

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Jack K. Day for the degree of Master of Science in Human Development and Family Studies presented on May 12, 2011.

Title: The Slow Emergence of the “New Father”: Understanding Fathers’ Perceptions of Messages About Fatherhood.

Abstract approved:

---

Richard A. Settersten, Jr.

The concept of the “new father” has been discussed in the literature and popular media for over 25 years. Yet current studies regarding father involvement continue to show that fathers do not contribute equally to childcare and domestic labor, even among parents in dual-income families. Furthermore, as roles within families become less differentiated by gender, fathers’ roles remain ambiguous.

This study investigates fathers’ perceptions of social expectations related to fatherhood, and how expectations inform their roles and identities as fathers. This study uses qualitative data to address three central research questions: (a) Where do men receive messages about expectations of them as fathers? (b) What specific messages do fathers receive? (c) Which messages are most meaningful to fathers? Focus groups were conducted with middle-class fathers ( $n = 17$ ) in dual-income families from a small college community in the northwestern United States.

The findings suggest that messages about fatherhood conveyed through television programs are not meaningful to fathers, even though television often reflects cultural norms and social changes in family life. Many fathers in the study also do not identify with many fathers within their own community. Instead, they largely define their roles based on negotiations with their wives, and they emphasize their desire to participate

equally in caring for their children. They also turn to fathers in their most inner circles as important anchors for setting their own expectations and judging their own performance as fathers. Yet fathers suggest that *other* fathers in their community do not display the same level of commitment to fathering as themselves, and they identify persistent low social expectations for fathers as a culprit in men's failure to fully participate in family life. The problem of low expectations is also connected to what fathers see as a larger problem: one in which there are no larger social expectations or scripts to clarify what it is that men *should be* doing as fathers besides being much more than providers.

This study illustrates the importance of understanding how men construct their identities and make meaning of their roles in relation to *other* fathers, especially those within their communities, a topic that has received little attention in the literature. It also raises questions about the "new father," a concept that is no longer new but for which progress has clearly been slow. The study offers future directions for research on fatherhood, emphasizing the importance of explaining why fathers' involvement, especially in dual-income families, continues to be unequal relative to mothers. Future research also must account for how a variety of reference groups either support fathers in being more involved or, in contrast, simply perpetuate low-expectations for fathers.

© Copyright by Jack K. Day  
May 12, 2011  
All Rights Reserved

The Slow Emergence of the “New Father”:  
Understanding Fathers’ Perceptions of Messages About Fatherhood

by  
Jack K. Day

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirement for the  
degree of

Master of Science

Presented May 12, 2011  
Commencement June 2012

Master of Science thesis of Jack K. Day presented on May 12, 2011.

APPROVED:

---

Major Professor, representing Human Development and Family Studies

---

Chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences

---

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

---

Jack K. Day, Author

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With deep gratitude, I offer my appreciation to those who have encouraged and supported me throughout this study. I wish to thank my committee chair, Dr. Richard Settersten, for pushing me to think in new and challenging ways about my topic, for his countless and invaluable edits, and for his overall support and mentorship. I also wish to thank my committee members, Dr. Alan Acock and Dr. Alexis Walker, who not only guided me through the process and strengthened my study with their insight, but who have also been essential to my growth as a graduate student. I owe thanks to my friends and colleagues in the department who inspire my passion for research, and have enriched my journey through graduate school.

I also extend thanks to the fathers who shared their experiences and views of fatherhood for their significant contribution to this study. Furthermore, I would like to thank the department of Human Development and Family Sciences for their generous financial support that made it possible to complete this study.

And finally, I owe many thanks to my friends and family for their patience and encouragement. I am grateful for the strength, perspective, and balance they have provided throughout this process.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Intent of Study.....	3
Focus on middle-class fathers .....	3
Use of qualitative methods.....	4
Research Questions .....	6
Theoretical Frameworks .....	7
Symbolic Interactionism .....	7
Theoretical perspectives on gender.....	9
Theoretical perspectives on media.....	12
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	16
Historical Contexts of Fatherhood .....	16
Fathers' Involvement in Families .....	18
Persistent gendered norms .....	19
Fathers level of involvement.....	22
Representation of Fathers in Families on Television.....	25
CHAPTER 3: METHODS .....	28
Sampling Criteria .....	28
Sample Characteristics.....	29
Recruitment and Focus Group Processes.....	31
Coding Processes .....	35

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSES .....	38
Television Fathers: A Mirror of Cultural Change .....	38
Lack of Identification With Television Fathers .....	41
Setting the Bar Low: Other Fathers .....	43
Raising the Bar: Negotiating Expectations With Wives .....	49
Establishing Lasting Bonds With Children .....	52
Distinguishing from one's own father .....	54
Challenging norms of masculinity .....	56
Fathers as (Un)equal Parents .....	59
"Share all" fathers .....	59
Easing the burden" fathers .....	62
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....	64
Fathers' Comparisons to <i>Other</i> Fathers in Their Community .....	65
Other fathers as a metric .....	66
High expectations ... for some fathers .....	67
Adjusting to Changes in the Culture of Fatherhood .....	70
How Fathers Make Meaning of Their Roles .....	72
The Grip of Persistent Gendered Norms on Fathers' Roles .....	74
Fathers as men .....	76



## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Television: Model of Cultural Change, Not of Behavior .....	77
The Slow Emergence of the “New Father” .....	78
Limitations of the Study and Future Directions.....	81
Conclusion .....	86
References.....	89
Appendices.....	100
Appendix A: Recruitment Letter .....	101
Appendix B: Interview Guide.....	102
Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire.....	104

## The Slow Emergence of the “New Father”:

### Understanding Fathers’ Perceptions of Messages About Fatherhood

#### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It is challenging to unravel the complex relations among social norms of fatherhood, expectations others have for fathers, and expectations fathers have of themselves. Current literature reveals that there are higher expectations for father involvement today than in recent history, but it is less apparent *who* holds these higher expectations, and *how* expectations are communicated to men. Surprisingly few researchers have talked with men directly about their perceptions of social norms of fatherhood, how those expectations inform others’ expectations for fathers, and how they inform fathers’ expectations of themselves.

The current literature on fatherhood tells a promising story about fathers’ increased involvement in children’s lives. Yet this story has been circulating through the literature since the 1980s, and there is substantial evidence that fathers still fall well behind mothers in terms of contributions to caring for children. Even though a new kind of father has been discussed in the literature for nearly three decades, has he actually arrived? And if not, what is taking so long?

LaRossa (1988) asserts that the conduct (behaviors) of fathers must be understood in relation to the culture (shared beliefs, norms, and values) of fatherhood, and recognizes that the role of fatherhood occurs in the context of personal relationships, and broader social relationships. The culture and conduct of fatherhood are inextricably intertwined, with the culture of fatherhood framing conceptualizations of fathers, informing fathers’

behaviors, and father's behaviors reinforcing or challenging cultural norms (LaRossa, 1988). Both the conduct and culture of fatherhood change over time, but often at different rates, creating discrepancies between the perceived norms of fatherhood and fathers' experiences, which may result in potential negative outcomes for fathers (LaRossa, 1988). For example, if what is expected of fathers differs from fathers' behaviors, their performances may be evaluated negatively by themselves and by others. Some researchers suggest that fathers also face increasingly ill-defined and ambiguous roles within families (Cherlin, 2004; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000), further complicating expectations for fathers. In the absence of clear social scripts, men may look to dominant cultural models to make meaning of their roles. In this study, I use representations of fathers on television as a proxy for cultural models to engage men in a dialogue about where they receive and how they perceive expectations for fathers.

It is necessary to gain a firmer grasp on where men receive messages about expectations for fathers, and how they interpret these messages, as both have important implications for fathers' involvement in their roles. Specifically, if men perceive low-expectations for fathers, they may believe that the fathers' roles are devalued (much as women's contributions to families have been devalued in the past), and are likely to assume they are being good fathers by simply being present. However, if men perceive high expectations for fathers, yet face ill-defined roles, they may struggle with the ambiguity of what exactly is expected of them.

## **Intent of the Study**

In recent years, there has been an increase in studies regarding father involvement with children that rely on quantitative data collected from surveys and time diary analyses (Cook, Jones, Dick, & Singh, 2005; Craig, 2006; Kazura, 2000), identity formation through fatherhood (Doucet, 2006; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Palkovitz, 2002a; Palkovitz, Copes, & Woolfolk, 2001), representations of fathers in media (Day & Mackey, 1986; LaRossa, Jaret, Gadgil, & Wynn, 2000; Pehlke, et al., 2009), and qualitative studies about father's experiences with and perceptions of the role of fatherhood (Daly, Ashbourne, & Brown, 2009; Forste et al., 2009; Palkovitz, 2002a; Summers, Raikes, Butler et al., 1999). This study addresses a gap in the literature regarding father's perceptions of cultural models of fatherhood, however, especially in terms of representations of fathers in media and fathers' perceptions of social expectations.

### **Focus on middle-class fathers**

As many theorists caution, fathers cannot be grouped into a single category. Fathers' roles must be understood in terms of historical, socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and ethnic contexts (LaRossa, 1988; Mintz, 1998; Palkovitz, 2002a). Indeed, it is clear from the literature that how the ever-changing culture of fatherhood informs expectations, behaviors, and level of involvement of fathers differs depending on these contexts. Defining the subgroup of fathers at the center of the conversation offer more nuanced views on how various contexts promote or inhibit father involvement.

Although middle-class fathers have received much attention in the literature, recent studies have focused more on absentee fathers, incarcerated fathers, and fathers in low-income families. The importance of exploring how the culture of fatherhood relates to these groups of fathers should not be understated, yet it is also important to focus on fathers who are likely to most directly identify with cultural representations of fathers. As Smith (1993) postulates, the *standard North American family* (SNAF), comprised of a father as the primary breadwinner and a mother as the primary caretaker who may also be employed, is the ideological standard for all families—a standard often perpetuated by media—even though many families do not directly identify with the standard. Nevertheless, individuals from the middle-class are most likely to identify with these dominant ideologies.

This study, therefore, consists of middle-class fathers from dual-income families, as middle-class fathers are the most likely to identify with dominant ideologies of fatherhood, and to be at the forefront of changes in conduct in reaction to cultural shifts (LaRossa, 1998). Because middle-class fathers are the most likely to relate to dominant messages about fatherhood, focusing on fathers from this group provides a richer understanding of where men receive messages about expectations for fathers, what those messages are, and which messages are most meaningful to fathers.

### **Use of qualitative methods**

Engaging fathers in conversation directly is essential to advancing knowledge about fathers' participation in their families. Although quantitative data provide evidence for the amount of time fathers spend with children, qualitative data provide more nuanced

insight into the values and motivations beneath fathers' actions (Daly et al., 2009; Eggebeen, 2002; Olmstead, Futris, & Pasley, 2009; Palkovitz, 2002a; Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes, 2006).

Expectations for fathers are often still rooted in traditional ideologies that prevent men from engaging as deeply with their children as mothers, who currently serve as economic, instrumental, and emotional providers of their children. In talking to men, it also becomes clear that many feel they are less competent than women in their roles as caregivers (Gottman, 1998; Kazura, 2000; Palkovitz, 2002a), and view their financial contributions as the most valuable, both socially and to their self-identity (Doucet, 2006; Maurer, Pleck, & Rane, 2001).

Fathers themselves offer the most direct insight into how the role of fatherhood are changing, into their perceptions of what others expect of them as fathers, and in relation to messages conveyed through television's representations of fathers. Men's reflections on cultural representations of fathers on popular television programs in relation to their own experiences also provides insight into fathers' perceived identification with or divergence from social expectations for fathers.

Utilizing focus groups allows a range of fathers to engage in conversation about their views on the pertinent topics of this study. As Marsiglio (2004, p. 78) states:

[It] provides researchers with the most effective means to capture the complex, multifaceted, and subjective aspects of fathers' involvement with their children. . . . Qualitative researchers are . . . poised to explore the potentially wide-ranging and complex ways that men construct, negotiate, and experience their self-understandings as fathers over time.

Marsiglio illustrates the importance of qualitative research for more fully understanding how fathers make meaning of the role of fatherhood. Focus groups give men the opportunity to engage in dialogue with other men about their experiences of fatherhood, and provide insight into how men portray themselves as fathers, and into men's perceptions of expectations for fathers.

In summary, significant work has been done to better understand the expanding roles of fathers. The literature clearly illustrates that some fathers are assuming increasingly broad roles within families. Yet fathers do not match what mothers contribute to their families, especially in regard to domestic labor and childcare. Fathers' perceptions of social expectations provide insight into how the culture of fatherhood promotes or inhibits their participation in parental roles. Including television's representations of fathers in the dialogue serves as a way to explore one aspect of the culture of fatherhood and is a common topic upon which to engage fathers in a larger discussion about what messages they receive about expectations for fathers, and which messages are most meaningful to them.

### **Research Questions**

Although much is already known about fathers' increased involvement within families, most of what is known is based on survey data, time diary analyses and reports by spouses. The literature has largely not addressed how men construct identities as fathers and make meaning of their roles in relation to cultural messages—overarching ideologies—about expectations for fathers, and social expectations—proximal messages

about expectations for fathers communicated through others, outside of families. The following research questions guide the study:

- Where do men receive messages about expectations of them as fathers?
- What specific messages do fathers receive?
- Which messages are most meaningful to fathers?

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Symbolic interactionist theory (Blumer, 1969) provides a useful lens with which to frame the ensuing discussion. To provide structure to discussions about gender, and representations of fathers on television, I also incorporate theoretical perspectives related to gender and to media.

#### **Symbolic interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism focuses on how people refer to agreed upon cultural symbols to acquire and generate meaning (White & Klein, 2008). More specifically, the theoretical framework focuses on the relation between symbols (shared norms and meanings), and interactions (verbal and nonverbal actions and communications) (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

In this study, I integrate two classic approaches to symbolic interactionism, that of Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead. Cooley (Cooley, 1902/1956) describes that a sense of self, which he terms *the looking glass self*, emerges from a person's desire to influence and gain the approval of others. The looking glass self is influenced by how individuals perceives others' perceptions of them; the individuals' perceptions of how others evaluate them; and individuals' reactions or self-feelings



(1902/1956). Most relevant to this study, the looking glass self is established within *primary reference groups*, groups in which the individual has intimate interactions that offer relatively permanent and cooperative ties (Cooley, 1902/1956). Individuals come to identify with primary reference groups, and form a sense of “we” among individuals within them (Cooley, 1902/1956; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Subsequently, individuals “translate their feelings toward primary group members into more abstract symbols and ideals and also translate their concrete experiences into norms and values” (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 138).

George Herbert Mead (Mead, 1934/1956) discusses how mind, the social self, and society develop and are sustained through interaction. Mead conceptualizes the development of mind, self, and society as the development of the mind, specifically developing the understanding that one is an individual who can use social symbols in which to interact and form a concept of the self; the development of the social self through which people assume roles that align with their self-conception; and finally, the establishing of society through interactions and cooperation with others (Turner, 1974). Mead asserts that society, which he often refers to as *institutions*, “represents the organized and patterned interactions among diverse individuals” (Turner, 1974, p. 154). Interactions are based on the assumption that, through the development of mind, individuals are able to assume roles (*role-taking*), and in role-taking, individuals are able to control their responses, which is dependent on individuals being able to take the role of the other (Mead, 1934/1956). According to Mead, society is also dependent on individuals’ ability to evaluate themselves from the perspective of the *generalized other*

(Turner, 1974). Social meanings and norms are developed through individuals taking the role of generalized other, and being able to interpret others' responses from this perspective (Mead, 1934/1956).

Cooley and Mead's conceptualization of symbolic interaction provide two important concepts that I return to throughout the study: *Primary social groups* and *generalized others*. I also address two other important aspects of the social interaction framework: identity formation, and social roles. Specifically, I investigate how men come to construct identities—the self-meanings they apply to their roles (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993)—as fathers. Although fathers' identities are generally constructed in relation to spouses (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993), I consider how fathers construct identities in relation to other fathers, and in relation to broader social messages about fathers. Because fathers have been at the periphery of caretaking in the past, as their roles centered on providing (Blankenhorn, 1995; LaRossa, 1997; Popenoe, 1996), it is important to gain deeper understanding about the salience of men's identities as fathers, as the more strongly men identify with their roles, the more motivated they will be to excel in role-related behaviors (McCall & Simmons, 1978).

### **Theoretical perspectives on gender**

Even though fathers contribute more to childcare than in the past, mothers and fathers' roles continue to be informed by gendered norms (Cha, 2010; England, 2010; Hochschild, 1989/2003). Expectations for fathers must therefore be analyzed through a lens that accounts for gender. In the absence of a unifying gender theory, and more specifically, a unifying gender theory related to family, I employ two theoretical

perspectives—gender construction, and gender equity—to structure the ensuing discussions regarding gendered roles in families.

Although there are myriad gender theories, Coltrane's (2000) discussion of gender construction theories draws direct parallels to symbolic interactionism. Gender construction theories posit that men's and women's performance of gendered tasks "affirm and reproduce gendered selves, thus producing gendered interaction order" (Coltrane, 2000, p. 1213). The perspective also situates gender in the context of *symbolic* and *performance* dimensions (Coltrane, 2000). That is, gendered social structures constrain the roles men and women assume, and the roles are maintained through the interaction of gendered selves. Theoretical perspectives on gender construction theory, however, recognize that there is flexibility in the roles men and women assume, but emphasize that individuals do gender specific tasks to present identities that are consistent with "sex-categories" (Berk, 1985; Coltrane, 2000). These gender identities are continuously constructed and reconstructed throughout life, especially as people enter into roles, such as parenting (Osmond & Thorne, 1993).

Less directly related to symbolic interactionism, though still pertinent to this study, Chafetz (1990) theorizes that gender inequity is maintained both by macro- and micro-level forces. At the macro-level, social structures related to communities, labor markets, and political systems affect the equity of women's and men's access to valued resources and opportunities, and therefore introduce gendered stratification within societies (Dunn, Almquist, & Chafetz, 1993). When the gendered division of labor favors men, and emphasizes the value of economic resources, women are left with the

responsibility of childcare and domestic labor, even if they also work for pay (Chafetz, 1990; Turner, 2003). Within societies, patterned belief systems and behavior lead to the emergence of ideologies, which are often gendered and emphasize differences between men's and women's roles (Chafetz, 1990). Men's roles become tied to participation in the labor market (the public sphere), whereas women's roles are tied to domestic activities (the private sphere) (Chafetz, 1990; Dunn et al., 1993). Recognizing that parental roles are inherently gendered, I am especially mindful of how men talk about their roles in relation to how they talk about the roles their wives assume, as these theoretical perspectives emphasize the structural and enduring nature of gendered roles. I also focus on the perceived value placed on fathers' increased participation in roles related to childcare.

In keeping with the theoretical perspectives discussed above, I also consider how norms of masculinity inform men's roles and identities. Indeed, when talking about men as fathers, it also is necessary to talk about fathers as men. Norms of fatherhood and gender are social constructs, and both are informed by the interaction of cultural understandings of the other. Both must therefore be considered when discussing how gendered norms inform expectations for fathers and men's identities as fathers. Townsend (2002) postulates, "To see dominant values of society clearly is to understand what the members of that society must confront in their daily lives" (p. 253). Gender is socially constructed through patterns of behavior typically associated with either men or women (Lorber, 1993). Valued traits in men include instrumentality, dominance, and assertiveness, and valued traits in women include warmth, expressiveness, and concern

for others (Deaux & Major, 1990). Stated another way, “what it means to be a man is unlike a woman . . . while different groups of men may disagree about other traits and their significance in gender definitions, the ‘antifemininity’ component of masculinity is perhaps the single dominant and universal characteristic” (Kimmel, 2004, p. 97).

Norms of masculinity also inform what is deemed appropriate and expected behaviors of men, carrying social sanctions when norms are violated. Yet masculinity cannot be constrained to a singular definition. Rather, expressions of gender are situational, as “gender is a specific set of behaviors that are produced in specific social situations” (Kimmel, 2004, p. 97). If what it means to be a man is primarily rooted in antifemininity, how does this impact paternal roles within families, and the roles fathers play in their children’s lives? Or, if masculinity is situational, which aspects permeate paternal roles?

### **Theoretical perspectives on media**

Many current scholars express the need to account for how men construct their identities as fathers, especially in light of poorly defined roles and competing images of ideal fathering (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Palkovitz, 2002a). Expectations for fathers are communicated through various social spheres, including from within families (such as through multigenerational ties), close social networks, and from fathers themselves; from within communities, institutions within communities, and through peers outside of men’s close social networks; and through various forms of media.

Related to symbolic interaction theory, this study focuses on how television families offer symbolic representations of families, and how these representations become embedded in culture. Recent theories about media's relevance to sociological issues have emerged from the fields of media studies and communication. As Grindstaff and Turow (2006) argue, because television has been the focus of much research in the past six decades, it is a logical site from which to explore the complex "interrelationship between culture and institutional/organizational power" (p. 103). Indeed, there are many relevant themes related to theoretical perspectives on media that resonate with sociological studies. For example, McQuail (2005) discusses two concepts pertaining to media theory that are directly related to symbolic interactionism: *social reality* and *identity*. He describes social reality as how the world we inhabit is reflected and recreated through media with varying degrees of accuracy, and identity as how mass media informs "identity formation, maintenance, and dissolution" [p. 8]). Both of these concepts resonate with the interaction between symbols and identity in symbolic interactionism.

For better or worse, television has become a major purveyor of culture, serving as a "shared experience" between people. Theoretical perspectives on media illustrate the important role various forms of media play in the perpetuation and shaping of cultural norms (Grindstaff & Turow, 2006; McQuail, 2005). Television is one of the most pervasive forms of media, as it is widely available to people of varying socioeconomic statuses. Televisions are currently in 96% of households in the United States (World

Bank, 2009), with the average person in the U.S. watching an average of just under five hours of television per day (Nielsen, 2009).

Television shows about families have enjoyed an enduring popularity because they offer situations that people can relate to; specifically families being the main focus of the plot, and homes the central setting (Douglas, 2003). In turn, popular television characters become embedded in culture. For example, many people who lived during the 1970s and 1980s may identify Archie Bunker and Cliff Huxtable as memorable television father figures. From more recent decades, characters such as Al Bundy, Homer Simpson, Tim “the Tool Man” Taylor, and Ray Barone have emerged as popular television father figures. These fathers encompass a wide spectrum of negative and positive representations of fathers, yet they spark and add to dialogues about the culture of fatherhood. Though television fathers can be passed off as simple caricatures of real fathers, they become cultural models upon which comparisons to actual fathers may be drawn, and that people come to identify with or reject.

When social scripts are unclear, people frequently look to dominant cultural models that are often rooted in traditional ideologies (Townsend, 2002), and media may serve as a source for cultural messages with which to make sense of the roles fathers are expected to fulfill (Kaufman, 1999; Pehlke, Hennon, Radina, & Kuvalanka, 2009). Gaining men’s perceptions of the culture of fatherhood as contextualized by television shows about families provides insight into the interaction between the current culture and conduct of fatherhood. More specifically, their insights provide a more comprehensive

understanding about the relation between culture, men's expectations of themselves as fathers, and how they perceive others evaluate their performances as fathers.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I relate the study to existing literature to provide context for the findings. I begin with an overview of the literature regarding the historical contexts of fatherhood, and how contexts have changed over the past century to establish a temporal framework for the study. I then turn to research on the current culture of fatherhood, especially regarding how parental roles are still informed by gendered norms, and how this shapes fathers' roles and identities. Then I explore what is currently known about fathers' involvement within families, and how they negotiate competing demands regarding employment and family life. Finally, I conclude with a review of the literature on media's representation of fathers on television, and how these perpetuate or challenge norms regarding the culture of fatherhood.

### **Historical Contexts of Fatherhood**

Although an extensive review of the historical contexts of fatherhood is beyond the scope of this study, discussing where the study of fatherhood has been better informs the directions it should take, and provides a historical context for current conceptualizations of fatherhood. The historical paths of the culture of fatherhood are complex, and unfortunately, not well documented (Mintz, 1998; Palkovitz, 2002a), changing with economic and social shifts, as well as with shifts in attitudes and beliefs about the roles parents should play in their children's lives (Griswold, 1993; Mintz, 1998; Palkovitz, 2002b; J. H. Pleck, 1987; Rotundo, 1985).

Men's roles within families have undergone vast change over the past century. As the Machine Age, beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, influenced a shift in the

economic structure of America away from being largely reliant on farm families, the roles within families also shifted (LaRossa, 1997). In farm families of the 1800s, fathers were central figures within families, and, although they held the most authority of any family member, labor was shared by all (Blankenhorn, 1995; Mintz, 1998; Popenoe, 1996). With the changing roles of men in families associated with the Machine Age, fathers saw their position move from the center of family life to the margins (Blankenhorn, 1995; LaRossa, 1997; Popenoe, 1996). Although men were still often seen as the heads of their household, many worked long hours away from home, leaving women to be the primary caretakers of children (Griswold, 1993; J. H. Pleck, 1987; Popenoe, 1996; Rotundo, 1985). As noted by some historians, this does not mean that men were the primary caretakers of children when they were the “center of family life,” but rather that they were able to spend more time with their children, thus playing a more active role in their lives (Mintz, 1998). As women entered the labor force and gained economic independence from men, fathers have seen their role as the breadwinner for families decrease in importance (Griswold, 1993; Mintz, 1998; Palkovitz, 2002a; J. H. Pleck, 1987). During the 1960s and 1970s, single-parent families became increasingly common, with women often raising children on their own, as they were more likely than men to gain custody of children after a divorce (Cherlin, 1998/2005; Griswold, 1993; Mintz, 1998).

In the past few decades, many have raised concerns about the increasing rates of absentee fathers and the potential negative effects on children. Absentee fathers and single-parent fathers have received much attention in the literature. Researchers also

have attempted to better understand the challenges for fathers raising children independent of mothers (Cabrera et al., 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000). Additionally, recent literature focuses on the diverse nature of fatherhood, paying particular attention to divorced fathers, incarcerated fathers, stepfathers, young fathers, fathering within low-income families, minority fathers, and fathers in violent or neglectful families (Cabrera et al., 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000).

Current literature on fathers is also focused on promoting fathers' active engagement in their children's lives. Some researchers have optimistically suggested a "new breed" of father—fathers who are actively and emotionally engaged with their children, and who share equally in domestic duties with their partners—has emerged (Palkovitz, 2002a). Discussion of the emergence of the *new father* goes back nearly 25 years, when Joseph Pleck (1987) introduced the term into the literature. Since that time, popular media have increasingly used the term, often heralding the emergence of the new, involved father (E. H. Pleck, 2004). As illustrated in the following section, however, the prevalence of the new father remains unclear.

### **Fathers' Involvement in Families**

Discussions about mothers' and fathers' roles within families are still usually held within the context of how parental roles, or conceptualizations of parental roles, are shifting away from "traditional" family norms characterized by fathers as breadwinners and mothers as caretakers. In social discourse, many nostalgically refer to the image of the traditional family made popular by television shows such as *Leave it to Beaver* (LaRossa, 2004). Yet LaRossa (2004) notes that shows about families from the 1950s

did not become popular until after they ran in syndication in later decades, leading to a revisionist history of “the way families were.” Nevertheless, cultural conceptions of the “ideal family” are informed by these portrayals of families, and these interpretations of family life are embedded both in the way people talk about parental roles and in cultural expectations for parents (LaRossa, 2004, Smith, 1993).

### **Persistent gendered norms**

Many see fathers playing a larger role in their children’s lives, and in participating in childcare, as a significant step toward gender equality (Coltrane, 1996; Coltrane & Adams, 2001; Doucet, 2009). Although some argue that fatherhood weakens men’s connection to traditional masculine norms (Marsiglio, 1998), or that fatherhood encourages men to redefine what it means to be a man (Bernard, 1981), others find that having children often leads to couples assuming traditional gendered roles (Cha, 2010; Doucet, 2009; Hochschild 1989/2003; Major, 1993; Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004; Thompsen, 1991), even if the couple holds egalitarian views about the division of labor (Katz-Wise, Priess, & Hyde, 2010; Kroska, 2004). More specifically, the act of childbirth emphasizes the biological difference between mothers and fathers, and magnifies the social differences between them (Doucet, 2009). Because women give birth to children, many fathers believe they cannot establish the same connection to their children as mothers do, reinforcing the belief that there are embedded gender differences in parenting (Doucet, 2009). Many studies show that fathers feel more comfortable in the provider role, believing that they are less competent caregivers than mothers (Cherlin, 1998; Doucet, 2006; Eggeborn & Knoester, 2001; Flouri, 2005; Forste, Bartkowski, &

Jackson, 2009; Palkovitz, 2002a; Townsend, 2002; Waller, 2009). This way of thinking also reinforces the belief that mothers are primarily responsible for children, limiting the role men play in raising children (Berk, 1985; Doucet, 2009; Major, 1993; Thompson, 1991). Men and women also often use gender-specific comparisons to justify inequalities in contributions to *family work* (Major, 1993; Thompson, 1991).

Men's and women's roles often become gendered once they have children and try to negotiate responsibilities. In 1989, Hochschild explored the concept of the *second shift*, how men and women in dual-earner families negotiate the division of labor at home. At the time, she found that over 80% of the fathers in her study did not share in housework or childcare, although there were a few examples of men who were the embodiment of the *new American man*, "a lovingly involved father, a considerate husband who shares chores with his working wife, and a major family breadwinner as well" (pg. xxvi). In the introduction to the 2003 edition of her landmark work, Hochschild suggests that we are now facing a *stalled revolution*, citing that men's increased contributions to housework and childcare reached a plateau in the mid '90s, and that their levels of involvement may even be decreasing, a trend that appears to persist into the new decade (England, 2010).

Current research shows that when fathers have the opportunity to earn more money than their spouses, which also often means they must spend more time at work, mothers forego or reduce participation in paid work to care for children (Cha, 2010). The division between mothers' and fathers' roles may also be widened by the continued devaluing of activities traditionally done by women (Major, 1993), which has led to

women engaging in “male” activities that garner respect, such as paid work outside the home, but not in men engaging in work that is undervalued (England, 2010), such as childcare and domestic labor.

Although current literature suggests that middle-class fathers hold more egalitarian views in terms of the division of labor within families than in the past (Bulanda, 2004; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010), it appears that their views may have changed more drastically than their behaviors (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Sayer, England, Bittman, & Bianchi, 2009). Even in households where men and women report sharing egalitarian views about the division of labor, women still perform a disproportionately higher amount of the domestic labor and childcare than men (Berk, 1985; Craig, 2006; Hiller & Philliber, 1986; J. H. Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; Thompson, 1991).

Qualitative studies illustrate that fathers still think about their roles in traditionally gendered terms. Even when fathers are the primary caregivers of children, they seek to frame their roles in masculine terms, or to participate in masculine activities both inside and outside the home (Doucet, 2006). Fathers also tend to participate in activities with children that men have traditionally participated in, such as playing with children, participating in physical and outdoor activities, participating in extracurricular activities, and reading to and teaching children (Doucet, 2006; Eggebeen, 2002; Gottman, 1998; Rotundo, 1985; Thompson & Walker, 1989). At the same time, fathers do express that it is important to be there for their children, to be emotionally involved, and to show children that they love and care for them (Forste et al., 2009; Gottman, 1998; Mintz,

1998; Palkovitz, 2002a), yet many fathers believe that emotion, sharing, and caregiving are not socially valued (Doucet, 2006; Hochschild 1989/2002). Fathers' accounts make it clear that their experiences are complex, and that the role of fatherhood can lead to perceived contradictions in men's attitudes and behaviors (Bernard, 1981; Lamb, 1987; Townsend, 2002).

In summary, gendered roles are still influential in shaping fathers' roles within families, though it is also clear that as men play expanded roles in their children's lives, what it means to be a man also undergoes change. The literature reflects that the roles fathers assume within families are complexly intertwined with norms of masculinity. Although fatherhood may allow men to break free from masculine gender norms, or to reshape what it means to be a man, masculine gender norms may also constrain the roles men play within families and the relationships they have with their children. Men's views on what it means to be both a father and a man may help to better delineate how the two inform men's expectations of themselves as fathers, and shape what they model for their children.

### **Fathers' level of involvement**

There is little consensus within the literature as to the definition of fatherhood, fathering, and father involvement (Lamb, 2010; Palkovitz, 2002b; Roggman, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Raikes, 2002). Recognizing the challenges researchers have in defining concepts that, on the surface, appear to have self-evident definitions, it is not surprising that fathers themselves may have a difficult time defining their roles.

Near the turn of this century, parental roles became more fluid. Many factors have influenced a shift in dynamics within families. Changing demographics of families, such as the delay of marriage, increased rates of cohabitation, and an increase in single-parent families have changed the conceptualization of families (Cherlin, 2004; Goldscheider, Hogan, & Turcotte, 2006; Hernandez & Brandon, 2002; Hofferth, Pleck, Stueve, Bianchi, & Sayer, 2002). Women's increased participation in paid work outside the home has encouraged the renegotiation of family work and roles within families (Berk, 1985; Blankenhorn, 1995; Griswold, 1993; Hochschild, 1989/2003; Major, 1993; Thompson, 1991; Wilson, 1987). The changing landscape of the labor market, such as more opportunities for women in the labor market, and less opportunities for men to find stable employment and careers, partially influenced by the decrease in manufacturing jobs (Cherlin, 2005; Heinz, 2003; White & Rogers, 2000). The weakening of social norms regarding roles within families leading to ambiguous roles, influenced by changes in family formation in which the focus on relationships became companionship rather than functional differences between men's and women's roles (Cherlin, 2004).

Many of these changes have encouraged fathers to be more involved in raising children. Palkovitz (2002a), warns, however, that increased involvement of men in children's lives does not necessarily translate into being a good father, and that it is the quality of father-child relationships that truly matters to supporting children's positive development.

Current research has not reached a consensus as to how fathers have reacted to cultural shifts in which women's and men's roles have become blurred. Day and Lamb



(2004) emphasize that current researchers continue to wrestle with defining the roles men assume in families, as “men’s identities within their families seem generally less certain than ever before” (p. 2). Most research suggests that fathers have responded to cultural shifts by spending more time with children (Marsiglio, et al., 2000; Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Palkovitz, 2002a; Zick & Bryant, 1996). Women still spend significantly more time than men engaged in child care and domestic labor (Craig, 2006; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004; Mintz, 1998; Palkovitz, 2002a; J. H. Pleck, 1997), however, in addition to spending increased time in jobs outside the home (Baxter, 2002; Craig, 2006; England, 2010; Hochschild, 1989/2003; Sandberg & Hofferth, 2005).

Fathers also tend to engage in the activities valued by both parents, such as playing with, teaching, and reading to children (Craig, 2006; Lamb, 1997; Lamb & Lewis, 2004), whereas women contribute more time to the arduous day-to-day tasks that require keeping more rigid schedules (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Milkie & Peltola, 1999; Shelton, 1992). Even though women are contributing more economically to families than in the past, reflecting that women are successfully assuming roles traditionally held by men, men are not making up the difference at home.

The discrepancies in mothers’ and fathers’ contributions to families detailed above have implications not only for the workload of the partner, but also for the quality of relationships that men have with their children. These findings are surprising given that expectations for father involvement have increased, and suggest that the new father may not be as fully progressed as hoped (Duyndam, 2007). Early research on father

involvement also focuses more on the fact that fathers are spending more time with children, but do not sufficiently address how or why (Lamb, 2010; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). Recent research has begun to explain what increased father involvement looks like—for example, being companions, care providers, protectors, models, moral guides, teachers, and breadwinners (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004; E. H. Pleck, 2004; J. H. Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004).

### **Representation of Fathers in Families on Television**

The image of the nuclear family with clearly defined gendered roles still persists in western culture (Olson & Douglas, 1997; Smith, 19993; Townsend, 2002), which can be partially attributed to the portrayals of families on television (Olson & Douglas, 2007). At the same time, television shows also depict fathers playing expanded roles within their families (Kaufman, 1999; Pehlke et al., 2009). Images of fathers often change faster than behavior (LaRossa, 1988; Thompson & Walker, 1989), however, which can lead to overstated changes in fathers' behaviors (Demo & Acock, 1993).

Although studies about representations of families, and fathers specifically, in media are limited, a few researchers have provided valuable insight into this topic. Douglas and Olson (1996) recognize that trends within families are often reflected by television families' portrayal of "the American family." In the 1990s, many were concerned about the decay of the modern family, and pointed to shows such as "The Simpsons," and "Married with Children," as a reflection and perpetuation of this trend (Douglas & Olson, 1996). Beyond being a reflection of cultural understandings and attitudes about family, television families can also act as important socializing agents

(Pehlke et al., 2009), offering “implicit lessons about appropriate family life” (Douglas & Olson, 1996, p. 77). Television shows provide examples of families’ daily lives, upon which people may draw comparisons to their own lives (Olson & Douglas, 1997). Because television influences how people think and talk about families, parents may use television families as guides for their own behavior, or to determine cultural expectations of them (Douglas & Olson, 1996).

Although fathers are often depicted as playing expanded roles within families (Douglas, 1996; Kaufman, 1999; Pehlke et al., 2009; J. H. Pleck, 1997), evidence suggests that fathers still tend to assume traditional roles in television families (Douglas, 1996). An analysis of television families in the 1990s found that mothers’ and fathers’ roles were depicted as distinct from each other, and were largely divided along gender lines (Douglas, 1996; Olson & Douglas, 1997). In keeping with social trends, women on television receive more recognition in regard to their contributions to families, and are often shown participating in paid work outside the home (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). Compared to past television shows, current television fathers are shown as having higher levels of emotion-based interactions with children (Pehlke et al., 2009), and participating in a broader range of activities with children, including reading and teaching, playing, and spending quality time with children (Douglas, 1996; Kaufman, 1999; Olson & Douglas, 1996; Pehlke et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, fathers are still often portrayed as foolish and immature, and are often on the receiving end of jokes, which may propel the myth that fathers are incompetent (Pehlke et al., 2009). Also, White middle-class fathers are over-represented

in television programs (Douglas, 1996; Olson & Douglas, 1996; Pehlke et al., 2009), whereas only 25% of fathers in popular situation comedies are Black and Latino, and only one third of fathers are working class (Pehlke et al., 2009). Given the potential role television plays in shaping attitudes and beliefs about families, investigating the relationship between expectations for fathers conveyed on television, fathers' reactions to messages about the expectations, and fathers' expectations of themselves provides deeper insight into how fathers come to conceptualize and identify with the role of fatherhood.

## CHAPTER 3: METHOD

The following chapter details how data were collected and subsequently analyzed. Data were collected through four focus groups with a total of 17 fathers from a predominantly middle-class community in Oregon, and the data were analyzed using the grounded theory framework (Glaser & Straus, 1967). The qualitative methods used provide valuable insight into how fathers perceive messages about expectations for fathers, and the salience of the messages to their identities as fathers.

### **Sampling Criteria**

Fathers were recruited from three daycare centers in a small university town in Oregon. The criteria for participating in the study required that fathers:

- Were middle class, with at least a B.S. or a B.A.
- Were in dual-income families where one partner worked at least part-time (15 hours per week), and the other worked full-time (over 35 hours per week)
- Had at least one child of 2.5 years or older

Because education is a common indicator of socioeconomic status, and higher levels of education are associated with better work opportunities and higher incomes, fathers were required to have at least a B.A. or B.S. Education is only one of various indicators related to socioeconomic status, however, and therefore does not accurately reflect all the resources that determine SES (Corwyn & Bradley, 2005).

Fathers were required to be in dual-income families to address the issue of the division of labor in families where both parents have obligations related to paid work outside the home. Because women entering the workforce is often cited as one of the

major catalysts of change in the gendered division of labor, this study focuses on men who must negotiate roles with wives in families where one parent works full time (over 35 hours per week), and the other parent works at least part time (15 hours per week).

Fathers were required to have a child of 2.5 years or older, because men tend to become more engaged in their roles as children grow older (Lamb & Lewis, 2004).

Fathers therefore had experiences to draw upon to enter into a dialogue with other fathers. Also, because I am interested in how gendered norms inform fathers' behavior, fathers with children over the age of 2.5 were targeted for this study. Research on child development shows that children begin to display *gender typing*, developing gendered roles and behaviors, by the age of 18 months (Serbin, Poulin-Dubois, Colbourne, Sen, & Eichstedt, 2001), and that children begin to regulate other's behavior based on gendered stereotypes after about age 3 (Poulin-Dubois, Serbin, Eichstedt, Sen, & Beissel, 2002). If children are becoming more aware of gender by these ages, it is likely that fathers are also conscious of the messages they transmit about gendered roles to their children.

### **Sample Characteristics**

Fathers were sampled from a town with a population of 49,322, of which 86% are White; with an average family size of 2.88; with a median family income (in 1999 dollars) of \$53,208; and in which of the population 25 years or older, 93% have graduated at least high school, and 53.1% have a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The town is also home to a university, hospital, and a prominent technology company that generally hires highly educated engineers.

All of the childcare centers from which fathers were recruited serve similar populations. Families with children enrolled are typically middle class, although each program offers subsidized rates for low-income families. Most families served are dual-income, with parents primarily employed by organizations in the technology sector, medical field, or academia.

Table 1.

*Basic characteristics of participants (n = 17)*

	<u>M (sd)</u>	Range
Age of participant	40.5 (4.6)	35-50
Number years married	8.8 (2.5)	3-13
Number of children	2.0 (0.5)	1-3
Age of children	3.7 (1.6)	0.8-8
Hours work per week	42.6 (13.8)	15-70
Hours partner works per week	33.4 (9.1)	20-45

Participants ranged in age from 35-50 years old, with a mean age of 40.5. All of the participants were currently married, and most had between two and three children, all under the age of 8. None of the fathers had children not currently living with them. Fourteen of the fathers worked 40 hours or more per week, and eight of their wives worked between 20 and 30 hours per week, with the other nine working between 40 and 45 hours per week. One father reported working 70 hours a week, though treating this case as an outlier only lowers the mean hours fathers report working per week to 40.9 hours. Although five participants reported working 50 hours or more per week, none

reported that their wives worked over 45 hours per week. Eight of the fathers had careers in academia; one was a pediatrician, with the remaining eight working in the technology sector.

Nine of the participants reported not belonging to any religious affiliation, with the other eight reporting being Christian, Catholic, Jewish, Methodist, or Unitarian, though only one father, whose wife was a priest, brought up religion during the focus groups. Twelve of the participants identified as Democrats, one as Republican, and the remaining four as Independent or other. Sixteen of the participants were White, and one was Black. Fathers were not asked their ethnicity on the demographic questionnaire, therefore, there might be other unknown variability in the racial and ethnic characteristics of the sample.

### **Recruitment and Focus Group Processes**

To recruit fathers, staff at each center sent out letters (see Appendix A) to families inviting fathers to participate in the study. The letter informed fathers that the study consisted of focus groups to engage fathers in conversation about their perceptions of representations of fathers on television, and their own experiences of fatherhood. The letter conveyed the title of the study, “The Ideal Father? Television Fathers and Experiences of Fathers Today.” This title may have dissuaded fathers who identify an ideal for fathers, and believe they do not meet the ideal, from participating in the study. Because fathers were allowed to self select into the study, however, more active and engaged fathers were more likely to express interest in participating, and therefore the title likely had a minimally negative impact on recruitment. Fathers were asked to return



the letter along with their contact information if they were interested in participating in a focus group. I contacted each father, confirmed they met the requirements for the study, asked for their availability, and then placed them in a focus group based on availability. Focus groups were held once at least four fathers had been scheduled for the group.

Focus groups were held at each of the childcare sites to accommodate fathers' participation in the study. Four focus groups were held in total, each with a range of 3-6 participants (one father who was scheduled for a focus group was a no show, resulting in one group of three), with a total sample of 17 fathers. Although typical focus groups consist of 5-10 participants, they often range in size (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The size of the focus group should be limited so that the group does not become fragmented, and so that everyone has the opportunity to voice their opinions and insights, but also needs to be large enough to provide a diversity of views (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Morgan, 1996). The number of focus groups necessary is also determined by saturation of responses. Three to four focus groups are usually adequate for reaching saturation of responses (Krueger & Casey, 2009), and saturation of responses between homogeneous groups tends to occur after three focus groups (Morgan, 1996).

In the case of this study, saturation of responses was reached for the pertinent topics (e.g., perceptions of expectations for fathers; reactions to representations of fathers on television; how fathers identify with their roles; the roles fathers assume within families) with the fourth group. Four groups were adequate to determine that responses given were no longer unique, and it was therefore not necessary to collect more data. This determination was made based on discussions between myself, the moderator of the

focus groups, and a note taker, a graduate student who was present for each of the groups, and on a preliminary analysis of the transcripts. A debriefing meeting was held at the conclusion of each group between the note taker and myself, consisting of discussions about trends in the conversations, general observations, and particular points or topics that were immediately salient (e.g., how fathers reported high levels of engagement for themselves, and relatively low levels of engagement for other fathers; lack of identification with television fathers). In the later groups, we discussed common topics and responses that emerged within and across groups. These meetings, and a preliminary review of the transcripts, revealed that the data collected was sufficient to continue on with analysis.

Focus groups were held within large classrooms at each of the centers. To facilitate conversation between participants, fathers were seated around a table with myself, and a recorder at the center of the table. The note taker sat beside the table and was primarily responsible for recording the first few words of each participant's responses so conversations could be tracked in the transcripts. The note taker also recorded observations about the general tone of conversations, and relevant nonverbal communication, such as when participants nodded in agreement, or if participants appeared to disengage from conversations. These notes were used to recall the context and tone of the conversations during coding.

Conversations were recorded once informed consent was obtained, at which time groups began with basic introductions, by the end of which fathers seemed to ignore the presence of the recording device. Participants were asked questions based on a loosely-

structured interview guide (see Appendix B). The focus groups were structured to have sufficient flexibility to allow the conversations to influence the flow and course of the discussion. Consequently, questions were not always asked in the same order, or with the same prompts across groups, but all core questions were asked. The groups ran between 85-100 minutes, and a brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) was administered at the end of each group. Participants were provided with a \$15 gift card as compensation for their time.

One of the main challenges in moderating each group was allowing each father to contribute adequately to the conversations. Some men tended to dominate the conversations, whereas others tended to be more reserved. I encouraged men to give a response to each question by asking them their thoughts directly before moving on to another question. Doing so prevented the conversations from being dominated by one or two men, and resulted in a range of responses on each topic. Because the study was conducted in a small community in which families typically move between childcare centers, some of the men knew each other prior to the focus groups. Therefore, I was particularly mindful to not let those who had relationships with other participants prior to the focus group, and who may have been more comfortable contributing because of having established relationships, to dominate the focus groups. These relationships could have also hindered fathers from contributing openly in front of their peers, though fathers were more likely to talk early in the groups if they knew someone else in the room. The fathers could have also been trying to present themselves positively to their peers, and therefore may have exaggerated the positive aspects of their parenting.

## Coding Processes

The discussions from the focus groups were transcribed from the audio files (two of the transcriptions were prepared by a professional transcriber), and then transcripts were entered into MaxQDA2 for coding. A separate transcript was created for each focus group.

In keeping with the grounded theory approach to analyzing qualitative data, I utilized a deductive-inductive approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to coding. Transcripts were coded in multiple phases: First, transcripts were coded from general codes generated based on questions posed during focus groups; second, emergent themes were identified, new codes were developed based on the themes, and transcripts were recoded based on the new codes; third, transcripts were analyzed to compare and contrast the most pertinent themes. During the first two phases of coding, each transcript was coded separately. After emergent themes were identified, I returned to the transcripts multiple times to compare and contrast themes, and their salience, between and within groups. I focused on individual sections within transcripts containing pertinent themes, and compared relevant themes across transcripts. This approach resulted in a coding procedure in which two of the phases were often used at one time, and in more than three distinct phases of coding. As LaRossa (2005) recognizes, analysis of qualitative work is a cyclical, nonlinear process in which one or more phases of coding may be utilized at any given time.

Following coding processes suggested by Glaser (1978), and Strauss and Corbin (1998), the first phase of coding focused on *open coding*, in which the transcripts were

“broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Codes were generated based on questions asked during the groups. For example, fathers were asked, “as a father, what are the most important roles you play?” Responses to this question were coded as *co-parenting*, as they address the negotiation of roles between mothers and fathers, and the roles fathers assume in families. Additionally, responses not directly related to the question, but about co-parenting and the negotiation of roles also receive this code, and multiple codes were applied to a response when appropriate. For example, the code *co-parenting* would be applied to the following response:

My spouse was part-time like a year ago and now she’s full-time and it really kind of changed things. When she was part-time it was actually in the evenings when I got home because she’d be like, ‘Okay, here. I’m done, you know. I’m going to go walk around the block or something,’ you know which I can totally understand. But now that like we’re both working full-time, it’s a little bit easier to be equitable.

This quote illustrates how parents must continually negotiate roles, especially in response to changes in employment, to effectively co-parent and to maintain equity.

As another example, fathers were asked about the expectations they perceive others have of them as fathers, and expectations they have of themselves. Two codes were developed based on given responses: *Expectations of others* and *expectations of self*. The code *expectations of self* would be applied to the following response:

I’d be the type of dad that my kids trust so that they have someone to follow and someone there where you can look for them and there’s enough of a relationship there ‘cause you’ve been there. You’ve helped them out with all the stuff they need help, you know what I mean? I feel like the distant dads maybe miss a lot out of a relationship, and there is a kind of issue with that.

This participant discusses the type of father he wants to be for his children, but he also compares himself to other fathers. This response, therefore, illustrates an emergent theme: how fathers evaluate themselves versus how they evaluate others, a theme that is explored in more depth during the second and third phases of coding.

During the second phase of coding, broader codes were developed to capture emergent themes. Transcripts were then analyzed to compare participants' responses to identify points of agreement, and where responses tended to differ. For example, it became apparent from participants' responses that most of the fathers in the groups saw themselves as sharing all the responsibilities of childcare and domestic labor, and other fathers as simply "easing the burden" of wives by lending a helping hand. This led to the development of two codes, *share all fathers* (fathers that report sharing all responsibilities with their wives), and *easing the burden fathers*. The code *share all fathers* would be applied to the following response, "we're also split everything. Well, we split the kid side of things 50-50," whereas a response about "lending a helping hand with childcare" would receive the code *easing the burden fathers*.

The third phase of coding often overlapped with the second phase. These two phases of coding were therefore not treated as distinct, and often occurred simultaneously. During these phases of coding, I focused on one or two themes at one time, applied relevant codes within individual transcripts, and then compared coded segments across transcripts. Transcripts were analyzed based on themes to identify those that were the most salient and common, and findings were then compared to the existing literature.

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSES

Focus groups generated rich conversations between fathers, and provide valuable insight into how fathers determine expectations of them, and how they identify with their roles. I begin the chapter by exploring men's reactions to broad cultural representations of fathers, and their perceptions of messages about expectations for fathers conveyed through the representations. Then I examine men's reactions to expectations conveyed through their community—both the community at large, designated by geographic location, and the community of other fathers with whom participants regularly interact. Next, I turn to men's perceptions of how they negotiate expectations of each parent with their wives, and establish expectations of themselves based on their own values. I conclude with an analysis of how fathers' expectations of themselves, and others' expectations for fathers, inform the roles they assume within families.

### **Television Fathers: A Mirror of Cultural Change**

Television fathers are one potential source for messages about expectations for fathers, as television is a prevalent part of culture within the United States. Fathers were therefore asked to recall television fathers, past or present, and identify those that they believe are representations of good fathers, and not-so-good fathers. Participants were also asked how they identify with the representations of fathers on television. Although participants generally agree that the primary function of television is to entertain, some men in the focus groups emphasize that television shows also offer a reflection of culture, and about perceptions of a father's place within families.

Many of the participants recall shows from the 1950s and 1960s, where fathers were rarely seen interacting with their children outside of the capacity of giving advice or being the disciplinarian. Fathers in the study note that in shows from this era, such as *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*, the fathers spent most of their time away at work, fulfilling the provider role. Many participants say that it was not until the 1980s that major changes were seen in the representations of fathers on television. They also note that these changes mirrored a change in cultural expectations for fathers—specifically that the focus on fathers primarily being the provider for the family shifted towards more value being placed on fathers’ increased engagement with children. Sean discusses how the fathers in these shows differed in their representations of fathers from shows in the past:

Like the two that I mentioned [*The Cosby Show*, *Family Ties*] were kind of back in the ‘80s and seemed like those were much more of a counseling type of relationships. The dad was always as much as the mother in those two sitcoms that I remember they were dealing with the problems of the kids and, as much as the mothers were, which is probably a real departure from earlier shows that, you know, ‘50s, ‘60s, where the man was not necessarily there, not necessarily accessible, so that was . . . a cultural shift I would imagine from what was there before.

Building off Sean’s response, Kevin elucidates the accompanying cultural shifts:

I think that parallels what is actually happening in culture. . . . I mean, [in hospitals] they would whisk the kids away and put them in the nursery, and [fathers would] look at them through glass, and it’s, in terms of the mother-father roles, very different. You know, the father was not as involved and tended to be, you know, go to work and home, and almost the classic *Leave it to Beaver* style. Whereas now . . . my impression is that fathers are a lot more engaged, you know in the activities I see . . . when I come to the events here [at school] with the kids, 50-50 fathers and mothers attending. . . . So I think there’s definitely been a shift in society



as well where the kids aren't just, you know, it's not segregated between the parents.

Both Kevin and Sean illustrate a common theme that ran throughout the focus groups: representations of fathers became more progressive in the 1980s, during a period of time when fathers were expected to be more involved with caring for their children in response to women spending more time in paid work.

In the 1980s, television fathers such as Bill Cosby's character, Cliff Huxtable, set high expectations for fathers. As Kevin describes:

Well [Cliff's] more modern in the sense that he shares responsibilities, shares the job, shares the daycare, the house cleaning, the cooking. He was supposedly the ideal dad at the time, giving the kids what they needed, but also just planning and helping out.

Yet some of the men in the study also assert that Cliff sets ideals that are unrealistic, highlighting that each episode is neatly contained within 30 minutes with issues being resolved by the end of the show. They note that, for the most part, Cliff always had the right thing to say when addressing his children's issues. Both Cliff and Claire, his wife, also had professional careers, yet both still had plenty of time to devote to their children. The characters therefore set the expectation that both parents should be successful in their careers, and spend ample time being actively and emotionally involved with their children. Although many of the fathers in the study believe this is a good expectation to have of fathers, they also recognize the reality that life is more challenging than portrayed on the show, that it is difficult to find the time and energy to be successful within each of these spheres, and, as a few participants note, that this is a particularly difficult ideal for fathers of lower socioeconomic statuses to meet.

Participants also brought up shows such as *Mad Men*, a current show set in the 1960s, which prompt them to reflect on cultural change. Alan says of the show:

So in *Mad Men* being in a different era, there is clearly an expectation that [fathers] need to be successful as business people, and they need to be the primary alpha figure in the family, and even at work or wherever. You know there's, that's probably something that was real in the '60s, and I mean sure that's real to some extent today, maybe it even leaks over to, there's maybe a latent expectation like that now . . . but now of course layered on top of that fathers are expected to be way more engaged with their kids, you know, than they were in the past.

Many fathers in the groups echo the sentiment that *Mad Men* provides insight into the way things were for their fathers' generation, and about how much the role of fatherhood have changed. Specifically, the men in the groups still strive to be successful in their careers, but not at the expense of their family. Even though many participants say that television shows reflect cultural shifts and trends, they do not identify with the characters on television.

### **Lack of Identification With Television Fathers**

The fathers in this study are quick to emphasize that at its best, television simply offers a depiction of current social trends within families (though I recognize these depictions most often relate to changes within middle-class families). Television fathers are not seen as models for behavior, and the participants stress that they do not receive messages about how to be as fathers from television. Participants also suggest that television fathers only convey the entertaining side of parenting—they are meant to be comedic, and therefore over the top and unrealistic. Keith explains:

[M]y wife will tell me about an episode of *Raymond* she saw, and you know, there's several father-child relationships in there, right? There's

several generations and they're all pretty outlandish in some respects, and that's where the humor lies . . . Again, because it's so over the top, it's not like it's being applied to me. It's like, "oh yeah, that's kind of funny. That's like this thing that happened on *Raymond*, and this is the scenario," but it's so outlandish that it's definitely not anything that is applicable or used as a metric for anything I do.

Participants are unable to recall any shows that depict the reality of the day-to-day life of families, as they do not show all the housework and menial chores that fathers do.

Surprisingly, many of the fathers in the study identify fathers such as Al Bundy and Homer Simpson, who are often associated with negative portrayals of fathers, as the most realistic representations, because they depict imperfect fathers who are dealing with issues of everyday life.

Interestingly, some men feel that television tends to get what mothers do around the home right. That is, they are seen balancing all the tasks that women tend to manage in real life. Some participants also mention that their wives are more likely to watch television shows about families, as their wives enjoy laughing at characteristics of their own families, and especially their husbands, displayed on the shows.

Even though fathers do not identify with the characters on television, they have much to say about television fathers, some positive, some critical. All of the participants are able to generate a list of television fathers, and identify those that are good and not-so-good fathers, thereby underscoring the fact that television fathers are a part of cultural knowledge. Most fathers in the study feel that television fathers do not depict the complexity of fathers' roles, or the full range of activities in which some fathers engage, and are often portrayed as bumbling buffoons when it comes to childcare, therefore

setting low expectations for father involvement. Many of the participants do not take the representations seriously, however, because the characters are meant to entertain.

In summary, the participants recognize that television fathers offer insight into cultural understandings about expectations for fathers, and their assumed place within families, as television shows often reflect cultural norms. Yet the men do not identify with the television fathers in meaningful ways. Although some feel that television fathers are a missed opportunity for providing positive representations of fathers, they do not believe this is the purpose of television. The participants maintain that, with the rare exception of television fathers such as Cliff Huxtable, television currently reflects low expectations for fathers, a trend they often see within their own community.

### **Setting the Bar Low: Other Fathers**

Distal messages about expectations for fathers may also come from others in the participants' community. In this discussion, community is treated on three levels: First, as a physical location that provides opportunities for fathers to interact with others, and provides opportunities for employment (e.g., the town fathers live in, and the resources and opportunities available within the town); second, as a community of *generalized others* from whom fathers remain distant (e.g., other fathers participants interact with occasionally, but who are not considered a part of participants' close social networks); and third, as a community of other fathers participants consider their *primary reference group*, because they share similar ideals, and with whom participants therefore align (e.g., fathers who participants interact with regularly, and who are considered a part of participants' close social networks).

The jobs available to the participants are an important aspect of the community. Fathers' jobs support them in being more active and engaged with their children by allowing flexibility in schedules, providing financial security, and by providing men with a network of fathers who share in and reinforce their ideals. Men's discussion about how their occupations support them in being more involved fathers suggests that the *new father*—the involved father who shares equal responsibility of home and childcare with wives—may be an ideal most easily obtained by middle-class fathers. That is, men with more education and higher paying jobs are more likely to have the flexibility to choose to spend less time at work to spend more time with children, and to be better able to support their wives in their careers. For example, Curtis explains how his career allows him to spend more time with his children:

I can technically, right, I can take off during the day. I take my daughter to the park if I want to, if the need suits me, and once again I'm more established, well okay, not faculty, but you know what I mean? . . . [I]t allows me a special privilege that not everybody has because of my occupation, and I'm deeply, deeply thankful for that.

About half of the fathers in the study have careers in academia, where work schedules are especially flexible. Some of the fathers report only working 3.5 days a week in order to spend time as the primary caretaker of children. Surprisingly, one father commented that he does not announce this fact at work, suggesting that these fathers may have more progressive ideals than their peers. This reluctance to divulge choosing family over work could also be attributed to coworkers who do not have families, however, and therefore negatively judge those who choose to do so.

Some men also relate that other fathers at their place of work do not express the same level of dedication to their families as the participants do. It was common for fathers to comment on how other fathers find it easier to take time for themselves, go out after work, or spend time with friends at the expense of spending time with their families. Alan describes the differences in his attitude versus some of his coworkers' attitudes about spending time with friends and away from families:

And then there's other family units that function differently, and so maybe they're, that father is free every night, you know, for whatever reason. And to them there might be a perception like, "Well why aren't all fathers free every night?" You know, that kind of thing. Not that . . . I think most of us that are involved big time want to be, but it's funny when you're, just see a mismatch between how other people think, assume that stuff's working.

For many of the participants, being more involved is a choice they want to make, not an expectation that is held by others. Many participants suggest that expectations for fathers differ among their coworkers, and that there is significant variation in how involved fathers are in caring for their children.

The fathers' conversations about expectations of them held by others in their community are complex, and seemingly contradictory. On the one hand, some men claim to be unconcerned about what generalized others expect of them as fathers, as they are doing the best they can, and largely feel they are successfully fulfilling their roles as fathers, especially compared to other fathers. On the other hand, participants' assertions that they use others as a comparison group illustrates that fathers are comparing themselves to other men, so to a degree, they care about how they measure up to other fathers.

Participants suggest that they hold higher expectations of themselves regarding their roles within their families than are held for other fathers, and than other fathers hold for themselves.

Many of the participants suggest that a lack of clearly defined norms sets low expectations for fathers. Additionally, fathers, such as Kevin, assert that expectations for fathers are set low, not only by television fathers, but also by others within their community:

I think it's hard, though, I mean because you have expectations of fatherhood which sometimes are devalued on TV and then other people are sort of patronizing. . . . I guess I really don't care what they think as long as my wife and kids are happy, you know, just doing what I think is best for them.

Kevin refers to the struggle of engaging in a role, that of an involved father, that is often devalued by others within his community, and expresses what many of the fathers feel, that ultimately the most important opinion is that of their wives. Sean illustrates this point, "So I think there are expectations, you know, that I don't just bale on the kids makes me a good dad to people external to the family." Sean goes on to say that his wife expects him to be with the children equal time as her, and identifies a large gap between expectations of others and expectations from within his family.

Participants express surprise at how little *other* fathers do within their own families, and perceive that it is often considered enough for fathers to simply be present without taking on equal responsibilities with their wives. Brad shares his view about the dynamics of other families:

Honestly I'm not just using this expression, "Well I know a couple who..." [but I know couples] where everything is really sort of very, very kind of tit-for-tat in a way that I find odd because it's especially sort of anything that the husband does for the kid is considered extra. Like anything you know outside of just the sort of basics is sort of extra for which he then expects immediate kind of, "Well then I get to take the next night off," or something bizarre. Whereas on the other hand the expectation is that sort of she does everything unless he steps in to shoulder some burden.

It was common for the participants to evaluate other fathers negatively compared to themselves, with the exception of when they talked about most fathers in their close social networks.

Men also talk about how their wives use other fathers as a metric for how their own husbands are doing as fathers—again emphasizing that their wives believe that other fathers are not doing nearly as much of the childcare and domestic labor (Although fathers were not explicitly asked about their participation in domestic duties, the topic came up naturally in the discussions), as their own husbands. Joe relates:

My wife and I regularly compare how I do compared to our groups of friends, who's around seven days a week at a time, how much do I watch the kids versus my other friends that are dads.

Many participants report being more active, involved, and helpful than other fathers, even some fathers in their primary reference groups. Many men also said that those in their primary reference group set high expectations for fathers. For example, Will says:

There's a lot of people in [town name] that are likeminded, similar-minded, nurturing, focused on the family and successful, driven to success, driven to high achievement. . . . That's why I think the expectations of me as a father among my peers or among my close social network would be high-achieving. So what I feel, and actually that's one of the things I like about my close social network, is I associate with high achievers and I feel that a synergy as a supporting mechanism continues



through the network, which I think is probably an expectation that we all bring to those to help kind of instill that in our children.

Fathers in Will's close social network set the expectation that fathers be successful and driven in their careers, and that they also to be present and engaged with their children.

Participants note that expectations of them as fathers are established and reinforced by surrounding themselves with others who share their same values and ideals, such as

Gordon:

I guess people don't like to talk about it, but you're selective. You know, there's people that you kind of associate with and so forth, and there's people that you don't. And I don't wish any ill on them, but I don't really care what they're doing. We're still going to kind of be birds of a feather flock together, and that's the reason we want to hang out with people that have the same kind of values, are raising their kids the same way. And that's one of the nice things about [town name] is there are a lot of people like that around here.

Gordon emphasizes that the community supports these fathers in realizing their expectations, as they are able to selectively align themselves with other fathers who share their values. , establishing and reinforcing expectations with a select group of fathers defines fathers' roles, rather than the roles being influenced by higher order expectations.

In summary, the fathers in this study appear to hold higher expectations of themselves than they perceive are held for fathers in general. Some of the fathers' comments suggest that many fathers within their community are not as fully engaged or committed to sharing parental responsibilities with their partners. Fathers' increased involvement seems to largely be attributed to these men wanting to be fully engaged with their children because it is important to them, and they view it as the right thing to do, even though they do not see it as the norm.

### **Raising the Bar: Negotiating Expectations With Wives**

According to participants, the most prevalent source of expectations come from within men's families, and more specifically, from negotiations with wives. As roles within families shift, the traditional notion of fathers primarily being the provider has also undergone significant change, leaving expectations for fathers largely determined by their circumstances. For some of the fathers, such as Brad, not having a role that is defined by being the provider leads to ambiguity as to what is expected of them:

It's stressful, but I think [the gendered division of labor] was the norm for so long that there is a certain kind of built-in validity to it, and also it takes a certain amount of the guesswork out of it. . . . [M]y wife and I will agree sometimes it's actually easier for one of us to be taking care of both kids because you don't have to negotiate. You don't have to figure out who's doing what . . . I think there's a great, big psychic cost to that sort of real, you know, division of gender labor, but I think certainly it does make it easier in some ways.

Without the gendered division of labor, expectations for fathers, and mothers, are determined by negotiations between both parents. This is often a welcome change for fathers, as all the participants express that they want to play more active roles in parenting and to have closer relationships with their children. At the same time, this requires fathers to learn as they go, as they are left without social scripts to draw upon to help structure their roles. This ambiguity often leads to more stress in that fathers are left without a clear sense of their roles within their families. Curtis expresses some of the implications of the social changes:

Okay, so this [being more engaged] is supposed to be a better way to be a dad, right? But does it end up putting more pressure on us to be the model dad, where we are not only responsible for being a breadwinner . . . we're supposed to have that role and we're supposed to be the caring father.

Now you know obviously working two or three jobs, you know exhausting and all that, and I don't want to call that simplistic of, the man knew he was the provider, and that, he did that so that the wife would stay home and raise the kids, and so the role was very clear. . . . [N]ow I don't buy into the idea that that was the way that it worked. I think that was a stereotype and I think there was a lot more give and take than maybe what we remember.

With the traditional provider role came the perception of clear divisions of labor between men and women, even though this was not necessarily the reality.

Nevertheless, many of the participants voice that having clearly defined roles, such as those defined by gendered norms, simplify negotiations within families, making parental roles easier to fulfill because expectations for each parent are clear. Curtis' comments also suggest that expanded roles come with added pressures associated with taking on multiple roles beyond being the provider, a sentiment echoed by many of the fathers. Stewart describes how responsibilities shift and must be negotiated when both parents have jobs:

My spouse was part-time, like a year ago, and now she's full-time and it really kind of changed things. When she was part-time . . . when I got home . . . she'd be like, "Okay, here. I'm done . . . I'm going to go walk around the block or something," which I can totally understand. But now that, like, we're both working full-time, it's a little bit more easier to be equitable.

Stewart relates that he and his wife had to renegotiate roles within their family when his wife went back to work full-time. At the same time, both parents working full-time makes it easier to maintain equitability because both parents have the same amount of responsibility outside the home, meaning each parent has to—or should—contribute equitably at home. (Throughout this chapter, I intentionally use the term "equitable," as

this is the term use by most fathers. In the discussion, I will discuss the implications of and problematize the use of this term.)

The fathers emphasize that it is necessary for both parents to take on multiple roles within families, and for there to be little to no differentiation between what each parent contributes. Adam notes:

I think back then it was the wife, you know, the standard of living was such that you could actually have a comfortable living with one person making an income, and I know in our case, a dual-income is almost a necessity these days, and all the pressures that go along with it. And, as a result, you're seeing both parents taking on roles that you didn't see demonstrated [back then]. I mean, I do the kitchen, I do the cleaning, I do the laundry, I do whatever I can, and so does my wife. We try and do it together.

Although many of the participant's families could subsist on one income when they were children, most families today need two incomes to support their lifestyles (more accurately, middle-class families often need two incomes to support their lifestyles, whereas families in lower socioeconomic groups may need two incomes just to get by), which encourages both parents to reconceptualize their roles.

The fathers also emphasize that they welcome the expanded roles they play within their families, and that the support of their wives helps them successfully fulfill these roles. To maintain equitability in their roles, both parents are involved individually with their children. The fathers also stress the importance of spending time as a family. The purpose of spending time with children, individually and as a family, is two-fold: for each parent to establish strong relationships with their children; and to support both parents in working outside the home. The apparent message from the conversations with

the fathers in this study is that within their own families, husbands and wives support each other, both at home and in their careers.

In summary, it is clear from the discussions that the fathers in this study do not identify with the provider role. Though they still see providing as one aspect of their roles as fathers, it is one also shared with their wives. Instead, they view themselves as co-parents who share in all parenting roles equally with their wives. That is not to say that all the fathers necessarily contribute to their families equally, or that all the fathers are alike in how they negotiate the division of labor with their wives. Most importantly, given the ambiguous roles facing fathers, the participants express that it is difficult for them to balance all their roles, especially without clear expectations and social scripts for each parent.

### **Establishing Lasting Bonds With Children**

Conversations with participants reveal that their identities as fathers, and most expectations about the type of father they should be, are self-created. The fathers strive to be multifaceted parents engaged in all aspects of parenting, and express the importance of being there for their children from the beginning, not only to maintain equality, or even equitability, with their wives, but also to establish lasting emotional bonds with their children. Yet the fathers rarely discuss the specific activities they engage in with children, especially in regard to day-to-day care. Rather, they talk in broader terms about what they do as a parent now, always with an eye to the future. In answering the question about the type of fathers the men want to be, Will responds:

I would like to be one that instills a connection long-term, you know, because I'm not going to be around them always . . . I want to instill some sense of not needing me, but [being] interested and aware of a loving relationship, a bonding relationship there, and then I would say to build a base for having an enthusiastic, effervescent spirit about life, not being afraid.

Like many of the fathers in the study, Will is most concerned with the type of people his children will become. The fathers strive to establish emotional bonds with children to provide them with the support they need to take risks and to make their own decisions down the road, and to develop lasting relationships with them that will continue to develop as their children grow older. For example, Kevin relates:

I'd be the type of dad that my kids trust so that they have someone to follow and someone there where you can look out for them and there's enough of a relationship there because you've been there for them. You've helped them out with all the stuff they need help with and so you know what I mean? Like I feel like the distant dads maybe miss a lot out of a relationship, and there is a kind of issue with that, it's like the mom has to kind of do it because you don't really have the dialogue with your children

Many of the participants talk about having to make a concerted effort to build relationships with their children that are based on trust and support. The participants recognize that emotional and nurturing relationships are most often fulfilled by mothers, and express that more distant fathers “miss out” by not establishing deeper relationships with their children.

Interestingly, the fathers in the study often relate that being the more involved and emotionally engaged father has not been modeled for them. They most easily point to places where they *do not* get messages about being the type of fathers they want to be. Television, other fathers in their community, and their own fathers often fall short of the

standards and ideals that they hold for themselves. Participants' expectations of themselves, and their desire to be good role models as men and as fathers, is largely driven by the men trying to be different, often better, parents than their own fathers were.

### **Distinguishing from one's own father**

The fathers in the study reference their own fathers as models to live up to, or as models for how they want to do things differently. Adam relates how he wants to be a more engaged father than his own was:

[T]o me it's something that goes away from both what my wife and I grew up with. In other words, distant fathers and distant parents. And so we're both trying to, like you said, make a conscious decision to do just the exact opposite.

Later he explains further:

I mean, the roles that I saw my father and mother play were very distinct, and I want [my children] to see me differently, and I want them to know that perhaps I care about them more than I perceived my parents cared about me. And that means I take on a lot of roles. I take on a role of a father who shows boundaries, like, these are boundaries, this is how you act, these are good things these are bad things, morals and ethics and so on. And then also to know that if they want to come and cry on my shoulder, they can come cry on my shoulder. I mean, being a comforter, if you want to call it that, that those are the kinds of things . . . those are the roles that I think both my wife and I are very aware of, keenly. And so, I think in a broad sense then, it's just, we both are very aware of what has happened to us and how we don't want our daughters to go through the same thing. And so in order to do that we have to recognize what we both went through, and how we're not going to do it.

Whereas Adam's parents assumed very distinct roles, resulting in his father being distant, he strives to take on many roles as a father in order to be more connected to and present with his own children. Adam's story was not uncommon among the participants in the focus groups.

The participants' fathers were often emotionally distant, and not actively involved in their lives. Many of the men are acutely aware that their parents assumed very different, often separate, roles, and that this affected the relationships participants had with them—especially with their fathers. Will shares a common sentiment held by many of the fathers:

[In regard to others expectations of him as a father] Oh I would say clearly providing, strength, and oddly enough because you know I'm an older father, not the way that I was raised or with the model that I saw around, but nurturing and caring. . . . You know, I'm in close emotional and physical contact with my daughters a lot, where I can count the times that I had physical contact with my father.

Yet most of the men also recognize that their fathers were not less engaged by choice, or because they were bad parents, but because they were primarily expected to provide for their families. Regarding the perceived generational differences in parenting, Gordon says:

[M]y dad was good and stuff, but he was, well I guess he would say "Your mother raised you. You know I brought the money home." So he was there. We'd go on vacations. So it wasn't like he was distant. He was just working all the time, and that's one thing that I certainly as an older dad . . . I mean I definitely want to be involved.

The participants recognize that their fathers were doing the best they could at the time, and that expectations of them greatly influenced the types of fathers they were. The participants note that much has changed since their fathers' generation, however, especially regarding expectations for fathers. As Dave says:

Yeah, I think just the co-parenting thing, that's the big difference. I don't think, I think that was changing just, you know, as we were kids, that expectation of fathers as being not just breadwinners, but equal partners in



parenting with young children . . . that wasn't the expectation at my house when I was a child, so. And it is now, that's, yeah, that's a big change.

Their fathers were expected to be the providers, and many of them spent most of their time at work away from their family. Some of the fathers assert that their fathers wanted to have closer relationships with their children, but the reality of their situations prevented them from doing so. The fathers in this study seek to capitalize on changing social norms by being more present and having closer relationships with their children, avoiding being the types of fathers their own fathers were by taking on more involved roles within their families.

Not all of the participants have the same type of relationships with their fathers as those described above. A few men express that their fathers were emotionally involved, and had the type of relationship with them that they want to have with their own children. In this way, these men had a model for the type of father they want to be. Nevertheless, most fathers agree that they are grateful that they do not face the same pressures their fathers did, allowing them to establish different expectations for themselves and to play more prominent and active roles in raising their children.

### **Challenging norms of masculinity**

In addition to being aware of how generational changes affect expectations for fathers, participants are also acutely aware of the ways in which norms of masculinity affect expectations they develop for themselves as fathers. Two themes emerged regarding the relationship between norms of masculinity and fatherhood: Assumptions of parenting boys versus girls and how these assumptions are challenged in a family with

daughters only; and recognizing the type of man a father is, and how this influences the relationships he has with his children.

Some fathers discuss the assumption that they be *the* male role models for their children, and that “special bonds” often exist between mothers and daughters, and fathers and sons. Yet the participants talk about breaking down barriers around the idea of parents having special bonds or relationships with their same-sex children. One participant recounts that his wife asked him how he felt about only having daughters, and if he felt like he was missing out on something by not having a son. She was especially worried that he would not be able to bond with his daughters the way he would be able to bond with a son, though this was not a concern of his. Most of the fathers reject the notion of having closer relationships with their sons than they do with their daughters.

Some fathers asked others in the group if they felt there is a difference in parenting boys versus girls, illustrating that this is a struggle for some fathers. Joe asks, “[Is] there a difference between a boy and girl? Because it’s 100% different for us between a boy and a girl. Boys, yeah, one word. The girls just will not stop.” The men in this group talk about having to find a window of time during the day to talk to their sons, as their sons typically give one-word answers to questions, only occasionally talking at length. Other fathers note that their daughters are the ones who are difficult to illicit responses from, suggesting that there may be individual characteristics at play as opposed to just gender dynamics.

When the issue of gender came up in regard to parenting, most fathers discussed the difference in relating to or communicating with children based on the child's gender.

For example, Brad relates:

I think one thing that's different about having two boys is that it actually . . . kind of changes the balance of the household, right? So my wife actually often feels outnumbered and also she tells me that she feels left out because my boys, you know, I think I haven't like sort of done this on purpose, but they kind of like the same things that I liked as a kid . . . they're into super heroes, now they're into *Star Wars*, you know, which is all stuff that I would like and so can relate to much more easily. But one thing I do try to do is not just sort of relate to them in sort of stereotypical like guy ways. Like I do a lot of baking with my sons, especially my younger son . . . and I think those things are important only because I know I hate the idea that being an involved dad means . . . I mean I like to watch football and I try to get them to watch football, but that's not only it. I also want them to see being male can be, you know, that there's a whole variety of things that you can do and it doesn't just have to be sort of gender stereotype.

Brad's quote emphasizes that some typical male bonding emerges in his relationship with his sons. At the same time, some fathers recognize they are not stereotypically masculine, and therefore consciously think about how they model what it means to be a man for their children. Many of the participants discuss being cognizant of gender stereotypes and the norms of masculinity, and strive to actively work against them in their parenting by presenting a multifaceted view of who men can be and what they can do (e.g., cooking or baking, being emotionally available). The participants believe it is important to model that people can be many different ways and can assume multiple roles, regardless of their gender.

In summary, in the absence of clear guides or norms, participants often determine their own expectations about the types of fathers they want to be. Participants emphasize

that it is important to them to be actively involved in raising their children from the beginning, and that they put great value on establishing lasting and nurturing relationships with their children. The men see their own fathers as not serving as good models for how they want to be as fathers, therefore they actively try to be a different kind of father. They often suggest that they do not blame their own fathers for not being emotionally or actively engaged in raising them, however, as they recognize the constraints social expectations placed on men of their fathers' generation. The participants say they actively work against the constraints that gendered norms place on men and women by being positive, multifaceted male role models for their children.

### **Fathers as (Un)equal Parents**

The ways fathers talked about themselves versus *other* fathers led to fathers falling into two different categories in terms of involvement and responsibility for both childcare and work around the home: Those who say they share all the responsibilities with their wives and are not easily able to differentiate what they do that is unique from their wives; and those who talk about "easing the burden" for their wives, insinuating that childcare and the home are still women's domain.

#### **"Share all" fathers**

Many of the fathers could not easily respond to the question, "What do you do as a father that is unique from your wife," because they report sharing all responsibilities with their wives. Alan offers insight about this type of father:

I have stay-at-home days so I have to be everything on those days. You know, I do the discipline, apply the structure, do the positive play and all that stuff when you know, there's some of that. But probably, I think with

parenting we're, really it's pretty blurred. Um, I can't, it's hard for me to think of something that strictly falls on me.

More often than not, the fathers who reported sharing all responsibilities with their wives were the same ones who take at least one day a week off from work to be at home with their children. Even if fathers work full time, they talk about utilizing flexible job schedules to help with childcare (e.g., taking children to appointments). In these families, the demands are great on both mothers and fathers, and they cannot afford to differentiate tasks. Tim notes:

Right, 'cause I think with the role business you know it's the roles of husbands and wives have merged. You know it's to take care of the family, and to be a husband or to be a spouse is secondary to the family role. . . . I mean we all kind of share the burden financially and emotionally and through the household, so I don't know. I mean I think that part of it, the fatherly role is sharing everything.

Tim also suggests that sharing the responsibilities of children with their wives is not only about *having to* because their wives are employed, but also because fathers *want to* be more engaged.

These fathers also often talk about negotiating roles to maintain equity with their wives, such as Martin:

My wife and I, we negotiate. So we negotiate what the responsibilities are at home, so that we both kind of agree to it. So things like, if you cook, I'm going to clean everything else up. If on Saturdays she gets to sleep in and I get to take care of the kids, do breakfast with them, whatever that is. You know, if you need to get to work early, then I'm going to take the kids to daycare and to school, and you're going to pick them up.

Many of the fathers discussed being mindful of what each parent contributes, and constantly renegotiating roles so that no one parent is taking on an unfair share of the

work. Men and women therefore seem to support each other by sharing and trading responsibilities. This does not mean, however, that the division of labor is necessarily equal within these households.

A smaller group of fathers within the “share all” fathers talk about dividing tasks based on the skills of each parent, though they also emphasize maintaining equitability with their wives. For example, if one parent predominantly does the laundry, the other folds it. It is not clear, however, whether the division of labor is actually equal in these families. Kevin discusses how some duties naturally fall to one parent or another:

Yeah, I agree, we're also split everything. Well, split the kid side 50-50, where the challenge comes in is the rest of all the chores, and taking care of cats, and the dog, and doing the dishes, and all that. And we tend to balance that stuff around, but some of it has evolved into one person tends to do, my wife typically does the laundry 99% of the time, you know, I do the escorting the spiders out of the house. . . . There's various tasks that really don't cross over.

Like Kevin, some of the fathers use examples that suggest they may do the less time consuming tasks. For example, some fathers report that they do the dishes when their wives do the cooking. In this case, wives are still left with the more time consuming task of planning and preparing meals, which is less of a departure from traditional gendered roles. Some fathers, such as Martin, are acutely aware of these possible discrepancies:

[W]hat I'm thinking about, and I'm thinking personal experience, is that the 50 that she ends up doing is not the 50 that either of us is better at anyway. Laundry, making food, spending time with the kids, all of those appear to be the kind of things that often women end up feeling like they are supposed to do. So that, I think, I still agree with what you're saying, except that there's a piece of me that thinks, a feminist piece of me that says that women seem like they get to work, and they still have the responsibility of everything at home. . . . Which I think is, I want to press against that.

Without being able to observe the families, or talk with wives about their views on the division of labor within their families, it is difficult to determine how much of the load fathers are actually sharing with mothers.

### **“Easing the burden” fathers**

Some fathers talk about “easing the burden” for their wives. Notably, only two of the fathers in the focus groups talked about themselves in this way. For example,

Cameron relates:

At home, I also do a few things here and there that’s a, more as a token of appreciation, it’s not the areas that I’m expert at, or that I enjoy doing, or anything, but occasionally or regularly, once a week, like doing the cooking or the dishes. Other than that, what I try also doing is, I know that to kind of reduce the burden on my wife I try to give her, I mean, give her an opportunity to have some free time.

It was more common for participants to refer to other fathers, even some in their close social circles, as being the type of fathers and husbands who simply lend a helping hand to ease the burden of their wives. Interestingly, the notion that *other* fathers still assume positions clearly defined by gendered roles within families is a commonly held belief among many of the fathers. Participants often suggest that other fathers make note of the contributions they make to their families, and expect to be compensated for their contributions (e.g., be allowed to spend time with friends). By framing the division of labor in this way, it implies that housework and childcare are still women’s domain, and that other fathers are not taking full responsibility or ownership of their roles. That is not to say these men are not engaged fathers, or that they are necessarily doing less than other

fathers, but the language participants use suggests that a gendered division of labor still exists within many families.

Interestingly, many men, regardless of which category they fall within, talk somewhat nostalgically about the gendered division of labor. Specifically, the men comment that things were simpler for families when there were clearly defined roles, both in that each parent clearly knew what was expected of them, and because each parent shouldered the burden of one set of pressures (i.e., work outside the home, or housework and childcare). Men are quick to follow up such statements with the recognition that they would not trade the relationship they have with their children that comes with their expanded roles to return to this former way of life. Yet it is clear that some fathers, and by suggestions of participants, especially other fathers, are struggling to make sense of their expanded roles.



## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The focus groups reveal that changes in the culture of fatherhood have left fathers to struggle with ambiguous roles, unguided by clear social scripts. Because individuals often look to cultural models to make meaning of their roles, and to inform their identities related to those roles, the intent of this study was to determine where men receive messages about expectations of them as fathers, what those expectations are, and which messages are most meaningful to fathers. Television fathers were established as a proxy for cultural models, though fathers in the study dismissed television characters as being too disparate from their own identities as fathers to be relatable. Rather, participants use a variety of other references: They look to their own fathers as reference points, both for how they want to be as fathers, and especially how they want to do things differently; they look to their wives, and especially negotiations with wives, to determine expectations for both parents; they look to themselves, as many of the fathers express establishing and living up to their own ideals for the types of fathers they want to be; and they look to other fathers in their community, both fathers with whom they identify, and generalized other fathers who appear to be less engaged in their roles.

In the following discussion, I first consider the messages men receive about expectations for fathers from within their community and how fathers align themselves with other fathers within their primary reference groups while distancing themselves from *generalized* fathers. I then explore how changes in the culture of fatherhood have encouraged some fathers to assume broader roles within their families, but how cultural changes have also led to inconsistent and varying expectations for fathers. Next, I turn to

how the findings in this study challenge the current conceptualization of fathers by exploring why the new father has been discussed for nearly 25 years, yet many fathers still do not live up to this ideal. Then, I consider fathers' reactions to broader cultural representations of fathers on television. I conclude the chapter with limitations of the study and recommendations for future directions of research on fatherhood.

### **Fathers' Comparisons to *Other* Fathers in Their Community**

The conversations with fathers underscore the importance of accounting for the contexts, including social contexts such as communities, in which men father to better understand how men come to form and evaluate their roles in relation to other fathers. Fathers in this study are situated in a highly educated, middle-class community, which provides them the opportunity to pursue careers in academia, the technological field, and the medical field. Fathers also have a broad pool of other fathers from which to find others who share in their ideals and with whom to establish bonds. Many of the fathers in the study say they align themselves with other like-minded fathers, both in how they perceive and evaluate their own roles as fathers, and in building relationships with those who share their values and ideals in regard to being successful in their careers without sacrificing close relationships with their children.

Participants' observations suggest that within their community, expectations for fathers range from primarily providing financial support and simply being there for children to being as fully engaged as mothers, offering support and insight into why there is a lack of consensus about the definition of fatherhood, fathering, and father involvement (Palkovitz, 2002b; Roggman et al., 2002). Palkovitz (2002b) stresses that

the current prevailing sentiment is that “more father involvement” is better for children, but that increased involvement is not synonymous with “good fathering.” Nevertheless, the mantra of encouraging more involved fathering pervades public discourse, even though how this actually translates to specific roles for fathers remains ambiguous, as there is significant variation within and between fathers’ roles (Lamb, 2010), an observation that is echoed by many of the fathers in the study.

Participants claim that many men in their community have choices regarding how they balance work and family, and that some fathers take advantage of the flexibility their careers offer in order to be more equal parents with their wives and to have closer relationships with children. Participants also say that many fathers choose to focus more on their careers and on financially providing for their families, however, and view their contributions to childcare and domestic labor as extra, something that they should be compensated for (e.g., being able going out with friends because they helped out around the house). The participants portray these fathers as missing out on having stronger relationships with their children, and as leaving their wives to deal with the stress of balancing a career and/or the responsibilities of childcare and domestic duties with little support. Participants do not convey that the role of fatherhood is unimportant to other fathers, but rather they suggest that other fathers identify with their roles and responsibilities differently than themselves.

### **Other fathers as a metric**

Men often use their own fathers as reference groups (Daly, 1993; England, 2010), and although fathers in this study often compare themselves to their own fathers, they

also often use other fathers in their community as reference groups. Past studies have shown that fathers look to other fathers to determine behavior they want to emulate (Daly, 1993). The fathers in this study, however, seem to have deeper and more complex connections to other fathers in their close social networks. It is from other fathers within participants' community, both other fathers in close social networks, and fathers in the community more generally, that they discern general expectations for fathers.

Evaluations of fathers' performances in their roles are culturally mediated (LaRossa, 1988; Townsend, 2002), and their roles are embedded within social contexts, such as personal relationships and broader social relationships within communities (Palkovitz, 2002a). Fathers' insights regarding their social relationships are valuable to developing a broader understanding of how fathers conceptualize their roles, and how they perceive others evaluate their performances. Fathers in this study emphasize their belief that most in their community hold low expectations for fathers, and therefore others, most often mothers, evaluate how they perform as fathers positively. These findings support past research that shows that wives often use same-gendered comparisons to evaluate their own husband's performances in regard to domestic labor and childcare (Daly, 1993; Major, 1993). At the same time, participants suggest that fathers who are less engaged in their roles do not receive negative evaluations because of the generally low expectations people hold for fathers.

### **High expectations ... for some fathers**

Participants in the study suggest that there are many fathers in their community with whom the participants do not identify because they do not share the same ideals

about fatherhood. Although fathers in the study say they form small social networks of other like-minded fathers, they report that most other fathers do not place as much importance as themselves on being active, engaged, fully involved parents, leaving most childcare to their wives. Why does this disconnect exist? Are fathers in this study actually exceeding other fathers in their contributions to their families? Although these questions cannot be addressed without observing fathers within their families, or without also gaining wives' accounts of their husbands' involvement, how the men conceptualize their roles and their identities as fathers compared to how they evaluate other fathers is striking. The participants may be distancing themselves from other fathers, building up what they do in comparison, or they may be pointing to general feelings that the role of fatherhood are not a salient part of many men's identities. The perception of many of the participants is that most other fathers primarily engage in the tasks traditionally fulfilled by fathers, and do not take on the same level of responsibility for childcare and domestic labor as their wives, or as the fathers in the study.

How participants talk about their identities as fathers compared to their perceptions of how other fathers identify with their roles appears to go beyond negatively evaluating those who are not in their close social circles. Theories regarding reference groups emphasize that people are likely to closely identify with those in their closer social network (e.g., Cooley, 1902/1956; Mead, 1934/1956), and to evaluate themselves and their peers positively, distancing themselves from those they identify as others. Both mothers and fathers are also likely to positively evaluate the fathers' performance positively in comparison to performances of other fathers (Daly, 1993). Yet fathers in the

study point to deeper social expectations for fathers, or the lack thereof, and the continued devaluing of fathers' roles beyond providing for families as creating a rift between fathers who are more involved in raising their children and those who are not.

Some fathers in the study emphasize that others in their community, especially other mothers, are surprised at the level of engagement and support the participants display in their families. These statements are usually said in the context that other fathers are missing out on having the type of relationship with their children that the participants value. The participants emphasize they are simply doing what is right and fair for both parents—that their situations necessitate both parents being equally involved in family life to support both their families and their careers—and because they want to be involved in raising their children.

To place the findings of this study in line with Cooley's theory, how fathers use others to evaluate themselves can be understood in terms of the *looking glass self*. Cooley theorizes that people are most concerned with how they present themselves to small groups in which they have personal and intimate ties, and that interactions with those in primary groups are important for forming and maintaining identities (Turner, 2003). Fathers in this study exemplify Cooley's theory in their desire to develop close relationships with fathers who are most similar to themselves, as developing close social ties supports them in establishing and maintaining high expectations for themselves as fathers.

Mead theorizes that people take on roles they coordinate in relation to generalized others, and subsequently evaluate themselves based on interactions with others.

Although similar to Cooley's theory regarding primary reference groups, Mead's theory accounts for how the development of mind and a sense of self lead to individuals assuming roles, and that these roles allow individuals to have organized and patterned interactions with others in society. The norms that arise from these interactions also inform individuals' roles. A lack of clear and consistent norms, however, lead to fathers identifying with a small network of fathers who often support them in being more involved fathers, yet also results in some fathers contributing less to their families because of the lack of higher expectations for fathers.

### **Adjusting to Changes in the Culture of Fatherhood**

LaRossa (1988) theorizes that the culture and conduct of fatherhood change over time, but often at different rates, creating discrepancies between the perceived norms of fatherhood and fathers' behaviors. Nearly 25 years ago, LaRossa noted that despite important cultural changes, such as more women employed outside the home, changes in fathers' behaviors lagged behind, as women were still largely responsible for caring for children. The trend of women contributing more to childcare and domestic labor has often been noted in studies throughout the 1980s (Berk, 1985; Hochschild, 1989/2003; Thompson & Walker, 1989), 1990s (Daly, 1993; Major, 1993; Sayer et al., 2004; Thompson, 1991), and 2000s (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Similarly, the ways in which participants talk about how they identify as fathers versus how they perceive other men in their community identify with their roles suggest that many fathers today are similar to the fathers of the 1980s: struggling to make sense of current expectations for fathers.

Participants' evaluations of other fathers, and evaluations of themselves compared to other fathers, offers a new perspective as to why defining father involvement is so complicated, and why levels of involvement tend to vary. Through the 1990s and especially in the early 2000s, numerous studies have found that fathers have become increasingly involved with their children (Lamb, 2010; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Mintz, 1998; Palkovitz, 2002a), even if they are still doing less than mothers (Baxter, 2002; Craig, 2006; England, 2010; Hochschild, 1989/2003; Major, 1993; Sandberg & Hofferth, 2005; Sayer et al., 2004; Thompson, 1991). How the participants talk about their own roles, and the value they place on being involved in their children's lives in order to establish and nurture lasting relationships with them, reinforces findings that fathers are more involved with their children than in the past. How the participants talk about other fathers, however, supports findings that fathers still contribute less than mothers to family life, and are not expected to contribute equally.

Although understanding relationships within families reveals much about fathers' roles, the views of fathers in this study illustrate that social norms established within communities may both support men in being more involved and engaged fathers, but also set generally low expectations for fathers, continuing the devaluation of roles related to childcare and domestic labor. In a recent review of fathers' roles and involvement in childcare, Lamb (2010) acknowledges the diversity of fathers' roles, and that different fathers place more importance on certain roles. His analysis of current dominant trends in the study of fatherhood, however, illustrates that theorists' attention remains focused on fathers' roles in relation to their partners, and that there is not consensus, neither in the



literature nor culturally, about which aspects of fathers' roles are the most important or valued (Lamb, 2010), a sentiment expressed by most in the study.

### **How Fathers Make Meaning of Their Roles**

One of the most significant challenges for fathers is the lack of adequate role models for what they should do and who they should be as fathers, and the lack of clear markers for what makes a good father. The men in the study report negotiating their roles with their wives. But without clear social scripts—and more specifically, without defined norms regarding fathers' roles within families, clear definitions of what father involvement entails, and sanctions for fathers who violate norms—fathers are not held accountable for sharing in the responsibilities of raising children and participating in domestic labor equally with mothers. Many fathers also emphasize the lack of adequate role models as a major barrier to knowing how to be an involved and nurturing father, a finding supported by prior research (Daly, 1993; England, 2010).

Supporting England's (2010) assertion that the previous generation often serves as an implicit reference group, the fathers in this study often use their own fathers as a primary reference point. In this way, fathers come to define their roles in terms of how they want to live up to ideals their own fathers set, as a guide for how they want to do things differently (a more common sentiment), or both. The participants report that most of their fathers were emotionally distant, and largely shackled by the responsibility of being the primary providers. Many of the fathers' reflections on the relationships they had with their fathers offer a window into why they are grateful for changes in culture that allow fathers to assume expanded roles within families. Most of the men in the study

want to be better fathers than their own fathers were by being more present and emotionally involved with their children, yet participants express wanting to have more clearly defined roles as they perceive their parents had. The participants' views about the current place of fathers in families mirrors trends in the literature noted by Day and Lamb (2004), that researchers are still trying to define the roles men assume in families, and that men's identities as fathers remain uncertain.

In addition to using relationships with their own fathers to inform their roles, fathers in the study suggest that they most often define their roles through negotiations with wives. They want to support their wives in pursuing careers, and recognize the need to be more involved in childcare and domestic duties. How many of the fathers talk about what roles they assume within their families suggest they participate in all tasks related equally to their wives, challenging findings that fathers are primarily participating in tasks valued by both parents (Craig, 2006). Yet fathers often over-report their level of involvement (Craig, 2006; Hochschild, 1989/2003), therefore, the participants' reports should be approached with some skepticism. Beyond sharing the burden of childcare and domestic duties with their wives, the fathers in the study say they want to have close relationships with their children, and place great value on being involved, emotionally engaged fathers. Clear social scripts, however, do not guide how to live up to these values,, and fathers are often left without structural support to be more involved fathers (Cabrera et al., 2000; Palkovitz, 2002b; Townsend 2002).

Fathers' claims of sharing all responsibilities with their wives may be questionable, however, especially given that they talk about *equitable* as opposed to

*equal* divisions of labor with their wives. Specifically, divisions of labor based on maintaining equity can often propagate imbalances between men and women, especially in terms of the division of family work, with men claiming that their financial contributions compensate for the family work that disproportionately falls to women (LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981; Major, 1993; Thompson, 1991). The fathers in this study often talk about contributing to childcare *equally* with their wives, yet some fathers acknowledge that it is more challenging to maintain *equitability* in the division of domestic labor. This tension closely aligns with findings of past research that women contribute more to domestic labor than men (Craig, 2006; England, 2010; LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981; Major, 1993; Thompson, 1991).

### **The Grip of Persistent Gendered Norms on Fathers' Roles**

Townsend (2002) asserts that even though the image of the traditional nuclear family has been roundly criticized and recognized as outdated in the literature, it still remains a dominant Western cultural image. The image, however, runs counter to how the men in the study conceptualize their roles as fathers. On the one hand, fathers in the study often state that they work against assuming gendered roles, consciously assuming roles that have traditionally been fulfilled by mothers, such as being nurturers, and sharing in domestic duties. On the other hand, participants suggest that other fathers still assume traditionally gendered roles primarily focused on providing, whereas mothers are still primarily responsible for family and the home, suggesting that the image of the traditional nuclear family still has some grip.

This perceived discrepancy between the types of fathers the men in the study say they strive to be versus how they view other fathers reinforces prior findings that parents in many families tend to assume gendered roles (Cha, 2010; England, 2010; Hochschild, 1989/2003; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Sayer et al., 2009), and define their roles based on traditional gender ideologies (Kroska, 2004; Katz-Wise et al., 2010), especially once having children (Cha, 2010). The men in this study also reinforce findings that men who hold egalitarian views tend to assume less traditional roles within families (Bulanda, 2004). Fathers in the study see themselves as more egalitarian, more mindful of traditional gendered roles, and more concerned with working against traditional gendered roles than they perceive “generalized” fathers to be. The fathers also suggest that their roles are ill-defined, which supports that in the absence of clear social scripts, some fathers—the fathers in this study would likely maintain *other* fathers—may rely on traditional gendered roles or ideologies to define or make meaning of their roles (Doucet, 2009).

Women are therefore left to confront the pressures of pursuing careers without neglecting children or the responsibilities of domestic labor, yet men are not held responsible for contributing more to domestic labor and caring for children. When trying to navigate between jobs and taking care of families, men tend to spend more time at work because they have more access to higher paying jobs, and women tend to spend more time taking care of children (Cha, 2010). Having children also often results in roles becoming more gendered, even among couples with egalitarian values, and within families where both parents work (Katz-Wise et al., 2010). The fathers in this study,

however, assert that the roles in their own families are not gendered. Rather, they are aware that roles associated with home and family tend to default to wives (Katz-Wise et al., 2010), and actively try to work against this through open communication and the negotiation of roles.

### **Fathers as men**

Most of the participants in this study are thoughtful about the type of role model they are for their children; they value modeling multifaceted roles that challenge conventional gendered norms. The fathers' views on masculinity supports not only that "new" conceptualizations of fatherhood weaken ties to traditional masculine norms (Marsiglio, 1998), but that these men are acutely aware of the ways in which gendered norms constrain the roles people assume. Becoming fathers and being an important male role model in their children's lives seems to have heightened their awareness of how they model masculinity, and, therefore, they consciously try to establish relationships with their children that challenge traditional gendered norms. These findings challenge prior research that suggests fathers tend to frame their roles in masculine terms (Doucet, 2006) and to participate in activities traditionally associated with fathers (Craig, 2006; Eggebeen, 2002; Gottman, 1998). Instead, the way men talk about masculinity suggests that they are working against norms that frame masculinity as that which is *antifemininity* (Kimmel, 2004), and do not convey that their own conceptualizations of who they are as men is threatened by talking on roles that have traditionally been assumed by women.

**Television: Model of Cultural Change, Not of Behavior**

The study began with the assumption that television fathers may serve as cultural models that convey messages about fatherhood, yet fathers in the study assert that they do not identify with television fathers, nor do they believe the characters should be role models for behavior. Many participants say, however, that television does offer a reflection of changes in culture and current cultural norms.

The findings of this study do not support that fathers may turn to cultural representations in the form of television fathers in the absence of social scripts as a guide for behavior (Kaufman, 1999). Most fathers in the study make a point to state explicitly that they do not identify with representations of fathers on television because they do not offer accurate reflections of the men's lives, emphasizing that television is meant to entertain, and that their everyday lives do not make for good television. The fathers also note that television fathers are either too good to be realistic, such as *Cosby*, or are portrayed as well intentioned yet incompetent buffoons. Interestingly, when the fathers discuss what television gets right about fathers, they most often reference the same fathers they typically identify as not-so-good fathers, such as Al Bundy, Dan (from *Roseanne*), and Homer Simpson. Participants say these fathers offer the most realistic representations of fathers, as they tend to show the stresses and struggles of fatherhood.

The fact that every participant was able to generate a list of television fathers, and had opinions about the ways in which they offered a positive, negative, accurate, or inaccurate depiction of fathers supports that these characters are embedded in culture (Douglas & Olson, 1996). The findings of this study reinforce Douglas and Olson's

(1996) assertion that television fathers offer a reflection of cultural change, as the participants often discuss how television fathers of the 1980s depicted the image of a more emotionally involved father that began to emerge at that time. Participants also frequently commented, however, that current representations of fathers still often portray fathers as foolish and incompetent buffoons who are usually at the receiving end of jokes (Pehlke et al., 2009). Although the fathers in this study do not identify with representations of fathers on television, they do maintain that television shows offer a glimpse into current cultural norms. The participants' discussions about television fathers suggest that television often reflects a culture in which fathers remain less engaged, and less competent in their roles compared to mothers.

### **The Slow Emergence of the “New Father”**

The findings of this study encourage a reexamination of the “new father.” Though many fathers have become more involved in raising children over the past few decades, there is ample evidence that fathers' contributions are still unequal relative to mothers. Up to this point, however, research has focused on how fathers' and mothers' roles are determined in relation to each other, and also on how broader cultural factors related to gendered norms inform parental roles. Yet fathers in this study shed light on a topic that has largely gone unaddressed: how fathers use primary reference groups versus generalized other fathers to evaluate their performances and as a way to make meaning of what is expected of fathers.

Fathers in this study seem to embody the conceptualization of a *new father* (J. H. Pleck, 1987; Marks & Palkovitz, 2004), as they say they are emotionally involved with

their families and take on equal responsibility with their wives in caring for and raising children. Yet the fathers are also markedly critical of other fathers, both those within their close social networks, and, more often, others in their communities with whom they do not regularly interact. Their comments prompt questions about how prevalent the new father is, as they often assert that other fathers in their community still embrace a traditional gendered division of labor. The findings also call into question *who* identifies with the new ideal for fathers and suggest that ill-defined expectations for fathers perpetuate low expectations for fathers.

The findings of this study offer some support for the *stalled revolution* (England, 2010; Hochschild, 1989/2003). The fathers in the study seem to be well aware of inequalities that typically exist between mothers and fathers. But why do these inequalities persist? The answer may partially be found in how the fathers evaluate other fathers—as less engaged, less involved, and more willing to leave the burden of childcare and domestic labor to their wives. If fathers perceive that other fathers are performing more negatively than themselves, then it is easy to see how fathers may see themselves as good fathers by comparison: Even if fathers do not contribute to childcare and domestic duties as much as their wives, they are still doing better than other fathers—or their perception of other fathers.

Given the plethora of research on fathers, and father involvement more specifically, why are there still such vast discrepancies in the literature about father involvement—in the definitions of involvement (what it means and how it looks to be involved), and in actual father involvement? What is preventing fathers from being more



involved? Although there is not a singular answer to these questions, looking at fathers' personal social contexts, such as their relationships with other fathers within their community, offers a new perspective with which to begin to answer these questions.

In summary, in this study I sought a better understanding of where men receive messages about expectations for fathers and what those messages are. Television shows about families served as a possible source for cultural models of parental roles.

Participants made it clear that they do not identify with fathers on television, nor do they believe that television offers an accurate reflection of what is expected of fathers. More importantly, fathers in the study maintain that expectations for fathers are low. These low expectations leave men to form identities as fathers based on their expectations of themselves, their perceptions of spouses' expectations of them, and also in relation to other fathers in their primary reference groups. Fathers in the study surround themselves with peers who share their ideals and values in order to establish a social network that is supportive of the attainment of their ideals. Conversely, fathers distance themselves from generalized fathers. Although they find fathers in their community who strive to be involved parents and to maintain equality with their spouses, they express surprise at how many *other* fathers in their community seem to adhere to rigid gendered roles, and leave wives with the bulk of the responsibility to care for children and homes. Fathers' perspectives emphasize an enduring norm: The roles of mothers and fathers remain gendered. Fathers' comments about the division of labor in other families suggest that the onus for any failures or lapses in parenting is on mothers, and in providing, on

fathers. These norms seem to be deeply entrenched, even in communities where we are most likely to find a new type of father.

### **Limitations of the Study and Future Directions**

A narrow sample of fathers was specifically selected for this study to explore how fathers identify with their roles in relation to cultural norms. Because I did not collect information about ethnicity or race, there may be cultural differences within the sample that are not being accounted for. I was, however, primarily interested in how middle-class fathers identify with their roles, regardless of their race or ethnicity. Nevertheless, these factors likely play a significant part in shaping fathers' roles. I focused on middle-class fathers because they are the most likely to change their behaviors in reaction to cultural changes (LaRossa, 1988), and are the most likely to identify with current conceptualizations of fathers and dominant cultural norms. Recognizing that there is not a singular conceptualization of fathers, a broad study of current social expectations and representations of fathers needs to encompass a more diverse group of fathers, especially low-income and minority fathers. Because norms of fatherhood, especially those related to a new kind father, are largely rooted in middle-class ideals, targeting other groups of fathers who may not identify with these ideals will provide a broader picture of how men use cultural models to make meaning of their roles. If the new father is a middle-class ideal, how are messages about what fathers *should be* like today received among fathers who do not necessarily closely align with this image? Fathers who do not identify with dominant ideals may be left adrift in regard to expectations of them as fathers, or they may forge identities unencumbered by perceived social expectations. Future research

should, therefore, further explore how men determine expectations of them as fathers, and the ways they are encouraged to or discouraged from being involved fathers.

Because only fathers were invited to participate in the study, we are limited to fathers' accounts of their contributions to their families. Future qualitative studies need to engage mothers, and possibly children, in addition to fathers to more fully understand expectations for fathers, and how mothers and fathers negotiate parental roles within families. Future studies should also account for how fathers come to form their identities in relation to other fathers, focusing particularly on how they evaluate their performances as fathers in relation to their peers. Doing so will provide a more complete picture of men's perceptions of expectations of fathers, and who holds higher or lower expectations of fathers. It is likely that fathers in other communities also perceive low-expectations for fathers in general, and that they will evaluate themselves more positively compared to others. Identifying fathers who are *actually* more involved, and those who are struggling to engage will, therefore, provide a richer understanding of and better support for father involvement.

Similarly, if the new father is an ideal most easily attained by middle-class fathers, yet is also a conceptualization of fathers that is not fully realized even within middle-class communities, future studies should explore how other fathers (especially minority and low-income fathers) identify with the ideal. If fathers do not identify with established ideals, they may be left with even more ambiguity about their roles, and therefore may have a more difficult time defining and identifying with the role of fatherhood. Future studies should examine whether fathers outside of the middle-class

identify with the conceptualization of the new father, and, if so, the ways in which identification with the ideal influences their evaluations of themselves and whether they are supported in meeting this ideal. Fathers who do not identify with perceived ideals of fathers may evaluate their own performances negatively if they feel they are not meeting the ideal. Alternately, like many of the fathers in this study, they may be left without guides or models for how to be involved fathers. Gaining a deeper understanding of how fathers in various groups relate to perceived ideals will also help to develop creative and more effective ways to support men in becoming more involved and engaged fathers.

Because this study focused on a small sample of fathers from one middle-class community, which has a population that is highly educated and has access to careers that allow for flexibility in schedules, the results may not be widely generalizable to fathers in other communities. Additionally, because fathers self-selected into the study, there is the potential that self-selection bias influenced the findings. That is, more involved and engaged fathers may have been more willing to participate in the study. The findings of this study are not meant to be definitive, however, and important themes emerged from discussions within the focus groups that should be explored in future studies. Fathers in the study, like many in their community, have degrees in higher education and careers that offer flexible schedules, and are therefore resourced to meet the challenges of balancing a career with being involved fathers. Future studies should focus on fathers who have jobs that do not provide flexibility, and offer little support for fathers to be more involved in caring for children. Future studies should also account for fathers who

live in low-income communities that lack the social supports offered by the community in this study.

Given that fathers in this study struggle to define their roles within their families, yet have the resources and flexibility in their careers to manage these negotiations, future studies should focus on gaining a deeper understanding of social expectations of fathers; how or whether men identify with cultural representations and conceptualizations of fathers; the implications for fathers who identify with cultural representations of fathers but struggle to live up to the ideals imposed, or for fathers who do not identify with cultural representations of fathers; and how to better support men in becoming engaged and involved fathers. This study emphasizes that loosely defined roles within families may leave fathers adrift. Although some fathers capitalize on having more flexibility in their roles by embracing expanded roles and strengthening their relationships with their children, it appears that other fathers are still leaving the responsibility for childcare and domestic labor to women.

Over the past decade, theorists have sought a better understanding of the ways in which men construct identities as fathers in the face of ill-defined roles (Cabrera et al., 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Palkovitz, 2002a), yet studies have not adequately accounted for how fathers construct their identities in relation to other fathers. The findings in this study stress the need to gain deeper understandings about how fathers use reference groups to make meaning of their roles, and to inform their identities as fathers. Where the focus of prior research has been on how mothers and fathers form their roles in

relation to each other, future research should focus more directly on how social interactions, especially with other fathers, inform fathers' roles.

This study also provides important implications for policy and practice. The findings of this study illustrate the benefits of fathers having flexible schedules at work in order to more fully participate in caring for children. The findings also support that caring for children when they are infants helps fathers establish lasting bonds with their children. Future policy should, therefore, consider the types of support offered to men in order for them to take leave to care for children, especially around the time their children are born. Fathers in this study are also better able to support mothers and children by having jobs that afford them the flexibility to take time off to care for children—either with routine, weekly time off to be home with children, or sporadic time off to care for children when they are ill or need to be taking to appointments. Having a flexible work schedule is a luxury not available to a large number of fathers, and therefore policy makers should consider ways in which fathers may be better supported in taking leave from work to care for children.

Many of the participants lament not having stronger role models for how to be fathers. They convey that they are feeling their way through the expanded role of fatherhood, reacting to social changes rather than preparing for them. Fathers in the study also emphasize that women are better prepared to be mothers than men are to be fathers because women participate in activities related to childcare, such as baby sitting and working in childcare facilities, starting at a young age. Similarly, fathers also say they lack positive role models for how to be actively and emotionally involved parents.

Programs targeted at male youth designed to introduce them to childcare may introduce them to positive role models, help increase their feelings of competency related to caring for children, and may increase their interest in being active parents in their own children's lives. Additionally, youth will be exposed to positive role models that help set higher expectations for men's active involvement in raising children.

### **Conclusion**

Although fathers are no longer bound by expectations to be the primary provider within families, conversations with fathers suggest there are not clear social scripts to communicate expectations, or with which to make meaning of their roles. Fathers discuss the need to find their own way in terms of how to divide labor with their wives as the realities of fatherhood (i.e., both parents working outside the home, many fathers wanting to be actively engaged in raising their children) have encouraged behavioral change before defined social scripts have been established. Fathers are therefore left to determine expectations of them through negotiations with their wives or to set expectations for themselves.

The fathers often reflect on the perceived simplicity of having clearly defined roles where fathers are primarily expected to be providers. Fathers' roles were not necessarily simpler when dominant social scripts were informed by gendered roles, nor do fathers want to have defined roles at the cost of having close relationships with their children. Indeed, many participants talk pointedly about their own fathers' lack of involvement in their upbringing largely because of the expectation that they be primary providers. Conversations with fathers reveal that the current lack of norms

simultaneously allows the roles of fathers to expand, and sets low-expectations for fathers—simply being present is often seen as good fathering. The fathers' in this study suggest that the lack of clear norms has resulted in many fathers, other than themselves, contributing less to their families than their wives, and to disparities in fathers' level of involvement with their children. This disparity is fueled by the perception that mothers are still primarily responsible for the private sphere, with fathers lending a helping hand.

Current research on fatherhood offers a complicated view of who fathers are, and the roles they assume within families. As theorists have noted, stronger theoretical frameworks should be utilized to structure conversations we have about fathers in a common language, and as a way to unify what is currently known about expectations for fathers and fathers' involvement in families and what is still being learned. Although symbolic interactionism has often been utilized to talk about how fathers construct their identities and make meanings of their roles, few studies fully take into account social structures that shape fathers' roles, and men's identities as fathers. More specifically, studies have tended to focus on fathers' roles in relation to mothers' roles, while accounting for how gendered norms shape these roles. Yet prior research has not yet taken an in-depth look into how men's social relationships within their communities inform how fathers define their roles within families and inform their identities as fathers.

As this study illustrates, how fathers evaluate themselves compared to other fathers likely plays a significant part in how men make meaning of their roles and evaluate the value of the roles they assume. If fathers perceive that other fathers are not fully involved parents, and that, in general, expectations for fathers remain low, they may



be less compelled to assume roles they perceive as socially devalued. It is essential to further investigate how fathers evaluate themselves in relation to other fathers, and how these evaluations encourage fathers to be more fully engaged or to simply do better than the status quo.

## References

- Amato, P. R. (1998). More than money? Men's contributions to their children's lives. In A. Booth & A. C. Crouter (Eds.), *Men in families* (pp. 241-278). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Baxter, J. (2002). Patterns of change and stability in the gender division of household labour in Australia, 1996-1997. *Journal of Sociology*, 38(4), 399-424. doi: 10.1177/144078302128756750
- Bulanda, R. E. (2004). Paternal involvement with children: The influence of gender ideologies. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 40-45. doi: 10.1111/j.0022-2455.2004.00003.x
- Berk, S. F. (1985). *The gender factory: The apportionment of work in American households*. New York, NY: Plenum.
- Bernard, J. (1981). The good provider role: Its rise and fall. *American Psychologist*, 36, 1-12. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.36.1.1
- Bianchi, S. M., Milkie, M. A., Sayer, L. C., & Robinson, J. P. (2000). Is anyone doing the housework? Trends in the gender division of household labor. *Social Forces*, 79, 191-228.
- Blankenhorn, D. (1995). *Fatherless America: Confronting our most urgent social problem*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Cabrera, C. J., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Bradley, R. H., Hofferth, S., & Lamb, M. E. (2000). Fatherhood in the twenty-first century. *Child Development*, 71, 127-136. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.00126
- Cha, Y. (2010). Reinforcing separate spheres: The effect of spousal overwork on men's and women's employment in dual-earner households. *American Sociological Review*, 75, 303-329. doi: 10.1177/0003122410365307
- Chafetz, J. S. (1990). *Gender equity: An integrated theory of stability and change*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Cherlin, A. J. (1998). On the flexibility of fatherhood. In A. Booth & A. C. Crouter (Eds.), *Men in families* (pp. 41-46). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Cherlin, A. J. (2004). The deinstitutionalization of American marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, 848-861. doi: 10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00058.x
- Cherlin, A. J. (2005). American marriage in the early twenty-first century. *The Future of Children*, 15, 33-55. doi: 10.1353/foc.2005.0015
- Coltrane, S. (1996). *Family man: Fatherhood, housework, and gender equity*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Coltrane, S. (2000). Research on household labor: Modeling and measuring the social embeddedness of routine family work. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1208-1233. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01208.x
- Coltrane, S., & Adams, M. (2001). Men's family work: Child-centered fathering and the sharing of domestic labor. In R. Hertz, & N. L. Marshall (Eds.), *Working families: The transformation of the American home* (pp. 72-102). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Cook, J. L., Jones, R. M., Dick, A. J., & Singh, A. (2005). Revisiting men's role in father involvement: The importance of personal expectations. *Fathering*, 3(2), 165-178. doi: 10.3149/fth.0302.165
- Coolley, C. H. (1902/1956). *Human nature and social order*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Corwyn, R. F., & Bradley, R. H. (2005). Socioeconomic status and childhood externalizing behaviors: A structural equation framework. In V. L. Bengtson, A. C. Acock, K. R. Allen, P. Dilworth-Anderson & D. M. Klein (Eds.), *Sourcebook of family theory and research* (pp. 469-483). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Craig, L. (2006). Does father care mean fathers share? A comparison of how mothers and fathers in intact families spend time with children. *Gender & Society*, 20, 259-281. doi: 10.1177/0891243205285212
- Daly, K. J., Ashbourne, L., & Brown, J. L. (2009). Fathers' perceptions of children's influence: Implications for involvement. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 624, 61-77. doi: 10.1177/0002716209334695
- Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2004). Conceptualizing and measuring father involvement: Pathways, problems, and progress. In R. D. Day & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Conceptualizing and measuring father involvement* (pp. 1-14). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Day, R. D., & Mackey, W. C. (1986). The role image of the American father: An examination of a media myth. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, XVII(3), 371-388.
- Deaux, K., & Major, B. (1990). A social-psychological model of gender. In D. L. Rhode (Ed.), *Theoretical perspectives on sexual difference* (pp. 89-99). Newhaven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Demo, D. H., & Acock, A. C. (1993). Family diversity and the division of domestic labor: How much have things really changed? *Family Relations*, 42, 323-331.
- Doucet, A. (2006). *Do men mother?* Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Doucet, A. (2009). Dad and baby in the first year: Gendered responsibilities and embodiment. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 624, 78-98. doi: 10.1177/0002716209334069
- Douglas, W. (1996). The fall from grace? The modern family on television. *Communication Research*, 23, 675-702. doi: 10.1177/009365096023006003
- Douglas, W. (2003). *Television families: Is something wrong in suburbia?* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Douglas, W., & Olson, B. M. (1996) Subversion of the American family? An examination of children and parents in television families. *Communication Research*, 23(1), 73-99. doi: 10.1177/009365096023001003
- Dunn, D., Almquist, E. M., & Chafetz, J. S. (1993). Macrostructural perspectives on gender inequality. In P. England (Ed.), *Theory on gender / Feminism on gender* (pp. 69-90). Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Duyndam, J. (2007). Credible fatherhood and unique identity: Toward an existential concept of adoption. *The European Legacy*, 12(6), 729-735. doi: 10.1080/10848770701565072
- Eggebeen, D. J., (2002). Sociological perspectives on fatherhood: What do we know about fathers from social surveys? In C. S. Tamis-LeMonda & N. Cabrera (Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 189-210). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Eggebeen, D. J., & Knoester, C. (2001). Does fatherhood matter for men? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63, 381-393. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00381.x

- England, P. (2010). The gender revolution: Uneven and stalled. *Gender & Society*, 24, 149-166. doi: 10.1177/0891243210361475
- Flouri, E. (2005). *Fathering and child outcomes*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Forste, R., Bartkowski, J. P., & Jackson, R. A. (2009). "Just be there for them": Perceptions of fathering among single, low-income men. *Fathering*, 7(1), 46-69. doi: 10.3149/fth.0701.49
- Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaser B. G., & Strauss A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Goldscheider, F., Hogan, D., & Turcotte, P. (2006). The other partner: The changing roles of good provider for men's union formation in industrialized countries. *Canadian Studies in Population*, 33(1), 25-48.
- Gottman, J. M. (1998). Toward a process model of men in marriages and families. In A. Booth & A. C. Crouter (Eds.), *Men in families* (pp. 149-192). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Grindstaff, L., & Turow, J. (2006). Video cultures: Television sociology in the "new tv" age. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32, 103-125. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.32.061604.143122
- Griswold, R. L. (1993). *Fatherhood in America: A history*. New York: Basic Books.
- Heinz, W. R. (2003). From work trajectories to negotiated careers: The contingent life course. In J. T. Mortimer & M. J. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the life course* (pp. 185-204). New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.
- Hernandez, D. J., & Brandon, P. D. (2002). Who are the fathers of today? In C. S. Tamis-LeMonda & N. Cabrera (Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 33-62). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hiller, D. V., & Philliber, W. W. (1986). The division of labor in contemporary marriage: Expectations, perceptions, and performance. *Social Problems*, 33, 191-201. doi: 0.1525/sp.1986.33.3.03a00030

- Hofferth, S. L., Pleck, J., Stueve, J. L., Bianchi, S., & Sayer, L. (2002). The demography of fathers: What fathers do. In C. S. Tamis-LeMonda & N. Cabrera (Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 63-90). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1989/2003). *The second shift*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Katz-Wise, S. L., Priess, H. A., & Hyde, J. S. (2010). Gender-role attitudes and behavior across the transition to parenthood. *Developmental Psychology*, 46, 19-28. doi: 10.1037/a0017820
- Kaufman, G. (1999) The portrayal of men's family roles in television commercials. *Sex Roles*, 41, 439-458. doi: 10.1023/A:1018878917810
- Kazura, K. (2000). Fathers' qualitative and quantitative involvement: An investigation of attachment, play, and social interactions. *Journal of Men's Studies*, 9, 41-53. doi: 10.3149/jms.0901.41
- Kimmel, M. S. (2004). *The gendered society*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kroska, A. (2004). Divisions of domestic work: Revisiting and expanding the theoretical explanations. *Journal of Family Issues*, 45, 900-932. doi: 10.1177/0192513X04267149
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Sage.
- Lachance-Grzela, M., & Bouchard, G. (2010). Why do women do the lion's share of housework? A decade of research. *Sex Roles*, 63, 767-780. doi: 10.1007/s11199-010-9797-z
- Lamb, M. E. (1987). Introduction: The emergent American father. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The father's role: Cross-cultural perspectives* (pp. 3-25). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Lamb, M. E. (1997). Fathers and child development: An introductory overview and guide. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp 1-18). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Lamb, M. E. (1998). Fatherhood then and now. In A. Booth & A. C. Crouter (Eds.), *Men in families* (pp. 47-54). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Lamb, M. E. (2010). How *do* fathers influence children's development? Let me count the ways. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (5th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Lamb, M. E., & Lewis, C. (2004). The development and significance of father-child relationships in two-parent families. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 272-306). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Lamb, M. E., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. S. (2004). The role of the father: An introduction. In M. E. Lamb (ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (pp. 1-31). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- LaRossa, R. (1988). Fatherhood and social change. *Family Relations*, 37, 451-457. doi: 10.2307/584119
- LaRossa, R. (1997). *The modernization of fatherhood*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- LaRossa, R. (2004). The culture of fatherhood in the fifties: A closer look. *Journal of Family History*, 29, 47-70. doi: 10.1177/0363199003261811
- LaRossa, R. (2005). Grounded theory methods and qualitative family research. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 837-857. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2005.00179.x
- LaRossa, R., Jaret, C., Gadgil, M., & Wynn, R. G. (2000). The changing culture of fatherhood in comic-strip families: A six-decade analysis. *Journal of Marriage and families*, 62, 375-387. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.00375.x
- LaRossa, R., & Reitzes, D. C. (1993). Symbolic interactionism and family studies. In P. G. Boss, W. J. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W. R. Schumm, & S. K. Steinmentz (Eds.), *Sourcebook of family theories and methods: A contextual approach* (pp. 135-163). New York, NY: Springer.
- Lorber, J. (1993). Believing is seeing: Biology as ideology. *Gender & Society*, 7, 568-581. doi: 10.1177/089124393007004006
- Major, B. (1993). Gender, entitlement, and the distribution of family labor. *Journal of Social Issues*, 49(3), 141-159.
- Marks, L. & Palkovitz, R. (2004). American fatherhood types: The good, the bad, and the uninterested. *Fathering*, 2(2), 113-129. doi: 10.3149/fth.0202.113
- Marsiglio, W. (1998). *Procreative man*. New York: New York University Press.

- Marsiglio, W. (2004). Studying fathering trajectories: In-depth interviewing and sensitizing concepts. In R. Day & M. Lamb (Eds.), *Conceptualizing and measuring father involvement* (pp. 61 – 82). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2000). Scholarship on fatherhood in the 1990s and beyond. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1173-1191. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01173.x
- Mattingly, M. J., & Bianchi, S. M. (2003). Gender differences in the quantity and quality of free time: The U.S. experience. *Social Forces*, 81, 999-1030. doi: 10.1353/sof.2003.0036
- Maurer, T. W., Pleck, J. H., & Rane, T. R. (2001). Parental identity and reflected-appraisals: Measurement and gender dynamics. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63, 309-321. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00309.x
- McCall, G. J., & Simmons, J. L. (1978). *Identities and interactions: An examination of human associations in everyday life* (rev. ed.). New York, NY: Free Press.
- McQuail, D. (2005). *McQuail's mass communication theory* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mead, G. H. (1934/1956). *Mind, self & society* (Edited by Charles W. Morris). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Milkie, M. A., & Peltola, P. (1999) Playing all the roles: Gender and the work-family balancing act. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 61, 476-490. doi: 10.2307/353763
- Mintz, S. (1998). From patriarchy to androgyny and other myths: Placing men's family roles in historical perspective. In A. Booth & A. C. Crouter (Eds.), *Men in families* (pp. 3-30). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Morgan, D. L. (1996). Focus groups. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22, 129-152. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.22.1.129
- Nielsen. (2009). Average TV viewing for 2008-09 TV season at all-time high. Retrieved from [http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/media\\_entertainment/average-tv-viewing-for-2008-09-tv-season-at-all-time-high/](http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/media_entertainment/average-tv-viewing-for-2008-09-tv-season-at-all-time-high/)



- Olmstead, S. B., Futris, T. G., & Pasley, K. (2009). An exploration of married and divorced, nonresident men's perceptions and organization of their father role identity. *Fathering, 7*, 249-268. doi: 10.3149/fth.0703.249
- Olson, B., & Douglas, W. (1997). Families on television: Evaluation of gender roles in situation comedy. *Sex Roles, 36*, 409-427. doi: 10.1007/BF02766656
- Osmond, M. W., & Thorne, B. (1993). Feminist theories: The social construction of gender in families and society. In P. G. Boss, W. J. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W. R. Schumm, & S. K. Steinmentz (Eds.), *Sourcebook of family theories and methods: A contextual approach* (pp. 591-623). New York, NY: Springer.
- Palkovitz, R. (2002a). *Involved fathering and men's adult development*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Palkovitz, R. (2002b). Involved fathering and child development: Advancing our understanding of good fathering. In C. S. Tamis-LeMonda & N. Cabrera (Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 119-140). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Palkovitz, R., Copes, M. A., & Woolfolk, T. N. (2001). "It's like...you discover a new sense of being": Involved fathering as an evoker of adult development. *Men and Masculinities, 4*, 46-69. doi: 10.1177/1097184X01004001003
- Pehlke, T. A., II, Hennon, C. B., Radina, M. E., & Kuvalanka, K. A. (2009). Does father still know best? An inductive thematic analysis of popular TV sitcoms. *Fathering, 7*(2), 114-139. doi: 10.3149/fth.0702.114
- Pleck, E. H. (2004). Two dimensions of fatherhood: A history of the good dad—bad dad complex. In M. E. Lamb (ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (pp. 32-57). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Pleck, J. H. (1987). American fathering in historical perspective. In M. Kimmel (Ed.), *Changing men* (pp. 83-97). Newbury Park, CA: Sage
- Pleck, J. H. (1997). Paternal involvement: Levels, sources, and consequences. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (pp. 66-103). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Pleck, J. H., & Masciadrelli, B. P. (2004). Paternal involvement by U. S. residential fathers: Levels, sources, and consequences. In M. E. Lamb (ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (pp. 222-271). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

- Popenoe, D. (1996). *Life without father*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Poulin-Dubois, D., Serbin, L. A., Eichstedt, J. A., Sen, M. G., & Beissel, C. F. (2002). Men don't put on make-up: Toddler's knowledge of the gender stereotyping of house-hold activities. *Social Development, 11*, 116-181. doi: 10.1111/1467-9507.00193
- Roggman, L. A., Fitzgerald, H. E., Bradley, R. H., & Raikes, H. (2002). Methodological, measurement, and design issues in studying fathers: An interdisciplinary perspective. In C. S. Tamis-LeMonda & N. Cabrera (Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 1-30). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Rotundo, A. (1985). American fatherhood: A historical perspective. *American Behavioral Scientist, XXIX*, 7-25. doi: 10.1177/000276485029001003
- Sandberg, J. F., & Hofferth, S. L. (2005). Changes in children's time with parents: A correction. *Demography, 42*, 391-395. doi: 10.1353/dem.2005.0017
- Sayer, L. C., Bianchi, S. M., & Robinson, J. P. (2004). Are parents investing less in children? Trends in mothers' and fathers' time with children. *American Journal of Sociology, 110*, 1-43. doi: 10.1086/386270
- Sayer, L. C., England, P., Bittman, M., & Bianchi, S. M. (2009). How long is the second (plus first) shift? Gender differences in paid, unpaid, and total work time in Australia and the United States. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 40*(4), 523-545.
- Serbin, L. A., Poulin-Dubois, D., Colbourne, K. A., Sen, M. G., & Eichstedt, J. A. (2001). Gender stereotyping in infancy: Visual preferences for and knowledge of gender-stereotyped toys in the second year. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 25*, 7-15.
- Shelton, B. A. (1992). *Women, men, and time: Gender differences in paid work, housework and leisure*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press.
- Signorielli, N., & Bacue, A. (1999). Recognition and respect: A content analysis of prime-time television characters across three decades. *Sex Roles, 40*, 527-544. doi: 10.1023/A:1018883912900
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Summers, J. A., Boller, K., Schiffman, R. F., & Raikes, H. (2006). The meaning of "good fatherhood:" Low-income fathers' social constructions of their roles. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 6, 145-165. doi: 10.1207/s15327922par0602&3\_2
- Summers, J. A., Raikes, H., Butler, J., Spicer, P., Pan, B., Shaw, S.,...& Johnson, M. K. (1999). Low-income fathers' and mothers' perceptions of the father role: A qualitative study in four early Head Start communities. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 20, 291-304. doi: 10.1002/(SICI)1097-0355(199923)20:3<291::AID-IMHJ6>3.0.CO;2-G
- Thompson, L. (1991). Family work: Women's sense of fairness. *Journal of Family Issues*, 12(2), 181-196.
- Thompson, L. & Walker, A. J. (1989). Gender in families: Women and men in marriage, work, and parenthood. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51, 845-871.
- Townsend, N. (2002). Cultural contexts of father involvement. In C. S. Tamis-LeMonda & N. Cabrera (Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 249-278). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Turner, J. H. (1974). *The structure of sociological theory*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.
- Turner, J. H. (2003). *The structure of sociological theory* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- U. S. Census Bureau. Fact sheet: Census 2000 demographic profile highlights. Retrieved from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)
- Waller, M. R. (2009). Family man in the other America: New opportunities, motivations, and supports for paternal caregiving. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 624, 156-176. doi: 10.1177/0002716209334372
- White, J. M., & Klein, D. M. (2008). *Family theories* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- White, L., & Rogers, S. J. (2000). Economic circumstances and family outcomes: A review of the 1990s. *Journal of Marriage and families*, 62, 1035-1051. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01035.x
- Wilson, W. J. (1987). *The truly disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- World Bank, Information and Communications for Development. (2009). ICT at a glance, United States. Retrieved from <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTINFORMATIONANDCOMMUNICATIONANDTECHNOLOGIES/EXTIC4D/0,,contentMDK:22229759~menuPK:5870649~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:5870636,00.html>
- Zick, C. D., & Bryant, W. K. (1996). A new look at parent's time spent in child care: Primary and secondary time use. *Social Science Research*, 25, 260-280. doi: 10.1006/ssre.1996.0012

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Recruitment Letter



College of Health and Human Sciences  
Human Development and Family Sciences  
322 Milam Hall  
Corvallis, OR 97331-5102 USA  
Phone: (541) 737-4765/1076 (fax)

---

Dear Father:

We would like to invite you to participate in a research study on “*The Ideal Father? Television Fathers and Experiences of Fathers Today*.” This study is the basis for a student project in the department of Human Development and Family Sciences at Oregon State University.

The purpose of the project is to gain a better understanding about the expectations and experiences of fathers today, as well as father’s reaction to representations of fathers on popular television programs. We want to talk with fathers:

- In dual-income families where one parent works at least part-time, and the other full-time
- With at least one child, 2.5 years or older
- With a degree from a four-year university
- *Being a current television watcher is NOT a requirement for participation*

We will hold small “focus groups” (discussion groups) with up to 8 fathers. Participants will receive \$15 as a symbol of appreciation for their time and help. Please contact Jack Day (information below) if you would like to take part in a focus group.

We would be very grateful for your participation in this project. Thank you in advance for your time and help. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Jack Day by email at [dayjac@onid.orst.edu](mailto:dayjac@onid.orst.edu) or by phone at 541-737-8623.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jack Day, Masters Student  
Richard Settersten, Ph.D., Professor

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

---

### Portrayal of Fathers on Television:

---

Who are the model fathers on television?

*(Probe: The fathers that you think people look up to, that set the standard or ideal for who fathers should be?)*

Who are the not-so-good fathers on television?

*(Probe: The fathers that give fathers a bad name, the ones that people use as an example for how not to father?)*

Which of these fathers set high expectations of what fathers should be? How?

*(Probe: What expectations do they set?)*

Which ones set low expectations of what fathers should be? How?

Some people suggest that the representations of fathers on television do a disservice to fathers. Do you agree? If so, how?

On the other hand, some people suggest that they help the image of fathers. Do you agree? If so, how?

---

### How Fathers Relate to Television Fathers

---

Do you see yourself in any of these fathers? How so?

*The following questions were used as probes. Every question was addressed in each focus group, though not every question was asked directly:*

Which television fathers do you want to be more like, and in what ways?

Are there ways that you strive to be different from any of the fathers?

Are there ways you strive to be better than any of the fathers?

Are there ways you feel you don't measure up to any of the fathers?

Are there you fall short of the expectations of fathers set by television fathers?

---

### Expectations of Fathers

---

We all have ideas of how we want to come across in our different roles (an ideal image of who we want to be, as men, and as fathers, for example). Ideally, how do others want you to be as a father?

*(Probe: What type of a father do you think others want you to be?)*

What type of father do you want to be?

*(Probe: Do the ways others [for example, your wife, others who may judge you as a father] want you to be, and the type of father you want to be match-up, or are they different? How so?)*

---

### Roles Fathers Assume within Families

---

What do you do as a father?

*(Probe: What activities do you engage in with your children? What activities are important to you as a father? What parental tasks/responsibilities fall solely on you? What parental tasks/responsibilities do you share with the mother of your children [if separated, to the person you most often divide day-to-day tasks with]?)*

As a father, what are the most important roles you play?

*(Probe: What is unique about what you can offer your children as a father?)*

---

### Generational Changes

---

What is expected of fathers of your generation that was not expected of your father's generation?

On the other hand, what is *not* expected of you that was expected of men in your father's generation?

---



## Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic questionnaire administered at the conclusion of each focus group:

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Marital Status:

_____ Single	
_____ Married	For how long? _____ (number of years)
_____ Divorced	For how long? _____ (number of years)
_____ Separated	For how long? _____ (number of years)
_____ Widowed	For how long? _____ (number of years)
_____ Cohabiting	For how long? _____ (number of years)

Number of people currently living in your household: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children living with you: \_\_\_\_\_ Ages of children: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children *not* living with you: \_\_\_\_\_ Ages of children: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently unemployed: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

How many hours *per week* do you work (including all jobs)? \_\_\_\_\_ (number of hours)

How many hours *per week* does your partner work (including all jobs)? \_\_\_\_\_ (number of hours)

Religious Affiliation, if any: \_\_\_\_\_

Political Affiliation:

\_\_\_\_\_ Democrat  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Republican  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Independent  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other

If other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

May we contact you about future studies:

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No