2001: 335). Furthermore, neoliberal constructions of white, working-class masculinity were not challenged when participants were discussing their working or educational lives, the choices they had made and the circumstances they were in. They had largely bought in to hegemonic neoliberal discourses, which champion the notion of individual responsibility, capitalist aspirationalism, and a meritocratic social and economic system. As G discussed in relation to opportunity and privilege,

K: Do you think Australia is equal as far as opportunities and privileges go?

G: Yep. For sure.

K: Why do you think that is?

G: Because it's made so easy. It's all out there if you want it and you're motivated to do it. You can do whatever you want, you can get there. There's nothing stopping you. I think people complain about not having options half the time, I mean, there's obviously people who don't have jobs, but most of the time it's just laziness. (G, contract worker, 25, single)

There was a theme in participant self-construction of individualism, of taking 'responsibility' for life opportunities and outcomes, and of stoicism in relation to work, education and the equity of Australian society and culture. As previously iterated, they largely 'followed the script' that might be expected from men engaging with working-class masculinity. Indeed, it was only when talking about family, intimacy and emotion work that their responses were surprisingly candid, open and in contrast with social and cultural construction of Australian working-class masculinity.

FAMILY, INTIMACY AND EMOTION WORK: UNDOING GENDER?

While a largely neoliberal narrative emerged in the bulk of the interviews and in relation to the majority of the areas discussed, there was one very interesting and unexpected exception. In their discussions of their families and intimate lives, a different narrative emerged, one that aligned with several of the studies discussed previously: that within working-class families, economic pressures and the need for both partners to work had an effect on the ability to 'do' gender in normative ways. Furthermore, as Roberts found in his 2013 exploration of young working-class masculinities employed in the retail sector, access to ways to 'do' traditional working-class masculinity are on the decline, with service industries overtaking manufacturing and other blue-collar labouring industries. This, he found, leads to working-class men negotiating with hegemonic masculinity both in relation to work, and in relation to family and domestic duties (Roberts 2013).

In the present research, the responses from participants did illustrate some egalitarian attitudes to parenting in working-class households, with parenting being central to the men's concepts of themselves as men. However, while my respondents were relatively forthcoming in terms of fathering, none spoke about their duties around the house, or their 'work' outside paid employment. Nevertheless, it is important to note that although these participants did not discuss other unpaid domestic labour in detail, previous research shows this as a further site where gendered familial constructs are being challenged. Parenting and unpaid labour are sites where gender can be done and yet undone, as Lyonette and Crompton argue: '[parents] are simultaneously challenging or 'undoing' (Deutsch 2007) as well as 'doing' gender' (2015: 34). In the case of working-class families, this was often produced through necessity, both partners needing to work, as opposed to a desire to challenge gendered norms (2015: 35).

While participants in this study did not discuss non-childcare domestic duties in detail, they did discuss actively working to challenge more traditional notions of the 'good' working-class father as breadwinner alone. The following quote represents a willingness to learn from the past and challenge a 'macho image':

> I think you have this concept of parenting that comes from your experiences as a child, and sometimes I think that's not the best way. I think as males we have a lot of pride, and we tend to, even if we might be wrong we tend not to admit

it. I think one of the best things you can do as a man is be able to learn how to say 'sorry' not only to your partner but to your kids. And I think we have this perception of this macho image that we need to sort of break down and we need to realize that it's okay to even say to your son that you love him. (T, union worker, married, 41)

Much like the responses about intimacy, this response highlights a lack of concern with maintaining a façade of unemotional masculinity in favour of being open, caring and loving not only with a partner but also with children. This certainly defies the theory that men are unlikely to want to be actively engaged on an emotional level with children and partners, and supports arguments such as those provided by Roberts (2013) and Brady et al. (2017), and indeed may challenge some of the assumptions about hegemonic masculinity itself, especially constructions that fail to recognize the fluid and changeable nature of hegemonic masculinities (as they are multiple), and the nature of changes to discursive constructions of class and gender across space and place.

While this may illustrate some disruption to gendered mores surrounding parenting, it does not prove definitively that a working-class household equals an egalitarian one. As Cha and Thébaud recognize, attitudes to gender are often 'negotiated through private experience of norm contestation and resolution within the family' (2009: 237). However, these authors did note that hegemonic masculinity had an effect on how men felt about gender within the family (2009: 238). Despite the fact that working-class identity is linked with traditional masculine mores and breadwinner masculinity, the working-class family offers some powerful spaces and places for gendered change. The importance of 'family' to the working class has been established (Donaldson 1991: 25). Certainly, the importance of family as central to having a good life was often established in the interviews:

I think what's important in life is to have a good family life and ... a good environment where you can pass that on to your kids. (T, union worker, 41, married)

Family is a classed and gendered construct. While the family is seen as being central to working-class life, different aspects of family life are marked by class, including parenting (Gillies 2005a) and marriage (Johnson and Lawler 2005). Different types of family are classed. For example, research shows how single-parent families with several children by different fathers

are associated with the subjective position of the 'disgusting' working-class woman (Lawler 2002; Skeggs 2005). This is evidenced in both cultural and political discursive constructions of the welfare-reliant single mother, who is represented as antithetical to the ideal responsible, individualistic neoliberal citizen in terms of both her poor 'choices' and her continual reliance on welfare. In Australia, the 'working families'/'battler' archetypes so strongly linked to working-class masculinities are represented by a very classed and gendered notion of what a family entails. In part this is linked with 'bread-winner' masculinity, which creates a source of tension when well-paid, local work may be hard to find.

As evidenced below, some of the most interesting responses during data collection for this project came about when discussing relationships. There were few in-depth questions about intimacy, but several of the men were quite forthcoming about their relationships and what they defined as impor-tant in their intimate lives. For the interviewees between the ages of 30 and 45, there were some very specific and emotive responses when asked about their partners, their lives and what was important to them.

> You don't need heaps of money, because if you enjoy each other's company it's half the battle. Like if you can sit all night and have a talk with no TV on or anything you're laughin' I reckon, y'know there are lots of people that are materialistic ... to have love, to be able to get along, I mean there's plenty of simple things you can do like you can go for a walk or whatever just if you enjoy each other's company that's the biggest part of it. You're not entertain-ing yourself with outside influences like you can come home and just sit and watch TV for like, five hours, and say, 'we have a relationship' but you're watching telly, you're not talking and to have a great relationship you've got to be by yourself as you are straight and normal. (M, manufacturing worker, engaged, 35)

This illustrates the importance of intimacy to this participant's life, and shows that he has no concerns about discussing intimacy. This inverts the notion that intimacy is something 'done' by women and that 'real' men, as are often represented in Australian pop cultural manifestations of working-class masculinity, are largely unconcerned with intimacy and relationships. Indeed, one interviewee stated that the

> Qualities of being a man would be, I think, mostly is to be a person that ... is loving and caring. I guess a person that understands people, understands their

families and contributes not only in a monetary sense but in an emotional sense as well. (T, union worker, 41, married)

These responses show that emotional intimacy is important to these men, not only as part of their relationships but as a part of their embodied masculinity. This offers a contrast to more deterministic constructions of hegemonic masculinity that link it directly to set behaviours and beliefs inherent in men as a distinct category (Hearn 2004; Connell 2005). Furthermore, much of the literature problematizes working-class men as hypermasculine, homophobic, sexist and resistant to change (Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Nixon 2009). Responses from the participants in this study challenge these assumptions about working-class masculinities, and indeed men. When these participants answered questions about their family, it became clear that, for them, enacting intimacy was not a way of subverting discourses about masculinity but was in fact part of an embodied Australian working-class masculinity that was fluid and changeable.

This illustrates a very important division between working-class men doing intimacy and contractions of working-class masculinities; and it highlights the problems with 'slippage' between talking about men and talking about masculinity that Beasley (2008) discusses in relation to the conceptualization of 'hegemonic masculinity'. Indeed, working-class masculinities are constructed as individualistic, unemotional and averse to any real, deeper forms of intimacy that could be construed as feminine, while these men were not only happy to discuss intimacy but it was an important part of their classed and gendered identities. This could suggest that, for these men, their intimate relationships are a space in which they disrupt mainstream gendered ideologies. While Jamieson points out, that 'there is a general taken-for-granted assumption that a good relationship will be equal and intimate' (1999), he argues that intimacy is not necessarily correlated with gender equality. A sense of equality is often an important part of intimacy. However, 'creative energy is often deployed in disguising inequality, not in undermining it' (Bittman and Lovejoy 1993 in Jamieson 1999). In contrast with Jamieson's theory, the desire for a more equitable intimacy that involves a willingness to open oneself up to emotional equality in a relationship may be a contributory factor in challenging gendered inequalities within the family.

Conclusion

The family is obviously an important site within which the working class can construct themselves. These constructions can either challenge dominant ideologies around gender or reflect and maintain such ideologies. The importance of the family in this context is somewhat at odds with the neoliberal individualism and the conservatism that are becoming an increasing part of Australian working-class masculinities, and which are so clearly evident in the character of Kenny Smyth from *Kenny* (2006) or images of the 'Aussie bloke' engaging with the mining industry. While Pini and Mayes found an adherence to traditional gender roles in mining families, in other working-class families it seems that there may be space opening up to challenge the dominant paradigm—the one in which men are largely engaged with the labour market and women are responsible for the maintenance of the private sphere, including not only unpaid domestic labour but intimacy and emotional work. In a neoliberal society in which individualism is championed and engagement with the labour market is positioned as being paramount, finding new ways to 'do' gender in the private sphere may provide a space in which to challenge not just gender but also class and neoliberalism. Clear at this point is that this is an area in which far more research is needed, research that takes into account the importance of intimacy and private sphere work in relation to both gender and class.

Notes

1. It must be noted that Pocock is taking issue with this assumption.
2. Out of 14 women interviewed for this project, 6 had split with their partners within the first 18 months of commencing university study. As argued by Habel, Whitman and Stokes (2016), this is an area in which further study is needed.

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