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Cook, Kay and Skinner, Christine [orcid.org/0000-0001-8548-9009](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8548-9009) (2019) Gender equality in child support policy : Fathers' rhetoric of 'fairness' in a parliamentary inquiry. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*. pp. 164-187. ISSN 1072-4745

<https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxy014>

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**Gender equality in child support policy: Fathers' rhetoric of 'fairness' in a parliamentary inquiry**

Journal:	<i>Social Politics</i>
Manuscript ID	SP-2017-0091.R1
Manuscript Type:	Research
Keywords:	child support, gender equality, male breadwinner model, policy, separated fathers

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Manuscripts

Review

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3 **Gender equality in child support policy: Fathers' rhetoric of 'fairness' in a**  
4 **parliamentary inquiry**  
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10 **Abstract**  
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12 Child support payments extend separated fathers' male breadwinning role across households,  
13 likely fuelling fathers' perceptions of 'unfairness'. By examining fathers' written submissions  
14 to an Australian inquiry, we examine fathers' claims of unfairness, which were expressed in  
15 terms of gender inequality. Here, we show how fathers adopted a gender equality discourse  
16 that left intact the existing gender order. Through expectations for equal treatment, men  
17 claimed the child support system would produce equality of outcomes, namely eliminating  
18 the redistributive need for child support payments. In doing so, fathers' qualified support for  
19 gender equality advantaged men as payers while further entrenching gender inequity.  
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33 **Keywords**  
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36 child support; feminist policy analysis; gender equality; gender equity; male breadwinner  
37 model; separated fathers  
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## Introduction

This paper examines separated fathers' assessments of gender fairness and unfairness in submissions to a 2014-15 parliamentary inquiry into Australia's child support system following significant policy changes that occurred in 2008. At that time, and in response to significant lobbying by the vocal Australian men's rights lobby (Fehlberg and Maclean 2009; Author 2013; 2014; 2016), the child support formula was modified to provide for the equal treatment of men's and women's incomes and overnight time spent caring for children. In this analysis of fathers' submissions to the later 2014-15 inquiry, we examine the gender equality rhetoric deployed by fathers in their new claims for child support reform. Specifically, we assess: the sources of fathers' perceived gender unfairness; the nature of gender equality that fathers sought; and the implications for mothers and fathers in terms of equal treatment, outcomes and opportunities to access resources, rights and responsibilities (Beckerman 2017; Orloff and Shiff 2016).

Given that gender equality policymaking is a contested and negotiated process (Walby 2005), and one where men often act as gatekeepers (Connell 2003), in this paper we analyse the claims put forward by fathers as they advocated for child support policy reform. In doing so, we contribute to the emerging body of research that examines men's often qualified uptake of gender equality discourses in ways that leave intact their personal benefit from gendered structural arrangements (Frericks 2012; Levtov et al. 2014). These studies have found that men take up gender equality in abstract rather than concrete ways, and often in ways that are least disruptive to existing hierarchies.

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3 We locate our analysis in the field of feminist policy studies (Bacchi 1999; Hawkesworth  
4 1994) which examines such issues as ‘how power relations are gendered ... [and] how ‘the  
5 political’ includes gender issues formerly considered ‘personal’” (Kantola and Lombardo  
6 2017, 324). We provide empirical support for the discursive feminist policy studies position  
7 that the representation of gender inequality and equality exist within power-laden political  
8 contexts which can open up or close down subsequent policy solutions (Bacchi 1999; Kantola  
9 and Lombardo 2017). To make such power relations explicit, and to extend contemporary  
10 and contested understandings of gender equality within feminist policy studies (for  
11 discussions see: Bacchi and Eveline 2010; Krizsan and Lombardo 2013; Lombardo, Meier  
12 and Verloo 2017), we suggest that the term be unpacked to differentiate the forms of equality  
13 being pursued.

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30 Bacchi and Eveline’s (2010, 2) note that ‘although ‘gender equality’ is commonly put  
31 forward as the taken-for-granted goal of [gender] policies, it does not necessarily follow that  
32 the same social vision accompanies the invocation of this term’. As such, the contest over  
33 what gender equality policy means is evolving and ongoing, and occurs largely outside of  
34 feminist policy analysis, such as in the worlds of policy development and implementation. As  
35 Lombardo and colleague’s (2017) note in their historical analysis, over time the term gender  
36 equality has simultaneously been stretched to incorporate new meanings such as  
37 intersectionality, shrunk to represent tight technical issues, or bent to accommodate goals  
38 other than gender equality, such as economic growth, in order to fit into existing policy  
39 frames.

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3 We posit that ongoing contests over what gender equality means and how gender equality  
4 policy should be developed stem, in part, from the conflation of three types of gender  
5 equality; namely equality of opportunity, equality of treatment, and equality of outcomes.  
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7 Equality of opportunity means that all people have equal access to social or material inputs,  
8 and is captured in lay notions of ‘a level playing field’. Equality of treatment, on the other  
9 hand, refers to all people being dealt with similarly, regardless of their starting point, and  
10 foregrounds equality in the application of a process. The standardized application of the  
11 Australian child support formula provides an example here. Finally, equality of outcomes  
12 refers to an equal result, allocation, or benefit; independent of the inputs or process. We argue  
13 that these ‘types’ cannot coexist on equal terms, as to improve equality of opportunity may  
14 require unequal treatment, for example. Moves towards one type of equality will result in  
15 moves away from another. In the words of Beckerman (2017, 209), following the work of  
16 Sen (1992):  
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31 if you are in favour of greater equality in some ‘evaluative space’ you  
32 will usually have to condone greater inequality in some other space.  
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34 So are you an egalitarian or not? It is not possible to be an egalitarian  
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36 in all of them.  
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44 We argue that rhetorical use of the umbrella term ‘gender equality’ may provide policy  
45 lobbyists with social legitimacy for their claims, while simultaneously advocating for forms  
46 of ‘equality’ that in fact entrench rather than dissolve social disadvantages. Following  
47 Krizsan and Lombardo’s (2013) delineation of ‘difference’ versus ‘equal treatment’  
48 approaches to gendered policy development, we suggest in the following analysis that there is  
49 danger in reading men’s claims for gender-equal treatment as consistent with the structural  
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3 transformations in equality of opportunities that are required to deliver gender-equal  
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5 outcomes. We begin this analysis by presenting a brief overview of the role of gender in the  
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7 Australian child support policy context.  
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### 13 **Gender and Australia's child support policy history**

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16 Child support is money transferred between parents post separation for the purpose of  
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18 supporting children (International Network of Child Support Scholars 2017). In Australia,  
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20 legislation to establish child support orders and transfer payments was implemented in 1988  
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22 and 1989, respectively. Femocrats such as Meredith Edwards had significant influence over  
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24 the policy's design and implementation, which embedded gender equity principles into the  
25  
26 child support program (Child Support Consultative Group 1988; Fehlberg and Maclean 2009;  
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28 Hancock 1998). The original system sought to redistribute money across households to  
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30 combat the high rate of poverty experienced by single mother-headed families (Fehlberg et al.  
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32 2015; Fehlberg and Maclean 2009; Hancock 1998).  
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39 Reflecting the gendered distribution of work and care at the time, payments referenced the  
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41 male breadwinner model; positioning one parent, typically the father, as the primary earner  
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43 and the other parent, typically the mother, as the primary carer. In so doing, in addition to  
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45 supporting greater gender-equal outcomes through the redistribution of finances post-  
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47 separation, the policy also upheld a very traditional division of labour. Through the child  
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49 support formula, the male breadwinner model was universally replicated across households  
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51 following separation, regardless of individual family practices. This likely fuelled fathers'  
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53 deep resentment of the child support system, culminating in a parliamentary inquiry (House  
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3 of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs [HRSCFCA]  
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5 2003), redesign of the formula (Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support 2005), and legislative  
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7 changes that took effect between 2006 and 2008.  
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13 Australian child support formula reform occurred contemporaneously with the enactment of  
14  
15 ‘welfare to work’ legislation in 2005 that compelled single parent benefit recipients from July  
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17 1, 2006 to seek thirty hours of employment per fortnight once their youngest child turned six  
18  
19 (Australian Government 2005). These welfare changes sought to compel and normalise single  
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21 mothers’ employment, further eroding reference to the male breadwinner model in post-  
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23 separation contexts. At this time, one of the primary justifications for amending the child  
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25 support formula was women’s increasing labour market participation (HRSCFCA 2003),  
26  
27 foregrounding the need for gender-equal treatment. Within the amended child support  
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29 legislation, equal treatment rhetoric saw the replacement of references to ‘mothers’ and  
30  
31 ‘fathers’ with the gender-neutral terms of ‘parents’, ‘payers’ and ‘payees’. More significantly,  
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33 the revised formula adopted an ‘income shares’ approach to the calculation of child support,  
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35 whereby both parents’ income and overnight care of children was treated equally (Ministerial  
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37 Taskforce on Child Support 2005).  
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45 The income shares approach legitimated assumptions regarding the need for equal treatment  
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47 of parents’ earnings and care. As each parent’s income and share of overnight care-time are  
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49 entered into the formula to determine a child support liability, child support in Australia  
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51 entails both financial and caring dimensions. The formula thus positions caring and working  
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53 time as interchangeable, marking a fundamental change in the operation and purpose of  
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55 Australian child support policy.  
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3 However, despite the rhetoric of equal treatment, given the reality of an unequal distribution  
4 of work and care patterns that exist between mothers and fathers, the revised child support  
5 formula still operates within a wider context of unequal opportunities. Hence, despite equal  
6 treatment, the resultant calculations still required money to be distributed across households  
7 from typically wealthier minority-time fathers to typically less wealthy primary caregiving  
8 mothers. Fathers with child support liabilities, however, can reduce their payments by  
9 increasing their care time. This provides fathers with good reason to argue for gender equality  
10 in terms of equal opportunities for caring and earning.  
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24 As Australia's child support policy history shows, while gender equality policy has typically  
25 been fought for by feminist scholars, women's organizations and policymakers (Connell  
26 2003; Lombardo et al. 2017), the gendered foundation of Australia's original child support  
27 system was challenged primarily by men (Fehlberg and Maclean 2009; Smyth 2005; Smyth  
28 and Henman 2010), arguing for equal treatment. Fathers' rights groups have been described  
29 as calling for and being highly influential in the conduct and outcomes of the 2003 inquiry  
30 and subsequent legislative changes (Fehlberg and Maclean 2009; Author 2013; 2014).  
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43 At the same time, feminist researchers have stridently critiqued the 2006-08 child support  
44 reforms, arguing that the revised formula and the evidence on which it was based,  
45 disproportionately favoured the interests of fathers as payers, excluding the worldview and  
46 experience of mothers as recipients. These critiques give credence to the idea that men  
47 provide qualified support for gender equality policy initiatives, often in ways that buttress  
48 their gender privilege (Frericks 2012; Levtov et al. 2014; Ratele 2014). The achievement of  
49 gender-equal treatment in the child support 'incomes shares' formula is likely one such  
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3 example. Here, the outcomes of the 2008 policy reform was far from gender-equal, and relied  
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5 on gendered practices of policy development that favoured and reinforced men's interests.  
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10 Certainly, analyses of the 2003 inquiry hearings and 2008 policy reforms revealed men's  
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12 claims regarding the problems with child support policy were prioritised in policy processes  
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14 (Author 2013, 2014) and were given disproportionate weight by policymakers (Author 2016).  
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16 Economic modelling of child support liabilities under the revised 2008 formula supports the  
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18 assertion that men were the reform's primary beneficiaries. Studies reveal net financial losses  
19  
20 experienced by child support recipients (mainly mothers), while high-income payers (mainly  
21  
22 fathers) were likely to be financially better off (Smyth and Henman 2010). The losses  
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24 experienced by low-income single mothers were intensified when the dual effect of child  
25  
26 support and welfare to work changes were considered (Summerfield et al. 2010). For  
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28 example, Son and colleagues (2014) found that the proportion of separated mothers in  
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30 poverty increased by 6 per cent following the introduction of the new formula.  
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38 Yet, despite financial and symbolic gains resulting from the 2008 reforms, fathers still  
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40 consider child support policy to be deeply unfair (Christensen 2014; 2017). Simultaneously, it  
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42 appears fathers' influence over child support policy processes has remained strong. Following  
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44 the election of the conservative Liberal/National coalition in late 2013, a new inquiry into the  
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46 Australian child support scheme was held. Of note to the current analysis is that the Chair of  
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48 the 2014-15 inquiry committee, federal Member of Parliament, George Christiansen, was an  
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50 active supporter of such fathers' rights groups and causes (O'Hara 2014; The Nationals  
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52 2012), recently labelling the child support system as 'anti-male' (Christensen 2017).  
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6 The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs  
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8 (HRSCSPLA) comprised eleven members of parliament, and was chaired by Mr Christensen;  
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10 staunch ally of the then Liberal/National (i.e. conservative) coalition Prime Minister, Tony  
11  
12 Abbott. Among other things, the terms of reference asked the Committee to inquire into: the  
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14 management of collection and payment of child support arrears and overpayments; the  
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16 flexibility in the system and whether it was keeping pace with families' change in  
17  
18 circumstances; and the linkages between child support policies and Family Court decisions  
19  
20 and the provisions for high conflict families. A particular interest was identified as 'assessing  
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22 the methodology for calculating payments and the adequacy of current compliance and  
23  
24 enforcement powers for the management of child support payments' (HRSCSPLA 2015). On  
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26 the one hand, the inquiry was therefore very broad, but on the other hand, was also highly  
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28 specific with close attention being paid to the working of the formula for calculating  
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30 maintenance amounts.  
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Ten months after the final hearing, the report was tabled by the Committee, which presented twenty-five recommendations and a 'plan to take the CSP [Child Support Program] to a new generation of service' (HRSCSPLA 2015, 2). Yet, as of September 2017, none of the recommendations from the inquiry had been enacted, most likely due to the change in Prime Minister in September 2015. The 2017-18 federal budget, tabled in May 2017, included three measures that the government identified as responses to the inquiry. All three pertained to administrative changes to tax and financial records procedures (Commonwealth of Australia 2017, 151) rather than changes to the child support program or formula.

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3 Despite the lack of policy action to date, it remains important to understand the issues  
4 presented by fathers, as their voices were highly influential in the 2003 inquiry and may yet  
5 influence policy reform. Given the policy import afforded to fathers previously, it is  
6 necessary to understand the policy problems fathers experienced and the solutions they  
7 proposed. There is a need to examine the extent to which these solutions could produce  
8 gender equality, the form this equality would take, and the gendered impacts produced as a  
9 result. As Raewyn Connell (2003, p. 10) asserted,

18 the task for gender equality policy is to recognize the reasons for  
19 resistance to gender equality among men and boys, to find answers to  
20 the arguments advanced by opponents, and to find better solutions to  
21 the underlying social concerns that find expression through resistance  
22 to gender equality.

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30 Before beginning this task, however, we turn to describe the gendered reality of post-  
31 separation parenting in Australia, in order to establish the context for the subsequent analysis.

### 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 **The gendered reality of Australian post-separation parenting**

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41 In 2016 in Australia, there were 618,900 one parent families; overwhelmingly headed by  
42 women (eighty-three per cent) (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2017). Such mothers  
43 are more likely to rely on government benefits than their male counterparts (ABS 2012). The  
44 increasing prevalence of single-mother-headed families mirrors trends internationally, where  
45 the number and proportion of such households has been increasing since the 1970's, with  
46 over a quarter of children in English-speaking nations now growing up in such families  
47 (Berrington 2014; Cancian 2014).

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6 Financially, the proportion of single parent households experiencing poverty in Australia  
7 increased from 25.7 per cent in 2003-04 (prior to welfare and child support reform) to 29.1  
8 per cent in 2013-14 (Australian Council of Social Service and the Social Policy Research  
9 Centre [ACOSS and the SPRC] 2016). There is also no doubt that child support is an  
10 important income source for lone parent families. In 2011, child support payments (when  
11 received) were found to reduce the rate of single-mother-headed family poverty by twenty-  
12 one per cent (Author 2017).  
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24 The high level of Australian single-mother-headed poverty is due in part to gendered work  
25 and care patterns that exist prior to separation (Craig 2006) and an entrenched and significant  
26 gender pay gap, especially for full-time employees (Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre and  
27 the Workplace Gender Equality Agency [BCEC and WGEA] 2016). ABS (2015) and  
28 longitudinal panel data (BCEC and WGEA 2016; Dinh et al. 2017) show that while the  
29 majority of Australian intact families with dependent children have two employed parents, in  
30 most cases it is the father who works full-time while the mother works part-time.  
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43 With respect to caring patterns that underpin separated mothers' desire and capacity to work,  
44 the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (LSSF; Qu et al. 2014, 72) found that "children  
45 most commonly spent 66–86% of nights with their mother, and 14–34% of nights with their  
46 father". Further, ABS (2015) data revealed that 45 per cent of children with a parent living  
47 elsewhere saw this parent at least once a fortnight; with a further 26 per cent rarely seeing  
48 their other parent. In 87 per cent of cases in 2009, which is the last time the Australian Child  
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3 Support Agency released such data, child support payments followed these gendered patterns  
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5 (Child Support Agency 2010).  
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11 For fathers, the average child support liability reported in the LSSF was \$131 per week, with  
12 fathers reporting full compliance in 73 per cent of cases (Qu et al. 2014). With respect to the  
13 affordability of payments, 78 per cent of fathers agreed that these payments were affordable,  
14 although more than half of paying fathers considered that this amount was more than their  
15 children needed (Qu et al. 2014). In a comparative analysis of child support liabilities across  
16 Australia the UK, USA and New Zealand (NZ) (Authors 2016) payments in Australia were  
17 found to be comparable or lower across a range of family cases. Specifically, minimum  
18 payments in Australia (\$391 per annum at the time of the analysis) were substantially lower  
19 than the comparator countries. Whereas, liabilities for low-moderate earning payers were  
20 comparable to NZ, but lower than the US and UK, and liabilities for median income earners  
21 were slightly lower than in NZ and the UK, and substantially lower than in the US.  
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38 Over the three waves of LSSF data collection (2008, 2009 and 2012), paying fathers'  
39 assessment of child support payments as being 'very' or 'somewhat fair' to them decreased  
40 from 71 to 63 per cent. At wave 3, the authors reported that:  
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45 father payers who considered that their child support payment was  
46 very fair were required to pay the lowest mean amount of child  
47 support per week (\$97), followed by those who considered the  
48 amount of payment as somewhat unfair [sic fair] (\$127), while fathers  
49 with the view of very unfair or somewhat unfair were required to pay  
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3 the highest mean amounts (\$157 and \$155, respectively) (Qu et al.  
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5 2014, 129).

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8 As previous research on submissions to the 2003 inquiry suggest (Author 2016), it is likely  
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10 that the most aggrieved fathers, who have the highest liabilities, are the most active in policy  
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12 reform processes.  
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### 14 15 16 17 18 **Methods**

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21 The aim of the analysis was to explore fathers' arguments in their written submissions to the  
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23 2014-15 inquiry. We wanted to understand how problems with child support were framed,  
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25 and to consider whether fathers' own perceived gendered reality might have been made more  
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27 prominent whilst mothers' gendered reality may have been ignored or downplayed ( for  
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29 example by ignoring how the economic consequences of mothers' part-time work patterns  
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31 fitted to children's care needs). Our approach follows Barbour's (2014) description of frame  
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33 analysis; a derivative of thematic analysis. Such discursive analyses are a common method  
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35 within interpretive policy analysis (Fischer et al. 2015) and 'deconstructionist' approaches to  
36  
37 feminist policy analysis (Bacchi 2009; Kantola and Lombardo 2017). Frame analysis focuses  
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39 on how representations of a particular problem, in this case gender equality, are 'packaged'  
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41 together (Barbour 2014, 280), using rhetorical techniques, appeals to norms, and other means  
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43 of generating and legitimating representational claims.  
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51 The data we used came exclusively from fathers' written submissions to the inquiry. The  
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53 inquiry called for a range of inputs from academics, interest groups, service providers, and  
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55 affected individuals and over 130 written submissions were received. Of those, after reading  
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3 their submissions, we identified that seventy-five came from ‘individual’ members of the  
4 public as opposed to organisations, lobby groups and agencies, including fathers’ rights  
5 groups (see Table 1). Of the seventy-five ‘individual’ submissions, fifty-five self-identified,  
6 or were identified by the research team, as fathers. The remainder were from mothers or other  
7 family members, with one submission unable to be classified. In addition, the submissions  
8 from individuals contained information about their child support experience and this made it  
9 possible for us to discern whether they were a payee or payer of child support, or neither.  
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21 In addition to written submissions, 105 individual members of the public made three-minute  
22 statements at community sessions held during eight of the thirteen hearings. An online  
23 questionnaire also allowed people to share their views and this was open for five months and  
24 received approximately 11,300 responses. It must be noted that the number of written  
25 submissions received by the 2014-15 inquiry was a fraction of the number received in 2003  
26 (HRSCFCA 2003); reflecting in part a more subdued emotional tenor and the diversity of  
27 options to provide input, including through the anonymous survey.  
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46 Our data focuses upon the fifty-five written submissions made by fathers. The three-minute  
47 statements were excluded, as they were too short to provide sufficient detail on the framing of  
48 arguments. Also excluded were the questionnaire responses, as these data was unsuitable for  
49 our analytical technique. The fifty-five submissions we did use, however, imposed some  
50 limitations. In terms of sampling, while we excluded submissions made by organisations and  
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3 lobby groups, including fathers' rights groups, it was not possible to discern whether an  
4 individual submission was made by a father who was a member of such groups. With respect  
5 to the analysis, we could only interrogate 'what was said' and not the reasons 'why,' because  
6 our ability to delve deeper was restricted by the nature of the data itself. For example, the  
7 context of these fathers' lives was not fully apparent: there was limited information on their  
8 relationship histories, their current family circumstances and those of the mother and children  
9 involved in the child support obligation. Nor was there reliable information on the socio-  
10 economic and employment circumstances of both parents and so it was not possible to  
11 compare and contrast the men's accounts on this basis. Additionally, the remit of the inquiry  
12 was driving responses in a different way than would be the case if these men had been  
13 interviewed for an in-depth research study.  
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30 Given these limitations, and following our interpretive approach to frame analysis (Barbour  
31 2014), the analytical purpose of working with these data was to become sensitised to the  
32 variety of arguments and the frames fathers used to explain both the policy problems and  
33 their solutions; and in doing so, reflect on these in terms of the implications for: policy  
34 reform post 2008; gender equality; and feminist theory. We began the analysis by reading  
35 through the fifty-five included transcripts, inductively coding the content of the submissions  
36 into thematic domains (Barbour 2014). From this, we identified 'un/fairness' as a core  
37 concept. Using interpretive techniques of frame analysis (Bacchi 2009; Barbour 2014; Rein  
38 and Schon 1993) we then coded the data into how fathers organised their arguments  
39 regarding fairness and unfairness, including how they defined the problems and their  
40 solutions. We also considered the 'meta-cultural frames' they employed (which comprise  
41 broad, culturally shared systems of belief (Rein and Schon 1993)) which in this case covered  
42 issues such as parenting, gender roles, and the division of work and care. From these  
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3 techniques, we considered that ‘unfairness’ captured how fathers described the problems with  
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5 the child support program in terms of gender bias and inequality, while ‘fairness,’ was used  
6  
7 in terms of gender equality, and was central to the solutions that fathers proposed. We present  
8  
9 the results of this analysis now in two sections, reflecting the unfairness/fairness dichotomy,  
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11 above, before moving on to a discussion of the implications.  
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## 17 **Findings**

### 18 *An Unfair, Gender-Biased System*

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23 Given that submissions were sought to identify the problems with child support, it is not  
24  
25 surprising that fathers’ responses were replete with examples of failures in the system; in  
26  
27 particular, how it failed fathers and their children. The child support and Family Court  
28  
29 systems were marked out as contributing to, or causing a range of social and individual  
30  
31 problems. Societal problems included the encouragement of single parenthood, domestic  
32  
33 violence, and male suicide, as the following excerpts illustrate, respectively.  
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37 There is no incentive for mothers to stay in relationships or marriage.

38  
39 Why would they, when it is easier to get more money from child  
40  
41 support than they would get from staying in the partnership and trying  
42  
43 to work things out (Submission 114).  
44

45  
46 Unfortunately we have seen too many instances when a parent is  
47  
48 pushed too far and violence erupts (Submission 66).  
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50  
51 The culture of the CSA needs changing. The Government needs to  
52  
53 share the responsibility for the high rate of male suicides that are  
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3                   attributable to family breakdown ... How many more men have to die  
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5                   before the system changes (Submission 34)?  
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11           Individual problems were flagged as consequences arising from child support operations that  
12  
13           were regarded as inadequate and linked to parental conflict, non-compliance, unemployment,  
14  
15           and income minimisation tactics. Again, the following excerpts illustrate these concerns:  
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18                   The child support system's current methods of collecting and  
19  
20                   calculation payments lack transparency, is overly complicated,  
21  
22                   disempowering, easily manipulated, impacts on career choices and  
23  
24                   favours [sic] recipients to manipulate the system. The program  
25  
26                   promotes resentment and conflict amongst parents, increases non-  
27  
28                   compliance of payments and results in angst and financial insecurity  
29  
30                   (Submission 74).  
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33  
34                   As far as the male psyche is concerned, the reason a good father gets  
35  
36                   up each morning to go to work in an often unrewarding or stressful  
37  
38                   job is to earn money to protect and care for his family. After  
39  
40                   separation it is imperative that his children are still an integral part of  
41  
42                   his life to provide the motivation to keep going. In the high conflict  
43  
44                   families when the children are prevented from seeing the father he  
45  
46                   becomes despondent and may lose his job. It is little wonder that the  
47  
48                   unemployment rate for child support payers is as high as 43%  
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50                   (Submission 79).  
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3 While the previous excerpt foregrounds and defends the breadwinning role of fathers, the  
4 enforcement of this role post separation was also cast as a problem across submissions. The  
5 cause of this problem was then frequently identified as the gender biased child support  
6 system that prioritised the interests of mothers. This was sometimes framed as a deliberate  
7 feminist strategy or a policy that was anti-male:  
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13  
14 This enquiry [sic] lists as one of the terms of reference, ways to  
15 reduce conflict. Contrary to what seems to be modern feminist  
16 mantra, men are not stupid. They are not blind to a system that  
17 repeatedly treats them as second class parents, a system that reduces  
18 their contribution to their children's lives and upbringing, as a  
19 walking wallet and visitation centre. The overwhelming majority of  
20 Australian men of procreating/child rearing age have been brought up  
21 to believe in equality ... They believe that men and women should be  
22 both involved in raising children. They witnessed the inequalities of  
23 the day that were biased against mothers, and perhaps their older  
24 sisters. They then accepted that both genders are entitled to receive  
25 the same compensation for their efforts at work and home ... They  
26 see systems which have NOT kept pace with societal expectations and  
27 modern family dynamics. They see decisions which are biased against  
28 men, against them for providing an income for their families. This  
29 causes frustration, anxiety, depression and anger (Submission 87).  
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49 The present adversarial system is totally out of control being run by  
50 feminists in the CSA and the family court of Australia to the  
51 detriment of fathers and their children (Submission 28).  
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3 In an environment where bullying is frowned upon by all government  
4 institution[s] how is it that the CSA can invest so much time into  
5 bullying and intimidation and due to the number of men victims  
6 caught up in this vendetta it is policy that is essentially anti male  
7 (Submission 03).

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17 Further to the anti-male comments, above, a ‘gender equality’ discourse was evoked to argue  
18 that men and women had the capacity to be equal and should be treated as such by the  
19 system.  
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23  
24 Feminists seek equality for women, even if this means forsaking  
25 men’s rights. This should not be their goal, their goal should be  
26 equality for all. In this current day both males and females can enter  
27 any career they want to, we should be encouraging everyone to be  
28 financially responsible for themselves and 50% responsible for the  
29 upbringing and financial costs of their child (Submission 77).

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38 I do not hate women, I am being objective when I state that men are  
39 being disadvantaged in society. If we truly want gender equality then  
40 treat women as equals and don’t perceive them as eternal victims that  
41 need saving (Submission 34).  
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48 Given the deeply inequitable division of work and care responsibilities between mothers and  
49 fathers pre- and post-separation which result in unequal earnings, such claims for equal  
50 treatment were often illogical, unsubstantiated or overly simplistic in nature. Their purpose,  
51 however, was to frame the problems in terms of gender inequality as the primary lens through  
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3 which the child support formula and its outputs should be understood. The framing elevated  
4  
5 ‘unfairness’ that subordinated men’s rights to father and children’s rights to have contact with  
6  
7 their fathers over women’s right to mother. For example:  
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10 Boys are growing up without seeing their dads due to an unfair  
11 system (Submission 03).  
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14  
15 The entire system perpetuates the incorrect belief that just because a  
16 woman has a womb and gives birth to children that they are a better  
17 parent and more deserving of the right to parent than men. The  
18 majority of non-custodial parents are men. The system turns them  
19 from loving fathers into nothing but wallets (Submission 21).  
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26 It is a right that children have access to both parents if at all possible.  
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28 And children have the right to know both parents for who they are  
29 and what they believe, not simply as a name on their birth certificate.  
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31  
32 No parent should have the right or means to exclude the other parent  
33 from having practical influence and participation in the upbringing of  
34 their child(ren) simply on the basis of personal preference  
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40 (Submission 117).  
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45 Despite these arguments, there is no legal right to parent although several articles within the  
46 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child set out children’s rights to know and  
47 be cared for (Article 7), to stay in contact with their parents (Article 9), and to access parental  
48 resources (Article 18). The Convention does not ascribe any right to children to have shared  
49 residence with their parent(s), nor does it make any provisions for how parental time or  
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3 responsibility should be divided. As such, how mothering and fathering are performed and  
4 organised post-separation is a matter for individual parental negotiation. These negotiations  
5 occur within the context of legal and administrative systems that recognise children's rights  
6 and parental responsibilities. These systems were being challenged by this 'fathers rights'  
7 rhetoric:  
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14 Why is it that when both parents are together the government finds it  
15 totally acceptable for both of these people to care for and raise their  
16 children? If this is the case then both parents automatically deserve  
17 the right to care for their child 50% of the time (Submission 77).  
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27 Another way in which the seeming unfairness of the current system was challenged, was by  
28 men foregrounding their currently unrecognised contributions. In the above excerpts,  
29 fathering was described as providing love, wisdom, care and visibility. As the excerpt from  
30 Submission 21 illustrated, terms that foregrounded and idealised the parent-child relationship,  
31 such as 'loving fathers' were often employed. What was absent from men's accounts of  
32 parenting however, was a description of the practical work of parenting; including the time,  
33 money and organisation that this care work entailed. Yet, despite the practical reality (and  
34 difficulties) of caring for children being absent from men's framing, this did not prevent  
35 claims for rights to fifty per cent care of children.  
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50 In arguing for rights to equal care time, it seemed the fathers' were concerned that  
51 motherhood was being 'unfairly' recognised and resourced by the child support system.  
52 Arguably, therefore, the system was seen as failing because it did nothing to stop fathers  
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3 feeling pushed out of their children's lives and it did nothing to support fatherhood. Rather  
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5 the system could make things worse for fathers and their children. Furthermore, what many  
6  
7 fathers seemed to be railing against was how the gendered division of work and care they  
8  
9 enjoyed pre-separation, no longer suited their needs post-separation. Instead, such gendered  
10  
11 arrangements seemed better suited to mothers' needs and preferences. Yet, rather than  
12  
13 acknowledging the structural causes of unequal gender divisions of work and care, mothers'  
14  
15 majority share of overnight care of children was cast as the undesirable and unfair result of  
16  
17 systemic biases in the system which mothers could manipulate for personal gain.  
18  
19 Interestingly, at the same time as protesting against these perceived gendered biases, the  
20  
21 submissions applied gender neutral language in the construction of some of the arguments for  
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23 gender equality, as we now turn to explore.  
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### 29 *Seeking Gender Equality in the Division of Work and Care*

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31 Throughout their submissions, fathers tended to use de-gendered language such as 'paying  
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33 and receiving parents', 'people', 'parents', 'payees and payers' and 'both parties'. These  
34  
35 terms echoed the policy rhetoric introduced in earlier reforms, and served to dissolve the  
36  
37 differences between mothers and fathers, rendering the breadwinning and caregiving tasks  
38  
39 performed by each parent post-separation as interchangeable. For example:  
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#### 43 5. Mandatory assumption of EQUAL parenting

44  
45 The starting point for all access and care assessments MUST start  
46  
47 with assumption of EQUAL parenting. Both parents are equally  
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49 responsible for raising their children, not only should financial  
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51 support be enforced but also equal access (Submission 23).  
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3 As this excerpt illustrates, the dissolution of differences between men and women was often  
4 framed in terms such as 'equal' and 'fair'. Yet, while such terms appeal to notions of  
5 equality, they simultaneously ignore the longstanding and highly inequitable gender contract  
6 that sees Australian fathers working long hours and Australian mothers typically working in  
7 part-time, lower-paid jobs with poorer conditions of employment (Dinh et al. 2017; Wilkins  
8 and Wooden 2014).  
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19 The demand for equal shared care post-separation was also positioned as a means of  
20 eliminating the need for child support altogether, including in cases when there was equal  
21 shared care but there was also an income disparity between the parents. Here, the existing  
22 system was seen as illegitimate, as it was transformed into providing 'spousal maintenance'  
23 as opposed to exclusively 'child' support.  
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31 Introduce 50/50 parenting arrangements where practical as a starting  
32 point. The family law act states that both parents are equally  
33 responsible financially for the upbringing of a child. 50/50 parenting  
34 arrangement would cancel out child support all together (Submission  
35 28).  
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42 It would be reasonable to assume that with equal shared care – that  
43 the concept of a payer and a payee would no longer apply. The  
44 current system is working as a spousal maintenance system, where  
45 despite the sharing equitable time and costs, one parent pays the other  
46 if they earn more income than the other (Submission 68).  
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3 Fathers expressed their frustration and anger that mothers were enabled, and financially  
4 rewarded, by the system when they did not work, or worked less hours than fathers. The  
5 solution, therefore, was to require separated mothers to work, and preferably full-time.  
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10 Remembering that the payer needs to work and obviously has more  
11 expenses than a payee sitting at home ... I believe that the child  
12 support formula was actually supposed to be based on both parents  
13 working and carrying their fair and equal share (Submission 112).  
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19 When children are in shared care there seems little obligation on  
20 parents working to similar hours. Why should one parent work longer  
21 hours than the other parent when care level is 50%. This is not fair  
22 (Submission 109)!

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26 The issue of resident parents in receipt of high levels of support who  
27 opt to work part-time, when they could be working full-time in their  
28 current positions, be addressed (Submission 12).  
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39 In this newly conceived gender-neutral world, men's calls for mothers to work full-time like  
40 fathers relies on the assumption that care work is invisible, or at least, that it can be easily  
41 performed by someone else. This argument is made in the excerpt, below. In this fathers'  
42 submission, it appeared that the only solution to manage work and care post-separation was  
43 for him to carry on in work. This father's need for a child-carer was contrasted with the  
44 situation of the mother, who did not 'have to' find a new partner or engage in work:  
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52 Also often the paying parent is working full-time and has no option  
53 but to engage in another relationship in order to care for their  
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3 children. Often the custodial parent does not have to work for various  
4 reasons and does not have to engage in another relationship to provide  
5 care. This situation can cause a lot of grief. The payee should be  
6 expected to work just as the payer is by the CSA (Submission 25).  
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15 This quote above is particularly interesting because, simultaneously, it implicitly argues for  
16 gender equality in the mother's household where she is expected to work on the same basis as  
17 the father, but in the father's household the traditional gendered division of labour can carry  
18 on within a new relationship. Whilst, in a roundabout way, this father did recognise the  
19 capacity of both parents to care, this was largely absent from most submissions. In only two  
20 cases was such capacity explicitly acknowledged:  
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29 Agreements should be directed by the assessment to determine how  
30 much care each parent has the capacity to provide and wants to  
31 provide, with a 50/50 shared parenting schedule the starting point if  
32 one parent nominates this and has the capacity to undertake this  
33 parenting responsibility. The capacity to undertake a parenting role  
34 should not be influenced nor determined by the other parent  
35 (Submission 34).  
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45 If this [shared care] is the case then both parents automatically  
46 deserve the right to care for their child 50% of the time (or if not 50%  
47 of the time at least a % up to 50% of the time that is agreed on by the  
48 parent who isn't able to provide 50%) (Submission 77).  
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3 Each of these excerpts recognised that parents, typically fathers who work long hours, may  
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5 not have the capacity to care for their children fifty per cent of the time. However, rather than  
6  
7 acknowledge the limitations that caring responsibilities place on mothers' employment  
8  
9 capacity, fathers instead focused on the extent to which they desired control over the division  
10  
11 of care.  
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17 Overall and notwithstanding the individual issues raised, the analysis of the submissions  
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19 above identified two subtly different 'frames' of the problem of the child support system in  
20  
21 the post-2008 equal treatment era. In the first instance, under the 'gender biased system'  
22  
23 heading, the arguments frame fatherhood and fathering as being ignored by the system, whilst  
24  
25 it simultaneously elevates or supports motherhood. This critique was often bound up in  
26  
27 solutions premised upon 'fathers' right' to fifty per cent shared care. Conceivably, arguing  
28  
29 for equal treatment of care time in this way was a means to even-up the recognition afforded  
30  
31 to fatherhood and motherhood in the system, because the practical realities for fathers to  
32  
33 manage care and employment were largely ignored in this framing.  
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41 In the second instance, under the heading 'seeking gender equality in the division of work  
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43 and care', the arguments were framed as a lack of gender equal outcomes which fathers  
44  
45 construed as being caused by women's unequal and unfair ability to opt out of work. While  
46  
47 the child support formula may treat both parents' incomes and care time equally, there was  
48  
49 great discontent that this did not produce equality of child support outcomes; expressed as no  
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51 need for child support payments.  
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3 Fathers' claimed mothers were being financially rewarded by the system, which sometimes  
4 was seen as merely providing spousal maintenance where shared care was operating between  
5 parents of different financial means. Within this frame, the solutions offered by fathers were  
6 not to demand equal treatment of incomes, because this was already in place under the  
7 incomes share model, but to demand gender equality in women's employment time to even  
8 up the monetary child support outcome. Again, the practical realities of combining caring and  
9 working were ignored and so too were the gendered disadvantages faced by mothers in the  
10 labour market.  
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## 24 **Discussion**

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26 Our analysis shows that in the written submissions from Australia's most recent child support  
27 inquiry, fathers sought to promote their own sense of 'fairness' by arguing for reform of the  
28 child support system around the principle of equality. In particular, fathers argued that both  
29 mothers and fathers had equal opportunities to earn and care, and should be compelled to do  
30 so. They believed that the system should support fathers' caring role on equal terms with  
31 mothers' and mothers should be compelled to work on equal terms with fathers (i.e. full-  
32 time). However, such equal opportunities were illusionary and – even if compelled – would  
33 not result in the equal outcomes that fathers suggested, given the gendered reality of family  
34 work and care.  
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50 UNESCO (2014, 60) states that with respect to gender policies, we need 'targeted measures'  
51 to compensate for the 'historical and social disadvantages' that stop women and men from  
52 becoming equal, noting that this might require different, and unequal, treatment. The  
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3 redistributive function of the child support formula provides one such example. It is action on  
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5 gender equity, through the transfer of resources from the wealthier parent (typically the  
6  
7 father) to the less wealthy parent (typically the mother), that can lead to gender equality. Sun  
8  
9 (2014, n.p. original emphasis) sums up these discrete yet inter-related concepts nicely:  
10

11  
12 Equality *aims* to promote fairness, but it can only work if everyone  
13  
14 starts from the same place and needs the same help. Equity *appears*  
15  
16 unfair, but it actively moves everyone closer to success by ‘levelling  
17  
18 the playing field’.  
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24 Sun’s (2014) description of equity measures appearing as unfair is exactly what we propose  
25  
26 underpins men’s negative evaluations of the child support system, as such measures disrupt  
27  
28 and unsettle the existing gender hierarchy (Lombardo et al. 2017). The extent to which child  
29  
30 support is, and should be, a vehicle for delivering gender equity is precisely what is at stake.  
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33 As Orloff and Shiff (2016, 110) describe,  
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36 while the necessity of formal gender equality – that is, equal treatment  
37  
38 under the law – is largely taken for granted, if and how states or other  
39  
40 institutions should press for greater equalization of resources, rights,  
41  
42 and responsibilities is contested.  
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48 We contend that fathers’ qualified uptake of gender equality discourse is a response to the  
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50 disruption of the existing gender hierarchy and gender contract that occurs post-separation. In  
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52 our analysis, following others (Frericks 2012; Levtov 2014; Raetele 2014), we found that  
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54 fathers adopted the rhetoric of gender equality but, usually only in ways that buttressed or  
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3 privileged their position. Unlike Levtov and colleagues (2014), whose International Men and  
4 Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) found that ‘men did not perceive gender equality as a  
5 “zero sum game” where gains for women meant losses for men’, a zero sum game was  
6 precisely how separated fathers regarded child support, where any child support or care-time  
7 ‘wins’ for one party translated directly into financial and care-time ‘losses’ for the other.  
8 Pursuing gender equity, as the child support formula seeks to achieve, can be seen by fathers  
9 as unfairly advantaging women; namely by privileging women’s choices about how much to  
10 work or care. Such policy settings have led researchers such as Smyth and Henman (2010) to  
11 describe child support as an unsolvable Rubik’s cube, where it is impossible to balance the  
12 interests of payers, recipients and the state.  
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28 In this inquiry, fathers talked about providing love and care for children, but talked little  
29 about the practical work of care, mirroring previous research (Craig 2006; Olchawski 2016;  
30 Smart 1995). There was clearly resentment of the structural gender inequality that men faced  
31 as separated fathers. Mothers were positioned as having the best of both worlds, whilst  
32 fathers claimed they faced a double inequality of being trapped in a traditional breadwinning  
33 role by child support liabilities, and trapped in a traditional gender division of care (with  
34 attendant gender inequalities in the labour market) which prevented the mother from equally  
35 sharing the burden of earning. Often the solutions that fathers proposed in response simply  
36 reproduced gender inequalities, despite apparently striving to achieve the opposite. Fathers’  
37 submissions, whilst claiming greater gender equality, and frequently using gender neutral  
38 language in doing so, never really challenged the ‘capacity’ of employed fathers to provide  
39 50/50 care or the ‘capacity’ of mothers to work full-time whilst also caring. Rather, gender  
40 equality arguments tended to be premised upon a father’s right’s perspective (or child’s rights  
41 perspective) to provide (or receive) paternal care. Deployed under a mirage of gender  
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3 equality, this apparent equality discourse did little to challenge the status quo of traditional  
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5 gender roles. Fathers made no real claims for greater gender equality through wider policy  
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7 actions that would de-gender parental obligations or achieve equality in terms of income,  
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9 wealth or division of caring responsibility pre-separation.  
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15 While women remain financially and socially disadvantaged by their caring roles and the  
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17 recognition of such within the existing child support formula, unusually in this policy  
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19 context, it is men as separated fathers who regard themselves as disadvantaged by their  
20  
21 advantageous labour market position. Yet, such structural concerns about gender relations or  
22  
23 labour market positions were absent from fathers' gender equality arguments. Their  
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25 submissions to this inquiry did not challenge or problematize the gender pay gap (BCEC and  
26  
27 WGEA 2016), the gendered distribution of caring responsibilities that exist pre-separation  
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29 (Craig 2006; Dinh et al. 2017) or the gender of poverty post-separation (ABS 2012; ACOSS  
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31 and SPRC 2016; Author 2017). Rather their arguments around the 'unfairness' of the current  
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33 child support system prioritised men's right to care (but without generally acknowledging  
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35 their capacity to do so) and elevated women's responsibility to earn on an equal basis to men  
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37 (while ignoring their capacity to do so). Fathers' solutions mainly focused on requiring help  
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39 from the state to recognise their 'right' to care and compel mothers to work. In fathers'  
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41 submissions, there seemed to be no role cast for the state to improve gender equality, apart  
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43 from dealing with mothers in some way; most often punitively.  
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51 Conceivably, addressing wider gender inequities in society could render the child support  
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53 scheme obsolete, as men's and women's employment, income and caring would become  
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55 more equal. As noted by the United Nations Population Fund (2005), gender equity  
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3 approaches, actions and interventions lead to gender equality, not the reverse. Levtov's  
4 (2014) research supports this assertion, with Norwegian survey data showing that material  
5 realities, such as balancing economic resources within couples, for example, played a greater  
6 role in driving gender equitable practice than did men's attitudes towards gender equality.  
7  
8 But while practical equality offers a fruitful way forward, research also indicates that this is  
9 far from a reality in many nations, including Australia, due to the gendered reality of work  
10 and care (BCEC and WGEA 2016; Cancian and Haskins 2014; Craig 2006; Dinh et al. 2017;  
11 Olchawski 2016; Qu et al. 2014).

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24 Applying a feminist lens, we argue that fathers' solution of 'fairer' equal work and care  
25 responsibilities failed to address the unfair and unequal socio-political conditions that  
26 structure mothers' and fathers' lived experiences and opportunities to work or care. As such,  
27 while the fathers' calls for gender equality could be viewed as laudable, their claims rendered  
28 invisible women's unequal access to resources, rights and responsibilities (Orloff and Shiff  
29 2016). As the previous child support policy reforms have indicated, when fathers were able to  
30 define the problems and solutions for child support policy through their own male gendered  
31 lens and focus on equal treatment, the outcomes tended to exacerbate rather than reduce  
32 gender inequity (Author 2013; 2014; 2016). Thus, it is a concern that policymakers might  
33 adopt fathers' gender equal rhetoric despite the fact that resultant policies are likely to  
34 reinforce the existing social order, as occurred in previous Australian child support policy  
35 reform (Smyth and Henman 2010; Summerfield et al. 2010).

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53 Our findings provide useful insights for gender policy studies with respect to differences  
54 between equality of opportunities, equality of treatment and equality of outcome (Beckerman  
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3 2017), and the differentiation of gender equality from gender equity policy aims (United  
4 Nations Population Fund 2005). Fathers' support for equal treatment as the path towards  
5 equality of outcomes was based on the erroneous assumption that there existed equality of  
6 opportunities. When arguing for equal outcomes that would render the child support system  
7 obsolete, fathers typically ignored the gendered reality of mothers' and fathers' unequal  
8 capacity to work and care. Given these omissions and conflation, it is important for feminist  
9 policymakers and analysts to understand the type of gender equality being argued for and to  
10 consider the implications of pursuing one type of equality over others. We suggest a careful  
11 reading of men's qualified uptake of gender equality discourses to identify the competing  
12 priorities as well as what is lost in various configurations of equal opportunities, treatment  
13 and outcomes. In doing so, we suggest feminist policy makers strive for solutions that address  
14 the underlying equity issues.  
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32 Drawing on the parlance of Frericks (2012, 16), it serves as a warning for child support and  
33 other policy makers to be suspect of calls for equal treatment measures:  
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37 the elimination of earlier forms of (positive) discrimination can bring  
38 with it unexpected hardship, if the conditions that originally  
39 motivated the positive discrimination - such as a gendered division of  
40 care, or economic dependency - persist.  
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50 Policymakers need to be highly sensitised to arguments of 'gender equality' and understand  
51 that equality is not synonymous with fairness. Women and policy advocates need to  
52 continually foreground the reasons why gender equity needs to remain central to post-  
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3 separation policies, as these address unequal opportunity structures, and critique the extent to  
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5 which equal treatment policies will achieve equitable outcomes. For example, the 2008  
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7 technical changes to the child support system that de-gendered treatment via the ‘incomes  
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9 shares model’ did nothing to tackle the status quo of unequal caring and earning capacities,  
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11 but further entrenched single mothers’ financial disadvantage (Smyth 2010; Son et al. 2014;  
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13 Summerfield 2010).  
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## 19 **Conclusion**

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22 This research sought to understand fathers’ problems with the Australian child support  
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24 scheme, following the introduction of the income shares formula. Fathers’ submissions to the  
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26 2014-15 inquiry revealed that their arguments have moved on from being a matter of equal  
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28 treatment within the child support formula to being an issue of mothers’ equal responsibility  
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30 to earn and fathers’ equal right to care. In doing so, fathers moved beyond an equality of  
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32 treatment discourse to demand equality of outcomes, regardless of whether equality of  
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34 opportunity existed in reality.  
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42 In analysing the claims for gender equality that some fathers put forward, we are not  
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44 suggesting that these are representative of all separated fathers, or men in general. Rather,  
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46 what we suggest here is that fathers were able to express their frustrations with the child  
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48 support program in terms of gender inequality, and recommended changes to the program to  
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50 make separated mothers and fathers more equal. However, left unchallenged, such seemingly  
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52 laudable arguments write out the historic legacy of gender inequality on which child support  
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54 is built; and thus, further entrench gender inequity.  
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6 We suggest that the equal outcomes in terms of zero child support liabilities that fathers seek  
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8 is a structural impossibility given Australia's deeply gendered, and inequitable division of  
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10 working and caring roles. This analysis, however, presents an opportunity to mobilise men in  
11  
12 feminist campaigns to de-gender work and care as a solution to the failures of post-separation  
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14 policy. However, fathers' submissions to the inquiry were not very politicized. They did not  
15  
16 argue that gender inequality on separation had its roots in policies that failed to de-gender  
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18 care work or create more gender equal divisions of labour in intact families. Instead, fathers  
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20 tended to understand the outcomes of such structural inequalities as the individualized fault  
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22 of mothers who were regarded as not attempting to work more and to care less to create  
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24 gender equality. They contended that the system simply condoned and supported women's  
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26 behaviour as mothers, whilst simultaneously downplaying or exploiting their role as fathers.  
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33 We contend that it is not for the child support system to 'fix' gender inequality, as these  
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35 structural issues run much deeper than the Band-Aid solution provided by distributing income  
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37 from a breadwinner to a caregiver post-separation. However, until Australian policies can  
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39 more meaningfully grapple with the gendered distribution of earning and caring  
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41 responsibilities in society, child support will remain a flashpoint for challenging seemingly  
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43 'unfair' gender relations that are impossible to resolve using this policy instrument.  
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Table 1: Volume and sources of data

	<u>Individuals' evidence by source</u>				
	Total volume of evidence	Fathers	Mothers	Other family members	Unknown
Submissions	130 submissions	55	13	6	1
Public Hearings	13 sessions; 76 witnesses	3	1	-	-
Community Statement Sessions	8 sessions; 105 witnesses	65	28	9	3

Manuscript ID SP-2017-0091

Response to the editors and reviewers:

We thank the reviewers for their encouraging and thoughtful suggestions. We have taken these on board and made revisions that strengthen the manuscript in the ways identified. Our manuscript now includes significantly more detail on the Australian context, including the fathers' rights movement, child support formula and inclusion of both earnings and care, payment affordability and fathers' experiences. We have located the paper more firmly within the context of feminist policy studies, and have provided more detail on frame analysis, the methods employed and nature of the data, and how these aligns with the aims of feminist policy analysis. To include the new material and supporting references, we have then re-edited the manuscript to return to within the word count.

In the following table, we include reference to the page number on which the additions or revised sections can be found. Italicised text denotes new material added.

Response to reviewers' comments:

Reviewer 1	Response
In the contextual part it would be interesting to read shortly about the father's rights movement in Australia: how strong, active and (un)popular it is as a social movement.	We have added what material is available from published accounts of the fathers' rights movement in Australia and their influence on child support policy (and family law) reform. This material can be found on page 7 of the revised manuscript.
This information would be valuable also in terms of methodology – namely now it is stated that 55 written submissions were analyzed: one would wonder if all submissions were individual or some of them were perhaps organizational.	We have added a statement to the in-text description of the Table 1 data that the 75 individual submission exclude those we could identify as coming from organisations, lobby groups and agencies, including fathers' rights groups.  In a subsequent paragraph outlining the limitations of our data (Page 15, beginning, "Our data focuses upon the fifty-five written submissions made by fathers..."), we have added the following: <i>In terms of sampling, while we excluded submissions made by organisations and lobby groups, including fathers' rights groups, it was not possible to discern whether an individual submission was made by a father who was a member of such groups.</i>
As not all readers are fully informed by political science it would be nice to get a bit more detailed information about the differences in the three concepts: equality as equal opportunities, equal treatment and equal outcome. Perhaps this could be located somewhere in the theoretical framework.	We have added more detail regarding the three types of equality and located this within a wider discussion of how our study fits into the field of feminist policy studies (see Reviewer 2's point 2, below). The new material can be found on pages 3-4.

<p>Reviewer 2</p> <p>The introduction presents the whole argument of the article in the first paragraph. Instead of presenting the results/conclusion at the start I think it is more beneficial to be open and enquiring at this stage.</p>	<p>We have removed the results/conclusions from this paragraph and replaced it with more speculative research objectives to foreground the study (see Reviewer 2's point 3, below).</p>
<p>The article should provide us with a stronger sense of the existing literature in the area - which I assume is feminist policy studies? Anyway, it needs to be framed in an area of study. This will make it clearer what is currently known and how this manuscript extends the scholarly conversation. The seeds for this argument are present, but they are in need of further development. To a large degree, the article also lacks a theoretical framework.</p>	<p>We have provided an overview of feminist policy studies on page 3 and have identified what contribution this manuscript makes to this literature. We note Reviewer 1's comment that, "The argumentation is nicely developed within the theoretical framework of equality as equal opportunities, equal treatment and equal outcomes which represents a novelty of the article". As such, we have sought to highlight the location of these concepts within feminist policy studies rather than insert an additional theoretical lens.</p>
<p>I recommend that the research question(s) or objectives be more uniformly formulated to avoid confusion. On p. 3 the question is stated as "How fathers, in their strategic claims for child support reform, deployed the rhetoric of gender equality". On p. 8 the article aims to "examine the extent to which these solutions [fathers' solutions] could produce gender equality, in which form this 'equality' would take, and the impact on women produced as a result." On p. 11 another formulation reads as follows: "what are the perceived issues of unfairness for fathers now". A fourth aim is described on p. 13. It would help the reader if the research questions were presented in one place and linked to the two empirical sections.</p>	<p>We have revised the description of the research question on page 2 to include an overarching aim and then more specific study objectives. We have then applied these objectives to the other instances noted.</p> <p>The study objectives are now listed as follows: <i>In this analysis of fathers' submissions to the 2014-15 inquiry, we examine the gender equality rhetoric deployed by fathers in their claims for child support reform. Specifically, we sought to assess: the sources of fathers' perceived gender unfairness; the nature of gender equality that fathers sought; and the implications for mothers and fathers in terms of equal treatment, outcomes and opportunities to access resources, rights and responsibilities (Beckerman 2017; Orloff and Shiff 2016).</i></p>
<p>The Author(s) mention that their analytical approach is frame analysis, but does not describe what this is (other than a derivative of thematic analysis) nor do they describe how they go about conducting it. The manuscript needs to be expanded on this point.</p>	<p>We have added further details of frame analysis, including its relevance to feminist policy studies (page 13). We have then added further details regarding how we conducted the analysis (pages 15-16). We have added several new references to support the new material.</p>
<p>I also think it would be helpful for international readers to get a better sense of the Australian child support system. How economically and mentally straining is it for fathers? Any figures? How is child support from fathers calculated? –</p>	<p>We have added greater detail regarding the Australian child support system including how liabilities compare to other countries, minimum payments, and factors considered the in operation of the formula. These details can be</p>

<p>with a basis in their income or mothers income, number of children, or all of these? A large share of fathers are said to be unemployed (p.15). Do unemployed fathers also have to contribute economically to their children's upbringing? Some more information of this kind needs to be supplied to better understand why fathers find it so unfair to contribute to their children's welfare.</p>	<p>found in the 'Gender and Australia's child support policy history' section (see pages 6-7) and the section on 'The gendered reality of Australian post-separation parenting' (see pages 12-13).</p>
<p>In the empirical analysis, two parts of the child support formula are analyzed: monetary support to the household in which the children live and equal shared care. It would be good if the introductory parts of the article prepared the reader that child support is more than monetary transfer between parents, and that it will deal with time spent caring as well. Quotes show that fathers want to be more than breadwinners and take responsibility for upbringing. Although post-separation parenting is a matter of individual, parental negotiation (p. 18) fathers' criticism is interestingly directed towards the system, but not towards the gendering of care work and employment.</p>	<p>We have foregrounded this issue more clearly on pages 6, where we have added "<i>As each parent's income and share of overnight care-time are entered into the formula to determine a child support liability, child support in Australia entails both financial and caring dimensions</i>" to the paragraph beginning, "The income shares approach...".</p> <p>We further emphasise this point in the following paragraph,— and embed it within our theoretical framework —concluding with, "Fathers with child support liabilities, however, can reduce their payments by increasing their care time. This provides fathers with good reason to argue for gender equality in terms of equal opportunities for caring and earning" (page 7).</p>