9 Encouraging Voices: Towards More Creative Methods for Collecting Data on Gender and Household Labour[1]

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INTRODUCTION

For more than two decades, authors from many disciplinary perspectives have charted and documented the work and parenting lives of women and men in Europe and North America and have left an indisputable trail of evidence to confirm that, in spite of women's increasing labour market participation, women continue to take on most of the household's work.[2] Perhaps the most surprisingly consistent finding relates to the limited change that has occurred with regard to household *responsibility*: women continue to be the managers, planners, organisers and supervisors of housework and childcare-related activities in the home. Indeed, even in Sweden and Denmark with their very favourable and highly praised work-family policies (Melhuish and Moss, 1991), Scandinavian writers have recently pointed to the 'remarkable' persistence of gender divisions of labour in care-giving work (Leira, 1990) and to the fact that 'the responsibility for children still overwhelmingly lies with mothers' (Borchorst, 1990, p. 176).

In coming to such conclusions on this 'remarkable' persistence or the 'astounding stability' (Berk, 1985) in gendered household work and responsibilities, the authors who investigate these issues then devise categories to describe the views and practices of research respondents. Most studies have some typology of categories along the lines of 'traditional', 'transitional', 'egalitarian' (Hochschild, 1989) or 'traditional', 'traditional–rigid', 'traditional–flexible' and 'renegotiated' (Morris, 1985). Other authors deduce whether or not there is 'nearly equal sharing' or 'actual equal

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sharing' between women and men in relation to family work (Brannen and Moss, 1991, p. 180).

While it is understandable that authors must find ways to capture the complexity of such issues within descriptive and analytical categories and while it would seem that the well documented 'outstanding stability' of gendered household labour cannot be contested, I would argue, nevertheless, that what is required is a deeper analysis of issues of gender difference and gender equality within the household domain. In particular, it is important to attempt to understand these issues from the perspective of the people being researched. How do individual women and men experience this 'outstanding stability' of gendered household labour? Where do the views, ideas, and experiences of the research respondents fit into the development and use of categories such as, for example, 'traditional' and 'egalitarian'? How does it feel to be living within such categories? How would *they* describe their household division of labour? Would they use the word 'division'? Would their aim be 'actual equal sharing' and, if so, how would they propose to bring this about?

In an attempt to understand these and other questions, I argue that it is worth reconsidering the *methods* which have been used to collect and analyse data on the gendered division of household labour. We need to re-think and re-vision the ways in which we *encourage* and *listen* to the voices and views of the women and men in our research. In this regard, I would posit that there are *two* moves which might bring forth new evidence on gender divisions of household labour. The first move involves finding creative methods to encourage the participation of the researched during the data collection phase of research. A second move, would be to listen more attentively to the respondents during the data analysis phase.[3] This chapter will deal with the *first* move, that of encouraging greater participation and analysis by research respondents during the data collection stage. Drawing on my research with twenty-three British dual earner couples who are attempting to *share* in the work and responsibility for housework and childcare,[4] I argue that paying greater attention to encouraging and listening to the voices of the people we research may help to bring us towards a deeper understanding of *how* and *why* gender intersects with household life and parenting.

The organization of this chapter is as follows. Section I reviews *what* data have been collected in some of the current research on gender divisions of household labour. I shall highlight four weaknesses in this area and suggest an alternative definition of *what* data to collect on household work. Section II discusses the *how* of data collection in this subject area; here I will discuss two main weaknesses in how data has been collected on gender and household labour.[5] Section III of the paper describes a visual participatory

technique which attempts to overcome some of the weaknesses in data collection methods described in the first two parts of the paper. This data collection technique which I developed for use in my interviews with couples (joint interviews with the women and man together) is entitled 'The Household Portrait'.[6]

1   DATA COLLECTION: *WHAT* HOUSEHOLD WORK?

(i)   Weaknesses in methods

Within the sociological and social psychological literature on the division of household labour and on parenting, there is a striking simplicity of categories employed to describe the work which goes on within households. In particular, it is worth highlighting four weaknesses.

First, there has been a tendency by many authors to simplify *childcare* tasks (Pahl, 1984; Morris, 1985; Jowell *et al.*, 1988; Brannen and Moss, 1991). In the British Social Attitudes study, for example, childcare tasks are limited to two items which include 'looking after children when they are sick' and 'teaching children discipline' (Jowell *et al.*, 1988, p. 197).

Second, there has also been a tendency to simplify *household work* tasks limiting them, in some cases, only to parenting tasks (Backett, 1982; Boulton, 1983; Ehrensaft, 1987; Kimball, 1988) while, in other cases, omitting general household maintenance and repair tasks (DIY) (Brannen and Moss, 1991).

Third, if the distinction is made at all between households with or without children, there is often no recognition made of the various stages and changing needs and demands of children as they grow up nor the fact that childcare tasks differ greatly depending upon the numbers and ages of children (Bird *et al.*, 1984; Pahl, 1984; Morris, 1985).

Finally, the housework contributions of other family members, such as older children and grandparents, have been neglected in the effort to focus only on women and men (but see Morrow, 1992; Solberg, 1988).

(ii)   Defining household work

In light of the four methodological weaknesses mentioned above, we may not be obtaining an adequate picture of household life. If we wish to document the changes in gendered labour within the domestic sphere, then we

need to have a more detailed portrait of the unique terrain of household life. In an attempt to enter this terrain, my research set out to explore a wide range of tasks and responsibilities within *seven* categories of household work, considering how these tasks and responsibilities changed as children grew older, and, in households with older children, how the children contributed as well.

The categories of tasks and responsibilities which I have explored include: (1) *housework*; (2) *caring work*;[7] (3) *'household service work'* (Sharma, 1986) and *'kin work'* (Di Leonardo, 1987);[8] (4) *DIY*; (5) *financial management*; (6) *household subsistence activities*;[9] and (7) *overall responsibility for housework and childcare*.[10]

A standard list of household tasks was drawn up with unique variations for some households, as household members had input into my definition of tasks and responsibilities. Thus, variations were found depending upon: the number and ages of children; household type and amount of DIY undertaken; household income and the ability to buy-in services; the contribution of older children to household work; as well as some households' own particular additions to the list of household work tasks. For example, one couple with a 2-year-old boy included: 'cutting Matthew's nails' as a childcare task; another couple included 'walking the dog'; while others reminded me to include caring tasks such as 'bed-time talks', 'confidences' and 'responding to children's emotional needs in a practical way'.

II DATA COLLECTION: HOW?

It may well be argued that researchers 'lack an adequate language for the work of everyday caring' (DeVault, 1991, p. 228). In a similar vein, it might be said that it is difficult for people living within households to conceptualise and articulate just how they run their households. If we stretch our imaginations for a moment and think about a household being run as though it were a workplace, then each household member might have a job description with a detailed list of tasks to do, a schedule to follow, and deadlines to meet. Household members might clock-in and clock-out of work, putting their feet up to relax and watch television after they had clocked out of work. Household meetings would be held to review problems with particular work tasks or with other household members, as well as for creative problem-solving, forward planning, and projections of future goals and aspirations. Team togetherness and team spirit might be encouraged or, alternatively, there might be an atmosphere of competition.

Let's come back from this imaginary scenario. Quite clearly, households do not run like this. Most households stand on a foundation which is built on the inter-locking structures of the ideological, socio-economic, cultural, psychological, emotional, historical and the 'symbolic' (Martin, 1984; Berk, 1985) which combine to create a sometimes inexplicable pattern for getting all the household work done. These largely inexplicable patterns might not be retrievable in response to interview or questionnaire questions as to *who does what*. Yet, most of the research carried out on household life revolves around the researcher asking who does what and the respondent replying. I would argue that the scope and degree of household work done by household members may be more difficult to obtain than is presumed to be the case within sociological research. Much of the information on how a household operates on a day-to-day basis is difficult to remember and conceptualise, much less to articulate.

A second related weakness in data collection methods within this subject area is the failure to elicit greater data analysis, at a preliminary level, by the research respondents[11]. It could well be that a simple question might encourage the respondent to think in a more analytical way, thus providing more detail on what are otherwise quite closed questions on household tasks. For example, in *Managing Mothers*, it appears that Brannen and Moss only asked their female respondents *who* took responsibility for a number of tasks. But they did not, for example, explore how each woman felt about the issue of household responsibility; for example, which parts of this responsibility did she enjoy and which parts did she not enjoy? This might have amounted to an insignificant addition to Brannen and Moss's research but, alternatively, it might have allowed them, as well as other researchers, to re-think what is meant by the concept of *responsibility* within household life. Whereas it seems to be assumed that household responsibility is a burden, asking respondents about it could possibly shed some light on this matter and further our understanding on this issue.[12]

If we wish to gain a deeper understanding of why there has been such a remarkable persistence of gendered household labour, then we should be more attentive to the issue of including research respondents' own analysis of these issues. It is important to hear what women and men feel and think about how life is organised within their own households. Which tasks do they like doing and which ones do they dislike? If they could change anything, what would they change? Which tasks are chores and which ones are not chores?[13] How and why has the division of labour changed over the years?

III 'THE HOUSEHOLD PORTRAIT'

In attempting to find methods which would encourage women and men to speak openly and analytically about issues of household life and parenting, I struggled with ways of eliciting information on the household division of labour. Throughout my pilot interviews, where I tried many variations on research questions within the format of semi-structured interview, I felt dissatisfied with the limited portraits of household life that were emerging. I began, therefore, to think that if I could somehow help people to visualise more clearly what their household division of labour looked like, then it would help them to speak about it. I felt that a *visual* technique would enable participants to speak more freely as it would help them to have a reference point from which to speak about household life. Moreover, a *participatory* technique would encourage a higher level of expression and analysis by the research respondents. Thus, I developed a visual participatory technique entitled the 'The Household Portrait'[14].

'The Household Portrait' technique for collecting data on the division of household labour allows both partners to reflect upon and discuss together how their household is run according to a broad range of tasks and responsibilities. The technique involves sorting through different sets of coloured papers which represent a broad range of colour coded household tasks and responsibilities according to the seven categories of household work described in Section I of this chapter. The couples then place these coloured slips of paper (with each colour corresponding to each of the seven categories of household work) in one of five columns on a large sheet of paper. The five columns represent the person who does that household task or takes on the responsibility for a selected range of tasks: (1) *Woman*; (2) *Woman with Man Helping*; (3) *Shared Equally*; (4) *Man with Woman Helping*; and (5) *Man*.[15]

Neither the technique itself nor the 'Portraits' that emerged are the central issues in this discussion. I did arrive at each household with my tape recorder, my seven envelopes filled with different coloured bits of paper, large sheets of paper with five columns, a glue stick, and a pen for adding in extra tasks which were unique to particular households. Nevertheless, the technique and its materials merely acted as a doorway into their household and into issues of parenting and household life. In a sense, the technique took me through the years of their lives and into the rooms of each household in ways that a more straightforward interview might not have done. Each couple took the technique into their hands, taking me along with them. Participants took great interest and pleasure in constructing their individual 'Portraits' and especially liked the way it was

individualised in that their children's names were included on some of the little coloured pieces of paper (for example, 'putting Tommy to bed').

The data which emerges from 'The Household Portrait' technique is multi-dimensional and multi-layered: it includes noticing the way they had placed the papers (who led, who followed); how they spoke about the issues (where they laughed, where they were angry); the pauses and disruptions; the arguments; the shifting from difficult topics; their voices on tape and the resulting interview transcripts. In the end, however, the most important piece of data seems to be their actual voices on tape, what was said and how it was expressed, which were encouraged by the technique and its materials but which surpass the actual finished products, the 'Portraits', in their usefulness as raw data. Indeed, in some cases there are sharp contradictions between what is constructed in the 'Household Portrait' and what emerges through the discussion around it as well as through the individual interviews with the women and men. This relates to the fact that many of these issues which deal with the structural, ideological and emotional context of household life and parenting are deeply contradictory in and of themselves.

I shall outline some of the strengths of this visual participatory technique by drawing on my interviews with couples.

(i) *Reflection, debate, arguments*: ' . . . it's a conflict area. I don't know if you could define it . . . ' [Jeff]

'The Household Portrait' technique allowed both partners to reflect upon, discuss, debate, agree, or disagree on each partner's contribution to the running of their household. Sally and Jeff are speaking about the coloured piece of paper which denotes the task: '*making decisions about the children's behaviour*'. Sally puts it into the *Shared Equally* column, but then Jeff says that he doesn't agree with this. He mentions the example of trying to come to a decision on the children's sleeping patterns when they were infants. Sally felt they should hold on to the strategy of letting the children cry themselves to sleep whereas Jeff was much more inclined to want to attend to them in the middle of the night. Here are their words:

Sally: So, we do discuss that, don't we, rather than just, sort of – it's not me that's sort of...

Jeff: I'd say *you* tend to set the agenda for it.

Sally: Yeah.

Jeff: So that makes it better to go under 'Woman (Man Helps)'. [He moves the little coloured paper from 'Shared Equally' to 'Woman (Man Helps)']

Sally: Except it isn't really like that. I mean I think I'd like to say that . . .

Jeff: ...it's a conflict area. I don't know if you could define it . . .

Sally: I mean it's certainly not an area that I feel that I would want to control because I feel – even if it's somebody taking on more – that it should at least be *discussed* equally, or discussed thoroughly, you know between the two of us, so, you know, it's depending on how you perceive it, and not you're *doing* it more or you're actually *doing* it without discussion.

This discussion between Sally and Jeff underlines, among other things, the fact that they both have different views on the *definition* of the task *'making decisions about the children's behaviour'*. As Jeff says: '. . . it's a conflict area. I don't know if you could define it . . . '. For Sally, as long as the issue is *'discussed* equally, or discussed thoroughly', then it is a *shared* task. Speaking about it together allowed these differences to emerge.

(ii) *Analysis*: **'the greatest bones of contention...'** **[Chris]**

A second strength of 'The Household Portrait' was that it involved the participants in the analysis of the data at a preliminary level. I asked them what they were happy about and what they were unhappy about. If they could change anything, what would they change? What tasks did they like to do? Which did they loathe? How did they feel about having responsibility for certain tasks? How had the division of labour changed over the years and why?

Anna and Chris describe in some detail how their 'Household Portrait' has changed over the years. In thinking about their greatest areas of disagreement, Chris says, and Anna agrees: 'I think the greatest bones of contention have always been the cooking and the washing.' They speak about this for a while and then I ask Anna if she has always done the cooking and the washing. She replies:

Anna: Yes, and I think that's partly just to do with, you know, gender stereotyping and partly because we'd had very different experiences when we met. Although we were virtually the same age, whereas Chris had just been a student the whole time till we met, I had jobs and had my own flat and looked after myself in a way that [she turns to Chris] *you hadn't*. So that I think, in a way, you know, we just *arrived* together with different domestic experiences as well as being of opposite sexes with *all* that entailed as well. Our experiences of our early twenties tended to reinforce gender stereotyping.

Of course there were many other factors, as revealed throughout the joint interview and the individual interviews with Anna and Chris, which account for the fact that 'the greatest bones of contention have always been the cooking and the washing'. Anna's own words, both here and elsewhere in her interview transcripts, helped me towards a greater understanding of how she analysed issues surrounding gender and household life.

(iii)   *Changes over the years*: 'And sometimes, even though I've known I've sort of wanted it to go more to the middle, I've *sort* of resisted it. And you've had to *push*.' [Mark]

One of the most appealing aspects of the technique is that it allowed the couple to enter into a discussion *together* of how they felt their household division of labour had changed over the years. The following dialogue demonstrates how Laura and Mark keep referring to their 'Household Portrait' as a reference point and in particular to the fact that during their twenty-five years of marriage they have, with some difficulty, kept trying to move household tasks and responsibilities to the middle column.

Mark: I think that, I mean, I think I quite *actively* not only supported you but *encouraged* you, in the very early days to find a sense of yourself. And then I have, I think *actively wanted* to share things as much as possible. There have certainly been times when, in a sense I've permitted or even arranged, perhaps forced if you like, the situation where *a lot* of the burdens of running of the household have been on your shoulders. And sometimes, even though I've known I've sort of wanted it to go more to the middle, I've *sort of* resisted it. And you've had to *push*. And I'm sure you *felt* that and I felt *guilty* about it even. But yes, yes it happened.

Laura: I mean I can see that I still *do* actually take responsibility for more things, but, um, the ones I take responsibility for I *actually*, you know, *enjoy* them and I'm quite happy with that. The things that I have felt *resentful* about or, you know, that it's not really fair, I find they're down the middle now, really.

(iv)   *A view of household life*: 'It's quite interesting actually to see . . . ' [Anna]

In looking at their 'Household Portrait', many couples were interested, at times surprised, to see how it looked. One man, who was working nights and taking care of his sons full-time in the day, discovered that he was, in fact,

not doing much housework. Looking at their 'Household Portrait', he comments: 'It has an awful ring to it when you confront it yourself.' Anna examines the 'Household Portrait' which she and Chris had done and she says:

Anna: It's quite interesting actually to see both what the pattern is *now* and to recognize how it's changed over the last ten years and over the past five years [since the children]. There's one set of you know, much more gradual shifts which began ten years ago and then some quite *dramatic* shifts which started *five* years ago. And really the most *positive* of these dramatic shifts is into the area of *shared* enterprise. Because we do *so* much that's actually shared.

(v)   *On gender differences*: 'And it *doesn't matter*, so we just let it fall as it happens.' [Elizabeth]

On the question of gender *difference*, Deborah Rhode has pointed out: 'The critical issue should not be difference, but the *difference difference makes*' (Rhode, 1989, p. 313; my emphasis). Yet this 'critical issue' has been dealt with only partially within the subject area of gender divisions of household labour.[16] On the one hand, the differences *within* household life have been held accountable for a wide range of impressively documented differences in the socio-economic positions of women and men *outside* of household life. In particular, it has been demonstrated how the weighting of the balance of household labour on the side of women has been very costly to many women. Many studies have pointed to how women's employment may suffer as it is mainly women who have had to make adjustments in their schedules in order to balance both paid and domestic work (Crouter, 1984; Berk, 1985; Pleck, 1985; Evetts, 1988; Hochschild, 1989; Brannen and Moss, 1991). Several studies have also pointed out that in dual earner households, it is the women who experience fatigue, anxiety, illness, role-strain, conflict and guilt in their decision to return to work and in their daily lives as parents and workers (Crouter, 1984; Thoits, 1987; Hochschild, 1989; Brannen and Moss, 1991). As described so well by Brannen and Moss, the fact that women continue to do most of the household work often leads to 'the potentially serious long-term consequences of subsequently leaving employment or leaving their full time job for another part-time one' wherein they often find themselves in a situation of 'occupational downgrading, with loss of earnings, pensions and other benefits'. They also mention how 'these actions affect future career prospects, pensions and long term household income' and they can also leave 'women (and their children) economically vulnerable to the future

loss of their partner's financial support because of marital breakdown or for some other long-term reason' (Brannen and Moss, 1991, p. 253).

On the other hand, there is little attention paid to the daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly layers of difference which may move and change as children grow older and as women and men's experiences as mothers and fathers alter in relation to a wide range of indeterminate, constantly changing factors. These factors include, among others: expanding or narrowing opportunities at work (promotion, demotion, or redundancy); perceptions of their particular child or children's needs as related to the age of the child(ren), the personality and disposition of each child, availability and suitability of local childcare, and the birth of a second, third, or fourth baby; a change in the child(ren)'s childcare arrangements (the loss of a child-minder or nanny); a child's transition into nursery or school; and personal incidents such as illness or the death of a significant loved one. In the main, gender difference is *problematised* within sociological literature on gender and household labour. In addition, there is little distinction between leisure and work so that there is a tendency to view all work which occurs in the home as part of the 'second shift' (Hochschild, 1989). In this sense, there is an implicit devaluation of what goes on *inside* the home so that this subject area is still informed by Oakley's findings two decades ago that housework is overwhelmingly isolating, monotonous and oppressive (Oakley, 1974).

There are two main points to be made on this issue of gender differences which emerge from the 'Household Portrait' technique. First, not all household tasks are 'chores'. The most obvious examples are childcare related activities which may be experienced much more as pleasures rather than as work (Oakley, 1974; Boulton, 1983). Yet, even on other routine household tasks, I was surprised at the range of differing attitudes about them expressed by women and men in my study. One man's hobby was 'ironing and listening to rock music'. Another man said, quite seriously: 'I love cleaning the toilet.' A woman who works long days told me: 'I love hanging out the laundry. But I'm not usually here to do it. So when I get the chance I do it.' Overall this may well point to the fact, as one woman pointed out, that 'there's a different feeling whether you're doing them under pressure or slowly'.

A second point on gender differences within household life which emerges from the 'Household Portrait' technique is that just as there are varied meanings attached to household work tasks, there are diverse definitions about what it means to *share* the household work or to be an *egalitarian* couple. Although all couples in my study identified themselves 'as attempting to share the work and responsibility for housework and childcare', the 'Household Portraits' represented a wide range of distinct

patterns of sharing related to differing ideas on both the *meaning* and appropriate *structure* for sharing the household work. To give just one example, Elizabeth and Saxon, both in their mid-fifties, are well aware of the role played by their respective gendered upbringing and socialisation. Yet they are comfortable with doing different things in the household as long as there is an overall sense of sharing. They each feel that their household division of labour reflects their unique likes, dislikes, and relative competence in certain tasks. Their 'Household Portrait' reveals that he tends to do most of the DIY and she does most of the 'kin work'. They refer to their 'Household Portrait' as they speak:

Elizabeth: Just as *I've* pushed perhaps to do more of these [refers to *remembering birthdays and sending cards, buying Christmas presents* and so on] you've pushed to do more of that [refers to most *DIY*]. And, it *doesn't matter*, so we just let it fall as it happens. You know, if I'd felt very strongly about that, I would have pushed. If you'd felt about that very strongly *you* would have pushed. Just as you're, you're beginning to push . . . [laughs].

Saxon: Yes that's right, you're quite right. Those are your strengths and these are my strengths and we tend to do those things and they do *happen* to fall into relatively conventional role models as well.

Whereas it is true that Elizabeth and Saxon are, in his words, 'relatively conventional' in some aspects of their household division of labour, they also have a very 'unconventional' history as regards the sharing of household work. During their twenty-one years of marriage, they have both taken turns at doing flexi-time and part-time work and they each took time off from work to be at home both full-time and part-time with the children. Thus it would be difficult to classify this household as either 'traditional' or 'egalitarian' given that it is actually both of these. This may highlight the fact that interpreting data on the household division of labour only at the level of tasks and responsibilities may give us an incomplete, and indeed distorted, picture of just *how* and *why* women and men are changing within household life.

(vi) Not gender *equality*, but gender *differences*; not only differences but the *disadvantages* that follow from these differences

My study produced an enormously diverse range of 'Household Portraits' with varying personal biographies and structural and ideological explanations behind each 'Portrait' and its supporting interview transcripts. Yet, as I proceeded to analyse my data, it became increasingly difficult to

discern just how to define or describe an 'egalitarian' couple (Hochschild, 1989) or an 'actual equal sharing' (Brannen and Moss, 1991, p. 180) between women and men in relation to family work. Indeed, one of the main findings of my research is that most of the couples in this study demonstrated considerable confusion and ambivalence over the issue of gender differences, both in terms of just what they were and where such differences should be permitted to prevail. Whereas equality in employment is more easily measured and tested against factors such as pay, promotions, and the relative positions of women and men, the issue of equality within the home is not so straightforward. Does it mean doing everything, even if that means that the women learn how to do plumbing and electrical chores for the first time whereas their male partner has been doing such tasks since he was a boy? Does it mean that men have to call up the baby-sitter as many times as the women do and go to the toddler groups or play group sessions where he might be the only man in the room? Moreover, does it mean that women and men have to share *everything* from the first day of their first child's life or that they may alternatively have periods where one parent does more than the other?

In my view, it remains difficult, if not impossible, to speak about *equality* within household life as measured by women and men's participation in, time spent doing, or taking responsibility for a broad range of household tasks. Gender differences existed for all couples in the present study. The scope and range of gender differences took on various configurations, but they nevertheless existed within all households, even those whom other authors might describe as fully 'egalitarian'. Thus, it would be more worthwhile to speak about gender *differences* and the *disadvantages* which follow from such differences (Rhode, 1989, 1990) rather than arguing for *equality* between women and men within household life. Although gender boundaries can and are crossed by women and men so that women are, for example, astrophysicists while men are primary caregivers, there is still a sense that boundaries *are* being crossed and these crossings may entail certain struggles, gains and losses which should be accorded greater attention rather than ignored.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that in light of the 'remarkable' persistence or 'outstanding stability' of gender divisions of household labour, it is important to re-consider whether or not we are getting a full picture of women and

men's changing contributions to household labour and their own complex explanations which stand behind static or flexible gendered positioning within the household. If we wish to know *why* women continue to take on the responsibility for household life, then one way forward would be to find imaginative and creative methods to encourage and listen to the views and ideas of women and men as they speak about and untangle deeply knotted threads of thoughts, feelings, and experiences on the subject of gender differences within the fabric of their domestic lives. 'The Household Portrait' technique represents just one way forward in collecting data on these issues.

In summary, there are four concluding points to be made on the usefulness of a creative research technique, such as the 'Household Portrait', for gathering data on women and men's lives as parents and workers. First, this particular technique assisted the couples in my study to remember, conceptualise and articulate how they arranged and carried out the household work. It encouraged discussion, analysis, debate, agreement and disagreement over how each household's particular division of labour had changed over the years and women and men's own views as to *why* these changes did or did not occur. Second, 'The Household Portrait' technique may have instilled a certain amount of trust in the couples I interviewed since they had a sense of the sort of picture that I left with. Rather than simply walking away with all their words on a tape recorder for me to analyse on my own, I left with a 'Household Portrait' that they had constructed together, discussed and, to some extent, analysed with me. Third, it encouraged a wide ranging discussion on a number of dimensions of *difference* within household life. There were differences in how individual women and men defined household tasks as chores, hobbies or leisure activities as well as differences in how certain tasks were defined (for example, 'making decisions about the children's behaviour'). Finally, a critical theoretical point has emerged from the utilisation of this data collection technique in that it uncovered the complex layers of gender *differences* which may exist within household life, the diverse definitions about what it means to *share* household work, and the difficulty with defining and describing *equality* between women and men within the domestic domain.

Notes

2. Since the 1970s, academic studies of gender divisions of labour within the household have collected basically three major types of data: (i) *time-budgets* (Meissner *et al.*, 1975; Gershuny *et al.*, 1986); (ii) qualitative or quantitative data on the distribution of household *tasks* (Pahl, 1984; Jowell *et al.*, 1988); and (iii) data which also includes the issue of *responsibility* for these same household tasks (Morris, 1985; Hochschild, 1989; Brannen and Moss, 1991). Some research has collected data on both time and tasks (Berk, 1985) or all three types of data: time, tasks, and responsibility (Brannen and Moss, 1991; Morris, 1985).

3. I am very grateful to Carol Gilligan for her insights on staying attentive to 'voice' and distinguishing between the various voices within research projects (the researcher, the respondents, and the existing literature on the topic in question). Her recent book, *Meeting at the Crossroads* (Brown and Gilligan, 1992), particularly Chapter Two, provides an excellent guide to in-depth data *analysis* which listens attentively to the voices of the re-searched. For an example of how this method was used in listening to women's experiences of postnatal depression, see Mauthner, (1994).

4. See Doucet (1995).

5. I wish to comment at this point that my critique is not of the authors' entire work in question, most of which is very admirable, but rather about some of the data collection methods which were utilised for obtaining data on gender divisions of household labour.

6. An example of a 'Household Portrait' is included in Appendix A.1.

7. In my study, caring work includes only childcare as none of my households had elder care responsibilities. I also distinguished between 'caring for' ('tending') and 'caring about' (the more emotional or expressive aspects of caring about other household members) (Graham, 1983).

8. 'Household service work' includes the work of maintaining contact and relationships with social, community and extended family networks; in a similar vein, 'kin work', refers to 'the conception, maintenance and ritual celebration of cross-household ties . . . ' (Di Leonardo, 1987, pp. 442–3).

9. This category overlaps with DIY to some extent and reflects what Ray Pahl (1984) refers to as the sphere of 'self-provisioning' which is the production and consumption of goods and services undertaken by household members for themselves. For some households, these are 'hobbies'.

10. For a typical detailed list of the household tasks in each of the seven categories, please refer to 'The Household Portrait' in Appendix A.1.

11. Such issues are, however, considered within 'cooperative enquiry' and more collaborative and experiential research such as that found in *Human Enquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research* (Reason and Rowan, 1981). It remains surprising how so few of these ideas have spilled over into sociological research on gender divisions of household labour.

12. This underpins a deeper theoretical weakness on the issues of *care* and *responsibility* in the subject area of gender divisions of household labour and the failure to distinguish between a 'feminine' and a 'feminist' approach to caring. As described by Tronto: 'The *feminine* approach to caring carries the burden of accepting traditional gender divisions in a society that devalues what women do. . . . A *feminist* approach to caring, in contrast, needs to begin by broadening our understanding of what caring for others means,

both in terms of the moral questions it raises and in terms of the need to re-structure broader social and political institutions if caring for others is to be made a more central part of the everyday lives of everyone in society' (Tronto, 1989, pp. 184–9; see also Tronto, 1993). Finch and Mason (1993) is an excellent example of combining rich empirical data with a sophisticated understanding of the issues of care and responsibility in the context of family and kin relationships.

13. Some researchers get at this issue of the respondents' feelings about the particular tasks through detailed diaries (see Berk, 1985). It remains the case, however, that this sort of analysis seldom enters into the interview situation.

14. The process of developing the technique was informed by principles from non-formal participatory education and my experience in creative non-formal education work with UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme in Central and South America. The basic principles of this approach are summed up in Srinivasan (1977, 1990).

15. See Appendix A.1.

16. See Doucet (in press) for a theoretical discussion of gender equality and gender difference as applied to the subject area of gender divisions of household labour.

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Appendix A.1 'The Household Portrait'–An Example from 'Laura' and 'Mark'

Woman	Woman (Man Helps)	Shared Equally	Man (Woman Helps)	Man
Watering plants	Tidying up	Buying of minor household (kitchen items)	Cleaning cooker	Cleaning bathroom/WC
	Laundry – doing it	Washing up		Cooking evening meal (weekends)
Garden: flowers		Laundry – putting it away		
Changing beds		Making breakfast		Shopping
Main listener/comforter for Anne and Jessica's concerns/problems		Cooking evening meal (weekends)		When Anne, Jessica Russell and Joe were little: physical play/ sports
After-school care when children were younger		Main listener/comforter for Russell and Joe's concerns/problems		
		Car maintenance		
Organises childcare arrangements (early years)	Arranged babysitting when children were little		Home improvement	Car maintenance
Bought (buy) children's clothes		Bed-time talks		Home improvement
	When Anne, Jessica Russell and Joe were little: creative play		Bicycle maintenance	Bicycle maintenance
When Anne, Jessica Russell and Joe were little took them to doctor/dentist		Driving children to activities		Minor repairs; plumbing, electrical
		Prepared children's room(s) (before or when they were babies. . . .)		
Taking photos	Organised birthday parties		Helping with homework	Household bills
				Overall budgeting and financial management

Appendix A.1 Continued'

Woman	Woman (Man Helps)	Shared Equally	Man (Woman Helps)	Man
Making photo albums	Remembering birthdays and sending cards	Sending Christmas cards	Overall budgeting	
Buying Christmas presents		Cooking for guests		
Knitting	Decorating house	Family contacts (letters / phone calls)	Making jams	
	Had the responsibility for childcare in pre-school years	Organising family outings / activities		
	Had the responsibility for childcare during early school years	Organising entertaining (setting it up)		
	Deciding what needs doing for housework	Attending school activities		
		Parent–teacher evenings		
		Buying major household appliances		
		Repairing clothes		
		Making decisions about children's behaviour		
		Planning meals		
		Has the responsibility (now) for ensuring that all is going well with the children		