

## Australia

Judy Rose      Janeen Baxter

Mike and Joanne Lally appear on first meeting to be an average married Australian couple. They live in a neighbourhood of Adelaide just outside the city center, with their three children Lily aged 10 years, James aged 13 years and Hayley aged 17 years. However, the Lallys are far from average. Not only do they share equally in housework and childcare, but they also both hold strongly egalitarian views about family life. Mike's egalitarian attitude is most evident in his adoption of Joanne's last name, "Lally," the surname they have also given to their children. Men who change their surname after marriage are extremely rare in Australia. Most women still take their husband's surname following marriage and typically, even if women retain their maiden name, children are given the husband's surname. Mike and Joanne are highly unusual in this respect.

The Lallys live in a red brick and wrought iron terrace house which, like most terrace homes in the area, is long and narrow, with three bedrooms, one bathroom, and a small paved courtyard out the back with a lone leafy tree. Their neighborhood was originally working-class, but it has become increasingly gentrified and is now predominantly inhabited by middle class professionals, who typically hold liberal (non- conservative) political views and support alternative lifestyles. Its residents are deeply involved in their community, which comprises a large number of cyclists and pedestrian commuters. Mike reflects on how he and Joanne (who is originally from the UK) have established deep roots in their community:

Well, we've lived here 22 years, and before that, I rented a house over the other side of the neighborhood. So, [it's been] a very long time. We know most of the shopkeepers by name, and we walk everywhere. And you go to the dog park, so

you know people who have dogs and you know people who have kids...we spent 13 continuous years at the local primary school.

The Lally's home is warm and unpretentious, much like Mike and Joanne themselves. The soft furnishings are colorful, if a little worn, and many of the hard surfaces hold accumulated artefacts of family life including CDs, magazines, and family photographs. Mike and Joanne's functional use of space is visible in the courtyard where they simultaneously dry clothes, store buckets and mops, and have cups of tea and meals on a no-fuss picnic table.

Mike and Joanne have a division of household labor that is organized around their work schedules and the family's needs. They both work in hospitals, Joanne as a clinical nurse manager and Mike as an operating theater technician. They have both negotiated complementary shift work schedules that allow them to work alternate times and fit their jobs around their care responsibilities. Their work schedules entail each of them working in different hospitals, at different times of the day and on different days of the week, except for Monday when they both work. Mike explains how their intricately scheduled arrangement works to facilitate childcare and helps them keep up with housework tasks:

I leave before family gets up. Joanne does breakfast and lunches, housework, cooks or sorts out tea. Hayley picks up Lily; I come home, do dinner and housework, and bring in washing and put it away. The children all help with cleaning up after tea.

There is a high level of cooperation in the Lally's daily routines and their children are encouraged to help out as well:

If I'm working, and Joanne's on a late, she will get the dinner organized. She'll buy the ingredients, or if she gets time she'll cook, and I'll come home and finish

it off, or now that the kids are older, Hayley will come home and put it in the oven, or warm it up for when I get home.

Joanne is the only one who works on the weekend. Mike explains his routine: Because Joanne often works weekends, Sunday is often spent preparing for the week ahead. While Joanne is at work, I'll organize tea [dinner] for Sunday and Monday, and make sure that there's food for the lunches, morning teas etc. The kids and I will often go for a bike ride, or as its footy season, take James to his footy game where I'm also the trainer.

Mike and Joanne take a fairly rational approach to the division of household labor, based on who has the most time available. Joanne explains:

If I'm working more, then Mike will do more housework, or vice versa, and it's never really been that much of an issue, because, you know, if you're not at home, then you're working, so you're still working either way (laugh)...it's never been something that we've discussed, but I don't really think it would be an issue anyway.

Both Mike and Joanne perceive doing a 50-50 split in family work. On childcare Joanne reports:

It would be 50/50, I think. It would work itself out, because Mike goes to work before seven in the morning. I'm always the one that gets up and gets the breakfasts and does the lunches and all of those types of things. But then five of my shifts in the fortnight are usually evenings so he does the stuff at the other end of the day.

On housework, Joanne also perceives a 50-50 split, although she does more of some tasks like food shopping (mainly because she has the car), while Mike does more cooking and cleaning:

Oh, that's all 50/50. Shopping, I would do the majority of the shopping. But again, that's because I'll do the morning run. I'll be walking the kids to school, and I usually go and do the shopping on my way back, because we've only got a little house. We've only got a little kitchen, so I do tend to shop probably every day, or every couple of days. So I probably do more shopping. Mike probably does more cooking. Mike probably cleans more than I do, actually. He'll sort of vacuum and clean through, although I do things like dusting and give the bedrooms a good go. Laundry's 50/50. He's done two loads of washing this morning.

Mike's echoes Joanne's report that they share housework evenly:

I don't know – 50 per cent, I suppose. Yeah, there's no tasks that I don't do and Joanne doesn't do. Yeah, I don't really like doing the bathroom (laugh), but if I have to do the bathroom – if the bathroom needs doing, I'll do the bathroom.

Yeah, if there's a load of washing to do, I'll do it. You know, there's that sort of running joke about 'domestic blindness.' I see James's pants behind you that have got a big stain on the leg. I washed 'em this morning, brand new pants, and he spilled something on them. (laugh) Well, yeah, so we both do the same – there's no division really. I don't think so.

These accounts suggest that the Lallys adhere to the principle of substituting for each other in most household tasks. However, Joanne acknowledges, "There are some tasks that I

don't like to do: cleaning floors, folding the washing, and some Mike doesn't like to do: paying the bills, cleaning the bathroom. It's an unwritten division of tasks without resentment from either party.”

While the Lallys demonstrate a high level of responsiveness to their children’s needs, Joanne explains there are certain childcare tasks each can do better than the other:

Lily didn’t let Mike do her hair this morning. ‘No offense, Dad,’ she said.

(laugh). But I don’t think they really go to anyone in particular. James has got certain issues, then he might come to me ‘cause he thinks I’ll be more sympathetic than his dad, but, really, they don’t usually save things out until one or the other of us is there.

Mike concurs that they have different strengths in parenting. He recounts how he is able to respond more ably than Joanne when his children are upset or anxious:

I think Hayley and Joanne, they tend to clash more and then I will come in and negotiate a truce. James tends to, for some reason, James tends to implode in the mornings and so Joanne tends – because I work, I start work at seven for three days, I’m not here in the mornings, so I’ll ring Joanne up halfway through my morning, and James will have, you know, gone and been upset or whatever. He tends to do that on those mornings I’m not here. Yeah, he does get a bit anxious, and he doesn’t get a headache; he gets a brain tumor. (laugh)

Joanne believed that their overall emotional bond with their children was equivalent, although their roles were different:

Emotionally, I think it’s probably pretty even. There’s certain times when, you know, different things may rub. Say, for example, with Hayley, we might clash, so therefore dad

comes and is the mediator, but then there's other times when, when people need their mum. So, I think that's pretty even.

Despite Mike and Joanne's awareness of their different parenting styles, they were also conscious of supporting each other in parenting decisions. Joanne explains, "We try to be consistent, because we've never wanted them to try and sort of play one off against the other."

Reflecting back on Mike and Joanne's backgrounds and relationship histories, we can track the evolution of their equally-shared arrangements. The seeds of an egalitarian domestic lifestyle were sown early for Mike. Mike's personal history, being the oldest child in a single parent household, contributed to his experience with household duties at a young age. His father's absence meant that he didn't witness a traditional division of labor. Mike recounts, "I don't know whether it sort of stems from my parents were divorced when I was quite young so I didn't have really a male role model." Joanne suggests that her husband's nontraditional start to life meant that he was also exposed to running a household from an early age, "Mike's dad wasn't around from about the age of eight, so Mike probably assumed a more dominant role in that household." Mike remembers that even before he met Joanne, when he lived in shared houses, he did more housework than his male housemates. He reflects, "When I did move out into shared houses, I always liked things tidy. I guess I did that."

Despite this early exposure to domestic life, after meeting Joanne and living together for a time before they married, Mike remembers that Joanne used to cook more than he, "We both worked full time. Joanne cooked at the beginning more than I did. Joanne, in England, lived with an Indian girl, so she cooks curries and things like that which we didn't have at home. So she was certainly a better cook."

Neither of them remember any disputes over housework during their early married life before children. Joanne recalls that they both contributed to housework together, and if one was sick or unavailable, the other would take over:

As far as cleaning and things, when you're both working full time, when you're pre-children, it just happens...I had a sore back a few years ago, so Mike always used to do the vacuuming. He's got a sore back now, so I seem to do it, but (laugh) yeah, we just used to share it. When it came to decorating and things like that, we used to do that together.

When they became parents, Joanne's difficulties with breastfeeding meant that Mike was a hands-on dad right from the start. As Joanne says, "I couldn't breastfeed so we shared that after a month, I think. That was a shared thing."

The pattern of one of the couple substituting for the other has continued as their children have grown, and as the family's needs and schedules have changed. Joanne's job as a nurse manager has always been at a higher pay level than Mike's theater tech position. Mike matter-of-factly notes, "Joanne's job gets priority because she gets paid more." Joanne's greater breadwinning capacity led her to go back to work full time, while Mike was able to withdraw from the workforce for short periods and take the main responsibility for their children's care, "I suppose it started when Joanne, with Hayley, when Hayley was born, Joanne went back to work, and I didn't work, so I was the 'househusband,' as they say, and I guess it started from there.

Joanne reflects on how their nontraditional arrangements seem natural to their children:

I worked full time a couple of times since I've had kids, but Mike's always worked part-time...They've only ever been in a maximum of two days child care... I earned more than he did, so it was a natural thing that I would work more

than him. So he was able to be at home. And the kids have never thought of it as being particularly special.

Joanne has worked full time hours when they have needed the money, but when a third child was on the way Mike recalls that Joanne admitted she could not do it all, “Joanne went back to work full- time for about 6 months while pregnant with Lily. At this time Joanne realized that it was too hard to juggle a demanding job, our relationship, and time with the kids, which she felt all suffered.”

These changes in jobs and hours over time ultimately led to their current arrangement, with each employed 30 hours per week. This part-time work schedule has facilitated an equal division of household labor, and reflects their strong priority on family wellbeing. Mike explains that planning their employment schedules to avoid as much formal childcare as possible, has been an important family goal:

We both work on Monday, but basically what we’ve tried to do is keep the kids out of childcare. The school where they’ve all gone offers morning care and afternoon care. They’ve never gone to morning care. Lily goes to afternoon care occasionally, not very often, like on a Monday. But now, as the other two have got older, they pick her up from after care, so she’s not there for that long.

Joanne has also demonstrated determination by negotiating her part-time senior role at work. Joanne initially had to convince hospital management that a part-time, job-share arrangement would be viable:

When I first started...when Hayley was a baby, I worked full time. But basically, when I got pregnant with James, I went back as a job share in my unit manager

role. We had to sell it to them, because they'd not had a job share management role before, so, you know, we said, 'Look, this is the way it will be.'

Mike's was able to negotiate three 10 hour days per week, with the option of being available to work different shifts if needed. Both Mike and Joanne's agency at work enabled them to attain their ideal hours. While Joanne's management role gives her more power to say, "This is the way it will be," Mike has relied more on his reputation as a good worker. Mike explains:

I guess as you've worked in hospitals a long time, you get yourself into a position... They're sort of big places, but they're small enough that you know the people that are in charge of you, and they know you're a good worker, and you can say to them, 'I want this shift, this shift, and this shift.' They appreciate your work.

Mike's aptitude for keeping a tidy environment at work also transfers in to a well-organized household:

I think it's got something to do with working in an operating theater. It's a work environment, that everything's labelled, and shelves are neat and if you want a piece of equipment or you want something, you go to a shelf and it's there. It's a tidy environment, so now I've worked in operating theaters forever. So I think maybe that's – there might be something to do with it.

Mike clearly values time with his family. When asked whether he ever craved some time alone, he scoffed at the advice in a book about the men's movement in Australia written by a well-known author:

He said about how men should go off for a weekend by themselves, you know, choose like your birthday weekend or something like that, but I couldn't think of anything worse! And maybe 'cause I've got daughters as well, I couldn't relate to much of it. But, yeah, so maybe that's why I sort of can't relate to that sort of male thing, and maybe that's got something to do with not having a role model. But no, no, I'd rather spend time with my family than by myself.

Joanne and Mike reflect anti-materialist values when they discuss work and family time. They are critical of parents who prioritize work and money ahead of time with children. Joanne complains:

It does annoy me when you see people that are working, they're both working full time, and they seem to outsource their parenting. I think, 'Why have you had them?' Okay, they might live in a really nice house; they might have two nice cars, but your children are being outsourced. I must admit, actually, I thought that recently, because I've been doing the netball run... for the kids' netball training, and I'm taking this particular kid whose parents both work full time, and I'm not even getting a 'thank you,' and I think, 'What's that about?'

By deliberately deciding to work part time, the Lallys have made a conscious decision to trade off earning more money to spend more time with the family. However, their decision to earn less means that some luxuries, including overseas holidays are not currently possible. Mike explains:

I guess that's one of the things with working part time. Saving up for things like holidays, ten plus thousand dollars for airfares, is really difficult. You know, we've just given up on that sort of thing. We still have great holidays. We share a

house with some friends every year over in January. So yeah, I think those sort of things have fallen by the wayside, but it'll come again.

Joanne reports that having become less materialistic and more modest in their leisure pursuits over time has affected the types of people with whom they associate:

Before we had kids, we had a group of friends that we used to go out with, and go on holiday, or go away for weekends and things, but we've drifted away from them... They seemed to be more materialistic, still wanting the, the fast cars and the flash holidays. And so I suppose we have gravitated towards different people.

Joanne touts the bit of couple time she and Mike spend together in activities that do not cost a lot of money:

We're fortunate because we might not go out so much in the evening, but we've just had a really nice morning. We just walked the dog out to Marphet Street, and had a wander around, and gone for a coffee, so we spend different time together, but it's just as nice."

The Lally's egalitarian division of labor has developed out of their different earning capacities, Mike's background, their ability to negotiate part time employment, and their goals for family life. Mike talks about Joanne's breadwinning role as the most natural thing in the world, and, in doing so, has undone the male prerogative to be the family's breadwinner. Likewise, Joanne's willingness to let Mike to assume the role of primary carer when their first child was born debunks the idea that only mothers can be primary caregivers. Joanne's stance against gatekeeping is also an important piece of the puzzle of how they create equality:

But there are also women –someone said, 'Oh, no, no, no, no... I don't let him do that, because he doesn't do it right.' I mean, yeah, okay, I prefer to use two pegs

to hang up something on the line than one, but if it gets done, it's not really not the end of the world, is it? If you want things to change, then you have to give a little as well, whether it's your job or whether it's your housekeeping duties, you need to be respected.

In many ways Joanne and Mike's collaboration in sharing household tasks contributes to a lack of angst over whether each is doing his or her fair share. Their married life is largely devoid of the conflicts and resentments over housework that might be typical in more traditional marriages.

Given the deeply entrenched gender norms that still pervade home and family life in Australia, the Lally's story is remarkable, and clearly demonstrates how equally shared arrangements can provide positive outcomes for men, women and children. However, while Joanne and Mike contribute equally to housework and childcare, in a manner unique in Australian culture, they are outwardly dismissive of this fact. When asked why they choose to share domestic work equally, Joanne reflects, "I don't know; it's never really been an issue." Mike seems surprised at the question, "I can't believe this is interesting. Don't other families live like this?" The short answer to Mike's question is "no." Equally-sharing households are rare and difficult to find in Australia.

## Australia Country Profile

Australia is a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy. According to the 2016 census, Australia's population is approximately 23.4 million people. Although Australia is the 6<sup>th</sup> largest country in land mass, almost 80% live in the eastern states and over 2/3 live in capital cities. Australia is a culturally diverse nation with more than a quarter (26%) of the population born overseas. The top four countries that overseas-born Australians come from are the United Kingdom, New Zealand, China, and India. Approximately 3 percent of Australians identify as either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. The majority of Australians are Christian (52%), with 8.2 percent of the population affiliated with non-Christian religions, the most common of which are Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism. Thirty percent report "no religion" (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2017).

Although the Sex Discrimination Act of 1984 (Australian Government, 1984) and the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act of 1999 (Australian Government, 1999) were established to protect the rights of working women, pay equity issues persist. The gender pay gap between full-time working women and men is 14.6% (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2018). While women are on average paid less than men in Australia, more women have attained Bachelor's degrees than men (ABS, 2018a).

The 2016 Census figures show that of families in Australia, 44.7 % were couples with children, 15.8 % were single parent families, 37.8 % were couples without children, and 1.7% were other types of families. In 2016, 65 per cent of men and 56 per cent of women were employed; with men employed an average of 39 hours per week and women employed an average of 30 hours per week (ABS, 2017).

Most Australian couples with children adopt traditional or neo-traditional arrangements in which fathers work full time and often long hours, while mothers either withdraw from the

workforce or transition to part-time employment while their children are young. The proportion of couples with children in Australia who were dual-earners was 66.1 per cent in 2011. However, among these dual-earning couples, over half adopt the full-time/part-time model, whereas fewer than a third comprise two full-time working parents (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2013). This pattern of family life has been shaped by the pervasive male breadwinner ideology, but is also related to the structure of the labor market, which provides greater opportunity for part-time employment amongst service sector jobs dominated by women.

Regardless of employment hours, women spend far longer on domestic tasks than men. Women spend, on average, 24 hours per week on domestic tasks compared to approximately 9 hours per week for men (Baxter, Hewitt & Haynes, 2010). Australian longitudinal data shows that men's domestic work time remains very stable over the life course, regardless of key events such as entry to marriage and the birth of children. Women's domestic work hours, on the other hand, vary much more widely across the life course, especially increasing after the birth of a first child (Rose, Brady, Yerkes & Coles, 2015).

In 2011, Australia introduced a national Paid Parental Leave scheme. Currently it includes: Parental Leave Pay for eligible working parents, paid at the national minimum wage for 18 weeks, and The Dad and Partner Pay for eligible working fathers or partners for 2 weeks leave, also paid at the national minimum wage (Australian Government, 2018).

In 2017, 49.3% of children aged 0 to 12 years attended child care. The Australian Government provides some support to families to meet the costs of child care through the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate (ABS, 2018b). In addition, The Fair Work Act 2009 introduced a right to request flexible working hours for eligible employed parents with children

under school age (Australian Government, 2009). To date, mothers, rather than fathers, have predominantly used flexibility arrangements to care for children (Rose et al., 2015).

## References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2017). 2071.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia - Stories from the Census, 2016 . Retrieved from:  
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Snapshot%20of%20Australia,%202016~2>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2018a). 4125.0 - Gender Indicators, Australia, Sep 2018 Retrieved from:  
<http://abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4125.0~Sep%202018~Main%20Features~Education~5>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2018b). 4402.0 - Childhood Education and Care, Australia, June 2017. Retrieved from:  
<http://abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/F924A95E815CD063CA257657001619DE?Opendocument>
- Australian Government (1984). Federal Register of Legislation. Sex Discrimination Act 1984. Retrieved from: <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2004A02868>
- Australian Government (1999). Federal Register of Legislation. Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999. Retrieved from: <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2009C00329>
- Australian Government (2009). Fair Work Legislation, Fair Work Ombudsman. Retrieved from <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/legislation>
- Australian Government (2018). Department of Social Services. Families and Children.Paid Parental Leave Scheme. Retrieved from: <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programmes-services/paid-parental-leave-scheme>

Australian Institute of Family Studies (2013). Parents Working Out. Retrieved from:

<https://aifs.gov.au/publications/parents-working-out-work>

Baxter, J. Hewitt, B & Haynes, M. (2008). Life course transitions and housework: Marriage, parenthood and time on housework. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(2), 259–272.

Rose, J., Brady, M., Yerkes, M. A., & Coles, L. (2015). ‘Sometimes they just want to cry for their mum’: Couples' negotiations and rationalisations of gendered divisions in infant care. *Journal of Family Studies*, 21(1), 38-56.

Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2018). National gender pay gap at 20-year low. Australian Government. Retrieved from: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/wgea-newsroom/national-gender-pay-gap-20-year-low>