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The Hidden Work of Coping: Gender and the Micro-politics of Household Consumption in Times of Austerity

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the coping strategies of women in ten middle class Italian families facing economic crisis. We investigate food provision revealing the ceaseless extra work that goes into meal preparation. Adopting anthropological theories of thrift and sacrifice we unpack participants' micro coping strategies, observing their tendency to redirect resources towards their loved ones and abnegating their own needs for the greater good of the family. This sacrifice is done out of necessity reinforcing traditional gender inequalities in the home. However there is also evidence that women take pride in their coping, developing new competencies and maintaining control over meal provision and thus the wider patterning of family life. We explore the significance of recessionary times for the constitution of female subjectivities at home.

Summary statement of contribution:

This paper contributes to valuing housework revealing the extra work involved in coping during times of recession. It contributes to the theorising of women's consumption and

exchange within households using the lenses of thrift and sacrifice. It also contributes to an understanding of the reproduction of female subjectivities within the wider frame of family life viewing coping work as potentially both a source of oppression and of fulfilment.

Keywords: austerity, consumption, family, gender, thrift, sacrifice

Introduction

My dream would be to give my daughter the same childhood I had. My husband and I come from middle class families. Every year we used to go on a skiing holiday, have 30 days summer holiday at the seaside, we went to good universities, we attended good master courses. My parents never said “No” to my requests. My daughter would never even dream of the things I had in my childhood. She would never ask us for such things, because she would not think they are possible for us. Our families were simply lower middle class families, and not the very rich. Unfortunately times have changed and we need to get used to this (Vittoria)

The current economic crisis has been described as the worst financial crisis since WW2 (Lewis, 2010). Some commentators have gone as far as suggesting that we are moving into a new ‘age of austerity’ (Edsall, 2012; Featherstone, Cumbers, Mackinnon, & Strauss, 2012). Yet there is a surprising silence in consumer research and marketing regarding how this crisis has affected the everyday lives of people like Vittoria and her family. The Italian context is a really interesting and important one to study in this respect. Amongst the European countries Italy has been one of the worst affected by the current crisis and therefore households have had to significantly adjust their consumption (DiIppoliti & Roncaglia, 2011). At the same time Italy remains behind other countries in Europe in almost every indicator of gender equality (Bonino, 2011). A strongly patriarchal ideology continues to influence the structure of Italian society and government interventions in the job market and welfare state have reinforced the male role of breadwinner and the female role of care-giver over time (Saraceno, 2010). In this paper then we explore how women like Vittoria try to perpetuate a

pre crisis lifestyle for their families, or in Vittoria's words, how they "get used to" a reduced income. What strategies do they use to make their household resources stretch further? What do they prioritise in their weekly shopping and what do they let go? By revealing all of the extra work that goes into these coping strategies that women use to "make ends meet" with their suddenly reduced economic resources we contribute to work that explores the 'doing of gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and the 'doing of family' (Hertz, 2006; Nelson, 2006) as well as the feminist project of (re)valuing domestic work (Oakley, 1974a; 1974b; De Vault, 1991; Davidoff, 1992; Erickson, 2005).

Macro studies of the recession have examined broad consumption trends (see Gärling, Kirchler, Lewis & van Raaij 2009; Lewis 2010; Dutt & Padmanabhan, 2011) focusing in particular on ways in which purchasing and saving strategies vary significantly in relation to demographics (Leiser, Bourgeois-Gironde, & Benita, 2010; Roland-Lévy, Pappalardo-Boumelki, & Guillet, 2010; Boisio, Lozza & Novello, 2011). These studies suggest that people buy less "luxury items" and more of the so called "necessity goods", they spend less money on eating out and ready meals and they increase their purchase of unbranded items in recessionary times (Leiser et al., 2010; Roland-Lévy et al., 2010; Boisio et al., 2011). As such we know quite a bit about changing purchase behaviours i.e. the flows of resources out of the home. However we know very little about the intra-familial flow of resources, how these are managed and allocated. In addition, while studies have explored coping within deprived families who are facing absolute levels of poverty (Kempson, Bryson, & Rowlingson, 1994; Kempson, 1996; Kochuyt, 2004; Hamilton & Catterall, 2006; Hamilton, 2012), there is little analysis of middle class families. As such we are concerned with women's attempts to maintain a good standard of living and avoid a 'fall from grace' (Newman, 1988).

This paper seeks to explore the everyday mundane coping strategies of Italian women. We begin by offering a context where we explore participants' narratives of the crisis. In particular we examine their emotional responses examining how they make sense of the situation they find themselves in. This is followed by an examination of what we have termed the 'work of coping' where we explore their changing purchase habits but also a wealth of creative and productive micro coping strategies they adopt. We then examine the strategies these women use to manage the flow and redistribution of resources in the household, observing that women tend to sacrifice their own needs and redirect resources to other family members. In closing we explore the significance of recessionary times for the constitution and transformation of female subjectivities within the household. We consider the possibility that the work of coping might offer women an important resource for their identity as mothers and partners in the doing of family. But we also observe that traditional gender ideologies in Italy still largely view family work as more appropriately the responsibility of women. As such we acknowledge the potentially oppressive and constraining nature of this extra work.

'Doing Family': Gender, Housework and Foodwork

One of our key objectives in this paper is to reveal the amount and complexity of extra work that goes into coping in times of recession. As such we add to the volume of work which has been concerned for some time to value the work that goes on behind the closed doors of the home. It is useful to remember that in the 1970s housework was 'not only neglected but, on all levels, treated with contempt. The idea of asking serious questions about housework seemed unthinkable' (Davidoff, 1995: 73; see also Oakley, 1974a, 1974b; Davidson, 1982; Hall, 1992). More recently it seems that, while recognised as central to the reproduction of family life, housework remains under valued and largely overlooked in public discourse. This

is certainly the case in Italy, where there is a surprising academic and media silence on the topic of gender inequality in the home, the first national statistics on gender equality weren't published until 1985 (Saraceno, 2010). It is rather disappointing that some of the same arguments Ann Oakley presented in her seminal 1974b book 'Housewife: High Value – Low Cost' still hold sway. Writing in 1995 Miller observes of the housewife 'Her labour of shopping, her skills of thrift and comparative purchasing are largely disregarded and unvalorised. Yet it is she (or at least the consumption she stands for) who may have displaced the top-hat capitalist as the aggregate "global dictator."' (1995: 8).

Food work plays a central role within this wider realm of housework and household provision. In her seminal work on Feeding the Family, Marjorie DeVault (1991) reveals the hidden work that goes into providing family meals. She identifies the dynamics through which feeding work is seen as women's work and illustrates how the actual doing or performance of this work by women reproduces social relations that locks them into an inequitable position in the household. She explores how the ceaseless work of providing food for the family reproduces care, love and responsibility as 'the food provided for a family cannot just be any food, but must be food that will satisfy them' (1991, 40). Similarly others show how food shopping (Miller 1998), cooking homemade meals (Moisio, Arnould & Price, 2004) and dealing with leftovers (Cappellini & Parsons, 2012) are all practices that perpetuate women's self-sacrifice for the greater good of the family. In these studies it is evident how cooking, and all the other work that makes cooking possible, operates as a form of doing gender in which 'a woman conducts herself as recognizably womanly' (DeVault 1991: 118). It remains that behind closed doors women continue to undertake much of the mundane, unpaid work of feeding their families (DeVault, 1991; Aarseth and Olsen, 2008; Hook, 2010). While men are cooking moreⁱ and some of this is driven by caring (Bove and Sobal, 2006; Szabo, 2013) it seems that at present cooking takes on more of a voluntary

character for men, and is not yet implicated in the wider obligations of care work (Aarseth and Olsen, 2008).

The above viewpoint which sees housework as largely drudgery and women as positioned in a oppressive relation through this work is not without its critics (Ahlander and Bahr, 1995; Meah, 2013). Meah argues that these discourses are centred on Anglo-American 'understandings of the relationship between gender, power and domestic kitchens' observing that for 'a range of women in the Global South, as well as minority and migrant women elsewhere ... activities surrounding the growth, acquisition, preparation and distribution of food in the domestic context have presented opportunities to demonstrate creativity and skill, as well as to accrue value within their families and communities, and even to provide opportunities to express resistance and empowerment within personal and structural relations' (2013: 2). In addition while DeVault does highlight current formulations of foodwork as oppressive, she also shows women taking pride and satisfaction in feeding their families asserting the importance of an 'acknowledgement of caring work in all its complexity, as actively deeply compelling for those who do it and critically important for group life' (1991: 3). Here De Vault is pointing to the wider role that foodwork plays in the reproduction or 'doing' of family life. Thus foodwork and cooking actively sustains the family unit 'cooking food is the transformation of raw ingredients into a new substance. This process makes the ingredients into an element which can then be used in family or social ritual.' (Davidoff, 1995: 75).

Managing the Household Resources: Hidden Inequalities

We think it is important to look at the material dimensions of recessionary times as well as the symbolic ones. As De Vault observes 'The work of maintaining a household group, and producing its daily life, is conditioned by features of the material setting for the work, as well

as by the differing social relations and understandings of class and social groupings' (1991: 230). The public – private dichotomy, and women's equation with the private or domestic side of this dichotomy discussed above has significant implications for both the control of access to outside resources and the allocation of resources in the family (Riley and Kiger, 1999). Traditionally studies of household resource distribution have generally followed Becker's (1976) model of collective choice and assumed that household resources are pooled to maximise efficiencies (Davis, 1976). There has since been a direct questioning of this underlying assumption of equally controlled resource pooling (see Wilk, 1989; Commuri & Gentry, 2005). This has been accompanied by a whole raft of studies which explore inequalities in resource distribution in households, particularly between husband and wife. These studies explore what happens to income after it has entered the household, making an important link between control over resources and wider power within the household (Pahl, 1983; 1989; 2005; Vogler & Pahl, 1994; Vogler, 2005). While women have increased their participation in the labour market this does not necessarily translate directly into increased control over money in the home. As Kenney (2006: 376) finds: 'Many women who are already disadvantaged relative to their partners in terms of market earnings experience household allocative systems that either fail to reverse that disadvantage or, in some cases, may compound itⁱⁱ.'

Inequalities also extend to household decision-making. Safilios-Rothschild (1975; 1976) introduces the terms 'orchestration power' and 'implementation power' to identify different types of decisions in the household. Decisions involving orchestration power are infrequent, take up little time and have more significant impact on family lifestyle, whereas decisions involving 'implementation power' are the routine, time consuming and often tedious. Tasks associated with implementation also offer very little discretion in terms of when and how they are performed and are often dictated by the needs of others (Riley and Kiger, 1999).

Studies suggest that implementation decisions are largely the preserve of women in the household (Safilios-Rothschild, 1975; 1976, Woolley & Marshall, 1994). Pahl's (1983) identification of the macro 'management' of household resources versus the more micro household 'budgeting' seems to follow a similar pattern. However the picture does not seem to have changed all that much since these studies. While more recent studies observe a greater participation in 'implementation' type decisions by male partners the overall *responsibility* for implementation seems to remain more often the preserve of women than men (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; O'Sullivan, 2004).

These inequalities in the allocation and management of household resources seem to be exacerbated in times of poverty. Studies reveal how it is often the woman's responsibility to meet the basic needs of the family in uncertain times. In her study of post 1989 Poland, Tarkowska (2002: 430) finds that men and women endure poverty very differently observing that women 'undertake different strategies, which are often time-consuming and humiliating, to supplement insufficient incomes' (2002: 430). Studies also find that women are more likely than men to 'go without' in times of scarcity (Cantillon & Nolan, 1998). A study of the different experience of poverty and deprivation for men and women found differences between the two groups in their perception of what they saw as 'necessary' with women emphasising items relating to childcare and men focusing more on leisure and luxury goods (Payne & Pantazis, 1997).

Theorising Coping Work through the Lens of Thrift and Sacrifice

Having examined some of the debates surrounding housework and foodwork on the one hand and the management of resources on the other we want to bring these two sets of debates together in a consideration of some of women's practices of coping in a recession. Here we borrow two key theoretical concepts from anthropology: thrift and sacrifice. Thrift is a very

underused concept in studies of consumption (Miller 1998) particularly in exploring what happens to goods after the point of purchase. We think thrift throws light on the way that resources circulate and are (re)distributed at the micro household level but also the *why* of this circulation. Hunter and Yates (2011: 11) make a direct connection between thrift and thriving asking ‘*What does it mean to thrive?* In short, thrift for what? More or less of what, and for what end?’ In our case we argue that thrift is intimately linked to the doing of family. To our examine our distinct take on thrift we must distinguish thrift from mere frugality. Thrift it is not about consuming less, as we argue later on, instead it is about how we use the resources we do have and as such it is a distinct method of controlling the flow of resources in the household. Rather than spending less, thrift is about the art of doing more with less (Evans, 2011). For example, in his analysis of households Miller (1998) shows how mothers practice thrift by saving money in their everyday shopping in order to spend such savings on treats and presents for their family, mainly their children. Kochuyt (2004) coins a useful term for these freed up resources calling them ‘artificial affluence’. They are artificial because they don’t actually represent new resources coming into the household, they are created through careful use of existing resources. As such everyday thrift is in fact a temporary saving of economic resources to be spent in the future for the household. Thrift then has a significant moral dimension which is about the care of the immediate family (as opposed to the distant other implicated in ethics) (see Evans, 2011). We are also keen to open out thinking around thrift to include not only the use and consumption of tangible resources but also the spending of time and effort. This shifts the terms of the debate outside the rational economic logic of the market. When viewed through a rational – economic lens many household consumption decisions appear rather illogical. Consider for example the parents in Hamilton’s (2012) study who go without essential items in order to purchase their children relatively expensive

branded trainers, or the mothers in Miller's study (1998; 2013) who go to great lengths to save money in their food shopping in order to buy sweets for their children.

However, thrift also ultimately involves an element of sacrifice (Miller, 1998). Some family members have to go without or dismiss their own needs in favour of others. This is an enduring finding in studies of low income families which all underscore the willingness of parents to abnegate their own needs in favour of their children (Kempson et al., 1994; Kempson, 1996; Kochuyt, 2004; Hamilton & Catterall, 2006; Hamilton, 2012). We need to be careful of reading this self sacrifice in terms of pure abnegation and altruism. Motivations for 'going without' are much more complex than they might first appear. Miller (1998) calls his participants devotional women, as their constant abnegation of their desires in order to satisfying their children's requests, has similarities with the religious relation between humans and their object of devotion or deities. While this behaviour is the material expression of care and love from the parent to the child it has a reciprocal element. In turn the parents are 'upholding their honour as parents' (Kochuyt, 2004: 140) and reinforcing their identity as good mothers and fathers (Hamilton & Catterall, 2006). As such parents receive something in return for their sacrifice.

In summary, this review raises a series of questions relating to both the symbolic and material dimensions of household coping in times of recession. Symbolically, how do recessionary times impact on womens' roles and identities in the wider context of family life? Materially how do they manage constricted resources in the service of their wider goal of doing family and maintaining pre recession living standards? We posit that the anthropological theories of thrift and sacrifice might offer the keys to understanding the link between these material and symbolic concerns of 'doing family' in recessionary times.

The Italian Context of the Crisis

Despite women surpassing men in advanced degrees and qualifications Italy remains behind other countries in Europe in almost every indicator of gender equality (Bonino, 2011). Findings at the global level are perhaps even more revealing. In the 2013 Global Gender Gap Index which includes measures of gender equality in the areas of economy, education, economics and health Italy is ranked 71st flanked by China, Romania, the Dominican Republic and Vietnam (GGGR, 2013). These inequalities are very evident at the level of the household, where differences between men and women in time spent engaged in housework are much larger than the European averageⁱⁱⁱ. Studies show that regardless of family composition and female employment, women tend to spend more time engaged in housework than men, and that these differences tend to increase dramatically in the case of families with children and in families where the woman is not in paid employment (Milani & Pegoraro, 2006; Blangiardo, 2010; Dotti-Sani, 2012). There are also geographical differences, male participation in housework is lower in the South of Italy, and increases in the North of the country where a more equal distribution of domestic tasks is visible (Menniti and Demurtas, 2013). The center of Italy is often in between these two extremes, showing the persistence of some patriarchal elements in the household distribution of labour, but also some more egalitarian aspects including higher levels of female education and employment than in the south of the country (Di Giulio & Rosina 2007; Santarelli & Cottone 2009).

In tandem with these quite regressive gender politics Italy has been one of the worst affected countries in Europe by the current crisis (Bosio et al., 2011; D'Ippolito & Roncaglia, 2011). In June 2013 unemployment hit more than 3 million people against 22.5 million in employment. This depressed labour market has had regressive effects on household consumption. The percentage of households indicating that they have reduced the quantity and/or quality of foodstuffs they purchase increased (from 53.6% in 2011 to 62.3% in 2012) the percentage of households buying from discount supermarkets also increased (from 10.5%

to 12.3%) (Istat, 2013). Italian families have also changed their diet reducing spending on luxury items including fish, cold cuts, and dairy products has reduced; and these proteins have been replaced with more affordable carbohydrates such as pasta, sales of which have increased. (Federalimentare, 2013). However, there seem to be very few studies that examine how the extra food work involved is distributed within Italian households. Survey based studies on household food consumption refer to an undifferentiated ‘consumer’ with little reference to gender and family roles (Bosio et al., 2011; Collesei, 2011; Martinengo, 2011).

Research Methods

In order to achieve a rich understanding of household consumption during the current recession, this study adopted an interpretivist approach providing ‘a more in depth analysis of the life stories expressed by a relatively small number of participants’ (Thompson, 1996: 392). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants living in Florence. Florence is the capital city of the central region of Tuscany it is the 8th largest city in Italy, with a population of 370,000. As discussed above Florence’s location in the middle of Italy represents a valuable opportunity to understand domestic gender dynamics since it seems to maintain characteristics of the patriarchal ideology combined with a more equal distribution of domestic labour. We were particularly interested in understanding the impact of the crisis on young middle class families (with parents in their thirties and early forties), since they are the segment of Italian population that, according to statistics (Eurostat, 2010), have been particularly hardly hit by the current crisis. We looked for households on incomes of more than 50,000 euros after tax, which had experienced a decline in income in the previous year (usually through unemployment). Our initial aim was to obtain a collective family view of the crisis by interviewing all members, starting with the person in the house responsible for the larger share of everyday household shopping and meal provision. As such we did not set out to apply a gender lens to the study. However we encountered a series of difficulties in

recruiting male participants who often declined our invitation asserting that they felt uncomfortable in talking about household matters outside domestic walls. In all ten households that agreed to participate it was the woman who self-identified as holding this responsibility. Unfortunately the partners of our participants were not willing to take part in our research, claiming that they lacked the knowledge to discuss domestic matters referring us instead to their wives or partners. While this could seem surprising to a reader not familiar with the Italian context, it reflects what a series of earlier studies have found, that domestic labour remains the responsibility of women in Italian households (Milani & Pegoraro, 2006; Blangiardo, 2010). Also a historically formulated model of masculinity grounded in anti-modernism and traditional gender roles continues to hold sway in Italian society (Bellassai, 2005).

We recruited participants through a purposive sampling accompanied by a snowball sampling technique (Silverman, 2006). University colleagues and acquaintances put us in contact with potential participants, who also suggested other possible participants. In a couple of cases participants were friends with each other, but in the majority of cases they did not know each other. Table 1 provides an overview of key characteristics of the 10 informants. With two exceptions they consist of women ranging from their mid-thirties to their early forties. They are all in stable relationships and half of them have young children. In this respect they epitomise the lower fertility rates of Italian middle class women living in the middle of the country (Santarelli and Cottone, 2009). Some of them are in professional careers but with a highly paid but unstable job, others have clerical jobs with a stable but limited income. Also their level of education varies with some possessing postgraduate masters degrees and others leaving education after high school and returning later for vocational diplomas. Eight out of the ten informants own their own homes. As will be illustrated in the findings, despite their

current differing economic and cultural capital the participants' identified strongly with a middle class lifestyle in discussions of their pre-crisis consumption patterns.

Table 1. Profile of Informants

Name *	Age	Education	Household	Occupation	Partner's occupation
Amanda	35	High school	Living with her partner in their own house	Line manager in a call centre	Temporary job in a petrol station (reduction of salary by approx 50% in comparison to previous job)
Caterina	27	High school with various undergraduate diplomas	Living with her partner in a rented house	Administrative job (part-time) Part time singing teacher (reduced numbers of working hours per week)	Part time clerical job in a company (reduced salary from full time to part-time)
Roberta	36	Degree + various postgraduate diplomas	Living with her husband and her 6 year old daughter in a rented flat	Freelance lawyer (reduced income from the previous year of approx 50%)	Barrister (reduced income from the previous year of approx 30%)
Pamela	41	High school	Living with her partner in their own house	Short terms contracts as clerical assistant (instable income due to short term contracts and unemployment)	Driver (reduction of working hours; income reduced from the previous year by approx 30%)
Costanza	37	High school	Living with her husband and 2 children (4 and 5 years) in their own house	Free lancer in marketing communication (income reduced from the previous year by approx 50%)	Line manager in banking sector
Antonella	32	High school	Living with her husband in their own flat	Short term contracts as senior administrator (instable income due to short term contracts and unemployment)	Civil servant
Vittoria	35	Postgraduate Master's degree	Living with husband and her one year old daughter in their own house	Supply teacher (unstable income reduced by the birth of their daughter)	Short term contract in a local company (fixed term 0 hours contract)
Elisa	36	Part time undergraduate student	Living with her husband and her 2 month old daughter in their own house	Administrator in the public sector	Entrepreneur (building company with approx 70% reduction of income from previous year)
Arianna	35	Undergraduate degree in Maths and Sciences	Living with her husband and 2 children (4 and 2 years) in their own house	High school maths teacher	Barrister (income reduced from the previous year by approx 30%)
Marina	37	Undergraduate degree in Economics	Living with her husband and one daughter in their own house	Part time senior administrator (reduced number of working hours)	Accountant (income reduced from the previous year by approx 10%)

* Pseudonyms are used in this paper to guarantee participants anonymity.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first two authors in Italian and lasted approximately one hour. With participants' permission interviews were recorded, and subsequently transcribed verbatim and translated into English. In the majority of the cases interviews took place in respondents' home allowing the researchers an additional insight into their general standard of living (Franklin, 1996; Hamilton, 2012). Interviews took place during weekends or after work.

Interviews covered themes such as the overall effects of the economic crises in participants' households as well as their feelings surrounding their changed financial situation. They also covered changes to the organisation of household management and budgeting including any changes in consumption practices surrounding the work of providing for the family. Often these themes led us to cover more sensitive issues including unbalanced division of labour in the household and participants' feelings about such a division. We often adopted techniques common to 'the Platonic dialogue' (see Kvale 2006:486). For example, when participants described how their shopping took more time than previously we probed them on their feelings surrounding this. In openly questioning participants about our assumed understandings of their negative feelings about their shopping, we encouraged them to illustrate their own feelings and contradict our assumptions (see Kvale, 1996; 2006). This of course also had the effect of raising their gender consciousness (Cook & Fonow, 1996). These techniques were adopted with the feminist purpose to '“bring women in,” that is, to uncover what has been ignored, censored, and suppressed, and to reveal both the diversity of actual women's lives and the ideological mechanisms that have made so many of those lives invisible' (DeVault, 1996: 32).

Interview transcriptions were analysed thematically following the general guidelines of qualitative research and interpretive consumer research (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Spiggle, 1994; Silverman, 2006). Each interview was analysed individually and later related to all other interviews in order to identify common themes across participants (see Spiggle, 1994). The final interpretation results from a continuous back and forth between individual and joined interpretations and a continuous back and forth between the literature and the data analysis (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989; Thompson, Pollio, & Locander, 1994). The authors' different cultural backgrounds enriched the final interpretation of the data. The fact that two authors are Italian women originally from Florence and hence very familiar with the cultural context and experiences described by participants helped deepen the interpretation. The third author being from the UK could probe into cultural and social issues that they may otherwise have taken for granted. This collaborative approach to data interpretation follows the principles of feminist research of interpreting data by making public women's voices and their everyday struggles (The Voice Group, 2008; Brooks, 2006). This back and forth interpretation between data and literature and between the various authors leads to the individuation of three main themes which are illustrated below.

Doing Family in Times of Austerity: The Emotional Work of Coping

It's a strange feeling, which is difficult to explain. It's like having the Sword of Damocles^{iv} over my head constantly reminding me that I can't spend any money, but at the same time I still buy things. [...] Lately life feels much harder and dearer... I don't think it's just a feeling, I think it's real! I have a constant anxiety, like a fire alarm telling me "be careful, don't buy this, don't overdo it, do this, do that" ...it is a real crisis, you can feel it. I don't

know the causes of the crisis, but I can see how our way of buying things, of enjoying them, has changed...(Antonella)

Antonella's comment really underlines the keenly *felt* experience of coping in a recession. As we explore below, recessionary times hit the family hard in terms of their material welfare but they also hit hard at the level of emotion. Antonella's 'constant anxiety' relating to her need to continually monitor spending is evidence of her incessant emotional daily struggle (De Vault, 1999; Erickson, 2005). As De Vault observes 'Oppression increases the work of maintaining a family and imposes distinctive emotional demands' (1999: 58). Antonella clearly struggles between her ambivalent impulses to both save and spend for the wider welfare of the family, she reports that she is constantly reminded to save but at the same time she 'still buys things.' This constant self monitoring and evaluation of consumption decisions empties them of any pleasure both in the purchase and subsequent use of goods, as Antonella observes 'our way of buying things, of enjoying them has changed'. It seems that consumption's moral character is emphasised in a recession and its aspirational functions die away. In fact our participants reported deliberately censoring their consumption dreams as part of the way in which they coped emotionally with reduced incomes.

We have renounced the big things, like having a better house. We have stopped dreaming! We do not travel anymore. We do not have any money for that....we look for special offers, and we have stopped going abroad (Antonella)

Antonella reports that she and her husband have stopped dreaming, they no longer look to consumption as offering possibilities for the accomplishment of their middleclass dreams in terms of travelling and moving to a bigger home. Many of the women we spoke to reported a significant scaling down of future expectations. De Vault (1999) highlights the effort of managing aspirations and opportunities as a distinct form of emotion work in the family.

Instead participants gave meaning to their current consumption patterns by drawing on past post-war discourses of frugality and hardship, of getting by with pride and respectability.

My grandfather went through the second war world and he told me stories about people around him suffering. Although he and my grandmother were rich, they never wasted anything. They were very wealthy with big savings but they were very careful and they used to live well without wasting money. I remember that my grandmother never wasted any food, not even the tiniest bit and she wanted me to understand this. It was amazing to see her at work in the kitchen. I think we need to go back to this sort of lifestyle. (Roberta)

Roberta's nostalgic portrayal of her grandparent's consumption skills as something she can learn from highlight two key moral discourses of consumption, those of thrift (using resources wisely) and of waste (avoiding it at all costs). As the literature shows the everyday moral concerns of consumption are often interlinking the avoidance of wasting resources and self-denial (Evans, 2011; Hunter & Yates, 2011).

Learning to be thrifty: The ceaseless work of coping

At the beginning of every month I save what we need for the usual expenses: mortgage, various monthly repayments, and bills for the house... all expenses that I know well in advance. What is left is what we use for living, and we make it last all month. [...] I'm very careful when using electricity and the heating; I tend to do fewer washes with the washing machine and tend to do very full ones, the same with the dishwasher. We use energy saving light bulbs. I do lots of these little things that should work given that bills are much dearer now. I used to spend 45 euros a month on electricity, now I pay 73 euros for the same amount. It's a lot! (Pamela)

Pamela's comments highlight the sheer detail of forward planning and careful monitoring of spending she engages in on a daily basis to manage on a reduced income. It demonstrates what has been found in other studies that women tend to be responsible for the mundane and time consuming tasks surrounding 'implementation' as opposed to 'orchestration' tasks (Safilios-Rothschild, 1975; 1976; Woolley & Marshall, 1994). Note also that she refers to these tasks as 'little things' as such largely discounting the work they clearly involve. A series of studies highlight the way in which women consistently underestimate and fail to recognise the work that goes into 'doing family' (Erickson, 2005). The slippage between Pamela's use of 'I' and 'we' in her discussion of the work of coping is telling, hinting at her primary motivation for this extra work which is maintaining the 'we' of the family.

When it comes to feeding the family (De Vault, 1991) the food budget in the households consists of "what is left" to use Pamela's words, after the fixed household outgoings have been met. All of the women we talked to described this process of feeding the family with fewer resources as a learning process which is *hard work* (Tarkowska, 2002) wherein old habits surrounding the entire process of having a meal (from planning to disposal) have to be revised and readapted.

If you want to save you cannot maintain your old habits, you need to work hard, look for special offers, go to the most convenient places without being too snobbish (Vittoria)

These purchasing strategies coincide with what previous studies (Kempson, et al., 1994; Hamilton, 2012) refer to as coping strategies adopted by poor consumers to manage the family's scarce budget. However for our participants, going to such extraordinary lengths to remember prices, save up vouchers and counting the number of washings that can be done with an unbranded product requires a *new set of competences*. It is indeed a new way of

consuming, changing previous attitudes “without being too snobbish”, as Vittoria puts it, and as Amanda observes:

I would've never thought of reading leaflets with special offers, but now I do it regularly. I'm very careful now. I've changed my way of thinking. I used to buy whatever I fancied [...] I used to do monthly shopping ending up throwing away many things or giving things to my mum. Now I do a weekly shop and in the middle of the week I check if we need something else.

While previous survey based studies highlight how Italian consumers have modified their shopping habits in the face of the current crisis (Boisio et al., 2011; Collesei, 2011; Martinengo, 2011), our data show that their learning process extends far beyond the single act of purchase. These interview extracts illustrate that this process of ‘learning to be thrifty’ concerns the range of practices surrounding domestic food provision, including: planning, shopping, preparing, cooking and disposing of the meal (see Goody, 1982; Marshall, 1995; Cappellini & Parsons, 2012). In fact these practices are too numerous to discuss individually here so we have included a summary table (see table 2) of participants’ everyday coping strategies.

Table 2. Changes to domestic food provision practices

Food provision	Before the crisis	After the crisis	Examples
PLANNING	-Long term planning (weekly and monthly);	-Monthly planning is replaced by weekly and daily planning; - Irregular planning (deciding where and what to buy based on special offers and price comparisons);	<i>I used to do a monthly food shopping at the Coop [supermarket] but most of the things ended up in the bin or I used to give them to my mother before they went off. Now I do a weekly shop at the local Pennymarket [a discount supermarket] and in the middle of the week I look at what is left and what we need for the rest of the week (Amanda)</i> <i>I now buy more fresh and seasonal things; they are cheaper but I need to buy them in small quantities otherwise they go off. This is a way of saving money but it's a pain! You cannot stock up many things and you need to go more often</i>

			<p>to the supermarket (Antonella)</p> <p><i>I constantly check promotions and special offers from various supermarkets. I do not go to the same supermarket anymore, but I tend to look at the special offers first and then I decide where to go (Costanza)</i></p>
SHOPPING	<p>-Daily visits to local bakery and grocery; -Frequent visits to local butchers and delicatessens; -Monthly visits to big supermarkets; -Weekly visits to local supermarkets;</p>	<p>-Reducing (or stopping) visits to bakery, grocery, butchers and delicatessens; -Substituting local delicatessens, butcher, grocery and bakery with local supermarkets; -Substituting branded products with unbranded ones; -Using coupons and loyalty cards; -Using online and off line special offers; -Frequent visits to discount supermarkets (never or rarely visited before);</p>	<p><i>I have stopped buying things in local delicatessens and bakeries. They have lovely things but they are too expensive. You can spend 10 euros on bread and focaccia without even realising it! I can't afford it anymore. I now buy baguettes at the supermarket, I cut them into small pieces and I freeze them.(Elisa)</i></p> <p><i>I have stopped buying snacks, branded biscuits, Parma ham and other cold cuts. We buy the cheaper options or things on special offer. [...] We buy more seasonal things and less ready meals which are too expensive (Costanza)</i></p> <p><i>I now go to discount supermarket and I buy unbranded products... I am not ashamed of this. Another strategy I use when I go to the Coop I look at the half price section which is full of good things but very close to the expiry date (Pamela)</i></p> <p><i>I use lots of loyalty cards and reward cards from Esselunga and Coop and the one from my local chemist where I buy some medicine for my skin: every 5 euros I spend I get 2 points and then I get some money off (Elisa)</i></p>
STORING	<p>Storing of monthly shopping; -Careful storing but often ending up with lots of out of date products (mismanagement);</p>	<p>-Increasing use of the freezer; -Storing tins and long life items bought in bulk using special offers; -Increasing use frozen products but not ready meals; -Storing hand-made products (jams, pasta sauces, olives, and pickles);</p>	<p><i>If I see some good special offers I buy things for the whole month, like cleaning products, washing powder, things like that, but it is rare now...another thing that I still buy monthly is the meat which I tend to buy around the 10th of each month, once I get my salary. I buy it and freeze it, so it lasts for the entire month (Amanda).</i></p> <p><i>I have increased the use of frozen vegetables. They are very practical and they do not go off like fresh vegetables. Some people say it is not as nice, or it is not as good for you as the fresh ones. I don't think so, what I think is that it's very convenient and I don't end up wasting any food (Vittoria)</i></p>
COOKING	<p>-Cooking with ready sauces and</p>	<p>-More cooking (pasta sauces, jams, cakes</p>	<p><i>I'm very careful now and I tend to use everything, and I eat all leftovers. If I have some</i></p>

	<p>other products perceived as convenient;</p> <p>-Alternating home cooking with take away dishes on a regular basis;</p>	<p>and biscuits);</p> <p>-Reducing use of takeaways and ready meals;</p> <p>-Cooking leftovers (used for making new dishes);</p>	<p><i>pasta left I reheat it in the oven and I make another meal out of it (Caterina)</i></p> <p><i>I want my children to eat well but I have to look at the money I spend on food. In order to save money I now cook an awful lot! I buy fresh things and I spend less but this means that you have to cook lots, which I don't mind anyway (Arianna)</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes we make our own bread, pasta and yogurt. This isn't only to save money, it also means we know what we are eating (Costanza)</i></p>
EATING	<p>-Eating fish and meat on a daily basis;</p> <p>-Snacking with nibbles and other products from delicatessens;</p> <p>-Abundant portions with frequent leftovers;</p>	<p>-New dishes (more pasta and carbohydrates) - - Less protein based foods such as fish, cheese, and cold meat;</p> <p>-Less nibbles for snacking;</p> <p>-Calculating portions to avoid leftovers;</p>	<p><i>I have stopped buying snacks and nibbles which are too expensive and you can't make a proper meal with them [...] I now eat much less fish. We can't afford beef anymore, we can maybe eat a steak once a month if possible. (Caterina)</i></p> <p><i>We now have more pasta and rice based dishes with some seasonal vegetable sauces (Elisa)</i></p> <p><i>I am very careful with the right quantity of the portions, but if I end up with some leftovers I store them in the fridge and I reuse them the following day. I often make an omelette with the remaining vegetables (Vittoria)</i></p>
DISPOSAL AND RE-PLANNING	<p>-Declared attention to waste but often ending up disposing of out of date products;</p>	<p>-Using out of date products;</p> <p>-Reusing leftovers for next day's meal (packed lunch for the office);</p> <p>-Using leftovers to make a new dish for the evening meal;</p> <p>-Using freezer for storing leftovers;</p>	<p><i>One of the first things we have changed is what we eat for lunch. Mario [her partner] used to eat in cafes, but now he eats something made at home, usually something left from the previous night or a sandwich. We had to change this immediately as he used to spend 10 euros every day on his lunch (Amanda)</i></p> <p><i>Leftovers are eaten again the next day and there is no discussion about this. In many cases I make a new dish out of leftovers. Omelettes made with pasta leftovers are very nice and we have them regularly now (Arianna)</i></p> <p><i>I throw away things that are really off, only if they look very bad for example if they have some mould on them! It's now very rare because I'm very careful and If I see that something is near the expiry date I eat it even if I don't fancy it (Vittoria)</i></p>

Table 2 illustrates that participants' 'new way of thinking', as Arianna puts it, involves altering previous practices such as reducing their visits to the local butcher or baker, and making better use of mealtime leftovers. However it also involves the introduction of entirely new practices such as making jams, tomato sauces and pickles.

Now I do more cooking. I've always been a keen cook, and now I cook even more. I make lots of cakes and sauces. I haven't bought a jar of jam in the last two years, or of tomato sauce. I tend to make as many things as I can: olives, sauces, various pickles [...] I make a cake every other day: the children eat it for their afternoon snack. I tend to use different types of jam so the children won't get bored with it [...] I don't buy unnecessary and expensive things, like branded stuff, and biscuits, that are three times more expensive (Arianna)

We see from Arianna a real sense of pride in providing for her family, in providing not only food that will fill them up, but food they will enjoy (using different types of her home made jam in her cakes so that the children don't get bored with them). Like the women in De Vault's (1991) study her ceaseless work of providing food for the family reproduces her care and love for them. We also see a sense of pride in the fact that she hasn't bought a 'jar of jam in the last two years', her home cooking is increasing her self reliance and also results in a reduced reliance on the marketplace, which she is proud of. In other cases we found that this increased self reliance also stimulated an increased distrust of, and cynicism towards marketplace offerings, in particular well known brands, as Costanza observed '*I have realised that there is this silly attitude to trust brands, but sometimes you discover that they are not different from other stuff*'

There is also a subtle shift in *what* is saved during crisis times. Studies show that outside times of crisis much of household food shopping is driven by the need to save time as much as money. Here convenience products typically play a significant time saving role in the

home (Carrigan & Szmigin, 2006). However, during recessionary times we have found that saving money takes precedence. Such a saving brings women back in the kitchen spending their time, effort and labour in doing even more planning, more shopping trips, more cooking, more storing and dealing with leftovers. Expressions such as “working hard”, “working out”, “without being too snobbish”, “making it last” illustrate how participants compensate their reduced economic resources with their own additional domestic labour. In addition, this additional work our participants perform seems to be so embedded in their roles as mothers and wives, that it is entirely taken for granted by them (see De Vault, 1991). It wasn’t until we pointed it out in interviews that they began to reflect on the volume of extra work they had undertaken. Doing more work and spending more time in the supermarket and in the kitchen becomes the moral (and rather individualised) solution which alleviates the difficulties of feeding the family with reduced financial resources.

However it is interesting to see that the dominant solution proposed by these women was to revert to the incredibly labour intensive strategies of their Grandmothers in feeding the family with less resource. As Roberta comments of her Grandma ‘*It was amazing to see her at work in the kitchen. I think we need to go back to this sort of lifestyle.*’ Below Amanda represents the only critical voice amongst these narratives of the necessity of working more in the kitchen. She expresses an admiration for her mother and mother in law in their performance of a hard working model of domesticity but she also clearly resists this model associating it with the regressive gender relations of the 1950s.

Maybe we have to go back and do things how we used to. My mother in law is from the 50s and she makes lots of pickles, jams, sauces...even when she has an empty fridge she can still make a meal. It could be a way of saving but... Gosh! When one has such a busy life how can one make sauces and pickles, buy fresh vegetables and clean them... My mum does this, but I

don't, , I'm too busy with my job, I buy vegetables that are already clean. We're spoiled, that's why it's hard to go back. (Amanda)

Redistributing resources: Sacrifice, thrift and artificial affluence

While coping in the crisis involves a significant amount of hidden extra work, a key strand of these coping strategies involve the redirection and redistribution of resources between family members. The typical pattern here was once the fixed outgoings are met the children are then prioritised over most other considerations, as Arianna commented: *'We have monthly expenses which need to be paid up front, like insurance, mortgage, ...then the nursery. The children are the ones we privilege!'* Roberta similarly highlights the lengths that these women go to plan and save in order to provide for their children.

Roberta: Marta (her daughter) attends callisthenics class. We have been lucky, the school runs a course which is only 250 euros for two classes a week for the entire year.

I: Where did you find 250 euros?

Roberta: I saved them in August when we had fewer expenses. We spent the month with my parents in our summer house at the seaside. We don't have many expenses there, we don't buy any food, so the money came from that month.

This subtle redirection of resources has been described by Kochuyt (2004), as a form of 'artificial affluence'. Undoubtedly artificial because rather than involving the creation of a new stream of income it merely results from the careful redirection of existing resources within the home. The quote above from Roberta involves the redirection of resources from one area of spending (food shopping) to another area of spending (Marta's callisthenics class). However, we also found plenty of evidence of a reduction in spending on participants

own needs (Cantillon & Nolan, 1998) in order to free up resource for their children and husbands.

I have stopped doing unnecessary things like going to the hairdresser [...] I used to buy lots of dresses...now I have learnt to go to the cheap markets. If I find something cheap I treat myself with something, like a dress for 10 euros...[...] I don't think I can give up my cleaner, I need to have a little domestic help so that I can have more time with my daughter. (Elisa)

Elisa has stopped spending on what she terms 'unnecessary things' such as visits to the hairdresser in order to afford the cleaner which in turn allows her to spend time with her daughter. Roberta describes a similar sacrifice:

I can't buy a newspaper every day anymore. Now I buy one every other day, but sometimes when Marta is with me and she wants her magazine I buy her magazine instead and I look at the online version of the paper. I like to give her a little something (Roberta)

Roberta and Elisa's observations confirm the idea that for participants saving resources involves a significant amount of self-sacrifice of their individual desires and previous habits (Cantillon & Nolan, 1998; De Vault 1998; Kochuyt, 2004; Hamilton 2012). Here we also see a renegotiation of what is seen as *necessary* spending within the household budget. Time and again we found that participants redefined spending on their *own* needs rather than on their husbands or children's needs as unnecessary (see Payne & Pantazis, 1997 for a discussion of gender differences in perceptions of 'necessities'). Therefore, while it is important to explore how the household resources are redirected, the way in which participants' describe and justify these decisions is just as revealing. For example we noticed that participants often seemed guilty about spending anything on themselves at all, feeling the need to justify this spending. As Elisa notes below, she has to buy the one face cream that she now uses for her 'skin allergies'.

I've stopped buying expensive face creams: I used to buy one for the eyes, one for the day and one for the night, now I only have a good moisturising one and that's it! I have to buy it for my skin allergies....I used to buy excellent stuff (Elisa)

Above we have explored the ways in which our participants make sacrifices themselves for their children we have also seen the way in which the children are prioritised over everything else once the fixed outgoings such as rent and bills are met. In this latter case we might say that our participants orchestrate a wider family sacrifice (which undoubtedly involves their husbands and partners) for the good of the children. This is not to say that husbands and partners do not adopt their own saving strategies, (indeed we did find evidence of this in our interviews) but this is to say that feeding the family clearly emerges as woman's work and as such collective and individual changes are orchestrated by her.

I'm forced to buy meat and wine because of my husband...I try to find good wine on offer at the supermarket or I go to local shops where you can find cheap but nice wine from local farms . He doesn't like poor quality wine! I am not an expert so I go for special offers and he drinks a bit less now and eats less meat! Sometimes I make him a cheap omelette for dinner and he eats it...(Elisa)

I don't buy cheese and cold meat any more: they are too expensive and they don't fill you up. I can't make a meal out of them ... if I did my husband would think that they were just the starter! (Laughing) I've trained him to eat more pasta, rice, more carbohydrates that fill you up, (Elisa)

These quotes show how Elisa's orchestration of her husband's sacrifice (eating less meat and drinking less wine) consists of visiting more than one shop, looking for special offers and preparing cheaper but filling meals. They also show that Elisa thinks her husband does not fully understand the lengths she is going to save money (see Tarkowska, 2002). Elisa's

comment that her husband might think that meat and cheese were ‘just the starter’ and the comment that she has had to ‘train him to eat more carbohydrates’ could be indicative of a great degree of ignorance by him of the cost of food and the families’ current need to budget carefully. However this depiction of her husband as ignorant might also serve to reinforce Elisa’s relative position as informed and in control of the family’s resources something that she seems to take pride in and which she is keen to portray to us that she does very well. As such Elisa seems to embrace the caring work associated not only with doing family but with doing family well.

Discussion: (Re)cognising the Work of Coping

Returning to the aims of this study below we map out the contours of coping work in our contribution to the wider project of revaluing housework (Oakley, 1974a, 1974b; De Vault, 1991; Davidoff, 1992; Erickson, 2005). Here we think there is also a need to (re)cognise or rethink the work of coping to explore both its material and symbolic dimensions and account for the way in which they are intimately bound up in female subjectivities in the household.

Our analysis has revealed the breadth of activities undertaken by women to try and reduce the overall impact on the family and try as far as possible to maintain pre-crisis standards of living. This work of adjustment is mental, (rethinking one’s orientation to money and shopping); physical (spending much longer in the shops looking for reduced prices and special offers) but also emotional (absorbing the stress involved in this extra work). We have also found some evidence to suggest that this extra work of coping is unevenly distributed between household members (Tarkowska, 2002). While we did not explicitly interview male partners and husbands there is evidence to suggest that the male householders may not be as aware of the amount of extra work put in by their partners to ‘cope’ financially. In addition women seem to be tasked with the mundane everyday decisions and tasks of implementation

(Safilios-Rothschild, 1975; 1976, Woolley & Marshall, 1994). These tasks are time consuming however the issue here is also the very little discretion they allow in terms of when and how they are performed and the fact that they are often dictated by the needs of others (Riley & Kiger, 1999).

However, ‘coping’ is not only about the survival of the family unit in material terms but in the wider sense of ‘doing family’ (Hertz, 2006; Nelson, 2006). We have highlighted the visceral and keenly felt experience of facing a financial crisis. The over riding feelings of our respondents were those of stress, worry and anxiety over the need to continually monitor spending and resource use. However it seems these women keep these emotions to themselves acting as an emotional buffer against externally imposed financial pressures and uncertainties, thus managing and stabilising the emotional climate within the family (De Vault, 1999; Erickson, 2005). Scholars observe that this emotion work is central to an understanding of the gendered divisions labour in the household as women ‘are held accountable for the performance of this work in ways that men are not’ (Erickson, 2005: 348).

Rather like Lister (1995) who observes that women in deprived households are ‘poverty managers’ we see the women in our study as ‘austerity managers’. We use the term ‘austerity’ because many of the coping strategies participants used were about regaining *control* over the flow and direction of resources both within the household and flowing from the household into the marketplace. This emphasis involved increased trips to the shops, careful control of portions but also the use of kitchen devices such as the freezer to control this flow. This control can be usefully theorised as a form of thrift where resources are both used more efficiently but also redirected i.e. spending is curtailed in some areas in order to be spent on others. Importantly, this redirection results in a flow of resource away from women towards their partners and children. In this way we found that it is mothers and wives that

create an 'artificial affluence' (Kochuyt, 2004) going without or sacrificing their own needs in order to free up resource for other family members. This is similar to the mothers in Miller's (1998) North London study who typically went to great lengths to save money on the more mundane items in their weekly shop in order to free up resource for treats for their children.

Our gendered interpretation was definitely also cut across by class. Even in times of crisis it seems that what and how is appropriate to consume is still guided by distinct classed orientations, or habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). The shift for our participants was towards saving money where possible through the use of home made products such as meals cooked from scratch. Families on very low incomes and/or single parents may not have the luxury of this time. For example we see little evidence of these coping practices amongst the deprived consumers in Kochuyt (2004) and Hamilton and Catterall's (2006) studies. Of course the learning and demonstration of these craft and cooking skills also allows these women to display and build on their cultural capital without having to spend large amounts of money. As such the turn to home based production is not solely a feature of economic necessity it also represents a perpetuation of a middle class identity and associated cultural capital.

Coping and its associated work are undoubtedly means by which our participants made sense of themselves and as such form a central strand of their identity work as caring mothers and partners. It may well be that their depiction of their husbands and male partners as both less informed and less engaged in the sacrifice of coping serves to reinforce this identity work and buoy up their sense of ownership and control of the family resources. As Meah (2013) points out, we recognise that there is value and fulfilment in the doing of family. However, we want to be careful not to depict this work entirely as empowering and liberating and fall into the trap of equating women's worth with their roles as carers. While we have found evidence of the pride these women take in the work of 'doing family' much of this extra work is still

undertaken out of necessity rather than free choice. If the recession ended tomorrow we have no doubt that the women in our study would gladly drop this extra work and return to their previous lifestyles. As we discussed at the start of this paper in the Italian cultural context more traditional gender ideologies still largely view family work as more appropriately the responsibility of women. As such we must acknowledge the potentially oppressive and constraining nature of this extra work.

It is worth commenting here on our confusion as researchers over our participants' unreflective discussion of all the extra work involved in coping work. When we pointed this extra work out to them they reacted in a surprised manner appearing to view it as naturally their responsibility as partners and mothers. This seems to perpetuate the myth that equates womanhood with caring work and sees this work as emanating naturally from within (Hochschild, 1989; Oakley, 1974b). This failure to recognise the extra work might also be explained in terms of the drive to appear competent. As Erickson observes 'Women themselves often discount the time and effort involved in caring work not only because it is expected to be a spontaneous expression of love but also because the illusion of effortless-ness is part of doing the work well (Hochschild, 1983)' (2005: 338). In addition studies have suggested that acknowledging unfairness in the division of work in the household may be 'tantamount to admitting that one's relationship as a whole is unfair or unsatisfactory' (Baxter, 2000: 627). Therefore in many ways it is easier not to confront the issue (see Beagan et al., 2008). So there are shades in our interview extracts that in being concerned to be competent mothers and partners and do the extra coping work well, our participants are rendering this work invisible and therefore reproducing the very structures that might be seen as locking them in to this work in the first place.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the continuing significance of the family as an economic unit in times of austerity. We do have some evidence in our study that it is not only the women of the household that sacrifice their needs for others but that other family members are also involved in giving things up for the greater good of the family. As such we suggest that families may well move closer together to handle the situation and are strengthened through this. Further research would involve talking to male partners and children to include their perspectives on issues of coping and sacrifice enabling us to see the bigger picture specifically in terms of the inter-relations between family members (Epp & Price, 2008) but also the extent to which other family member share the responsibility of 'doing family'.

Our study has also shown that in times of recession women seem to have reverted back to the home sphere and replaced a more costly reliance on marketplace production (Carrigan & Szmigin, 2006) with increased home-based work and production. This shift represents an increased focus on the domestic sphere as a site of production and thus an intensification of 'house work'. As feminists have been telling us for some time this work and the nurturing and commitment it involves is largely unrecognised and at the same time unvalued, in financial terms (Oakley, 1974b). In terms of the feminist project then the recession represents a significant set back in gender politics seeing the movement of women 'back into the kitchen'. Economists might argue that this is simply a market response as households attempt to capitalise on efficiencies in the division of labour in times of austerity. However this does not take into account women's simultaneous participation in the workforce outside the home which means that the work of the 'second shift' (Hochschild, 1989) is merely increased and women are still doing 'too much work in too many places' (De Vault, 1991: 3). We suggest that in hard times then women's role as naturalised carer seems to intensify and that this results in a reproduction of structures of oppression. These structures are reproduced through the everyday performance and doing of gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987) in the household

and this leaves open the opportunity for change. However at the same time they rely on a broader gender consciousness which operates at the level of wider society (O'Sullivan, 2004). Given the deeply sedimented nature of traditional gender roles in Italian society this change is likely to advance at a slow rate.

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ⁱ Despite the emergence of the popular image of the male cook through the success of international celebrity chefs (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007) this image is still yoked to the professional (and paid) realm of the restaurant. This masculine mode of cooking is usually framed in the language of art and aesthetics (Fine, 1995). Here cooking seems to be much more about leisure, pleasure and lifestyle (Adler, 1981; Coxon, 1983), and the more mundane practical considerations of family health and budgeting don't often get a look in.

ⁱⁱ An example of an allocative system which perpetuates inequalities can be seen in Commuri and Gentry's (2005) study which finds that couples organise their finances to include multiple pools. These pools are not necessarily used to create efficiencies but rather they are important symbolically serving to 'obfuscate income differences and, when necessary, enable the enactment of roles that resemble those in men as chief wage earner households.' (2005: 192) This creative resource re-allocation serves to symbolically mask the economic power of the woman and reproduce the normative ideal of the male partner as the primary economic provider.

ⁱⁱⁱ Recent national data highlight that Italian women spend an average of 36 hours per week engaged in domestic work, compared with 11 hours of their male partners (OECD 2013). On average Italian women spend more time per day on housework (an average of 5 hours) than women in the rest of Europe (an average of 4 hours). However Italian men spend less time engaged in domestic work than the European average (an average of 1½ hour against the European average of 2 hours) (Eurostat 2012).

^{iv} Damocles is the main character of a legend appearing in "Tusculanae Disputationes" by Cicerones. Damocles is a prince at the court of the tyrant Dionigi I, in Siracuse during the IV B.C. Damocles and the tyrant decide to swap roles for a day. Dionigi hang a sword over Damocles' head by a thin horsehair to teach him that privileges come with anxieties and responsibilities. At night Damocles enjoys a rich banquet but when he discovers the sword Damocles decides to terminate the swap and is happy to go back to his previous life. Today the expression sword of Damocles is commonly used to describe situations which involve inevitable danger and the constant anxiety associated with it.