

# Fatherhood: breaking the cultural norms



## Fatherhood: Breaking the Cultural Norms

### Abstract

The ideas of parenting a child have evolved over the past century and continue to show us that the importance of paternal parenting involvement is paramount to the social and emotional development of children. It has been only recently that the true understanding and study of fatherhood involvement are known. This has begun a shift in our cultural norms around the abilities and importance of fatherhood involvement. The more we know will hopefully force the hand to facilitate this vital childhood relationship.

The study of fatherhood is scant as compared to motherhood and its absolute importance and significance in understanding how it shapes the life of a child. When we think of childrearing we often vision a mother caring for her young. Parental responsibility terms the duties and includes both parents. Often in society we place sex-role stereo types on families and paternal roles of fatherhood are fixed to be less emotionally connected to their children, less involved in day to day care and seen as the primary financial resource to support their children. In all communities, especially disenfranchised ones, fathers are typecast into roles that include absent parent, negative role models and emotionally unavailability. These beliefs seep into our systems, governments and the family structure.

Fatherhood in America has evolved from what it once was. Years ago the role of fathers was to provide financial stability to the family. However, today a shift for fathers to take an active role in the individual lives of their children and create unique relationships with them is seen. They have

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become more involved in care giving, decision making around education and medical care, as well as an emotional foundation for their young. They are now waking up at night to change diapers, feed babies, drop off children at school, help with homework and some are even breaking the stereotyping roles associated with gender specific parenting and are stay at home fathers while mothers work full time.

A mother's love has been historically seen as paramount in healthy child development. Prior to the mid 1920s fathers were excluded from popular press and except when to portray them in the canned roles of breadwinner, disciplinarian, and moral advisors in families. " In any case, only 16% of all articles published dealt explicitly with fathers. This percentage fluctuated little in the popular press throughout the course of the 20th century."

(Rohner & Veneziano, 2001) The study for this area in human development has been limited until more recent times (1960s and 1970s) as research was simply not considered, or information was collected form the wives of the men and not the fathers themselves. The beliefs of male breadwinning were used by researchers over the course of the 20th century to clarify a fathers' limited involvement in child care and upbringing. As women began to enter into America's workforce the nonspecific gender parenting culture took root (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001.)

The " father effect" is a term coined to point to the benefits of active fatherly participation in a family. (Krish, 2017) According to recent research there is now data driven proof that children have better outcomes when involved with a caring paternal figure. This is seen in the psychological and biological makeup of children. The word mothering bring forth, nurturing feeling, while

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the term fathering elicits feelings of something burly, harder, and overall a less affectionate idea. The conception of fathers as being somewhat of an inconsequential influence in child development has its counterpoint that is seen in the assumption about the predominance of mothers and their motherly love. However, it should be pointed out that virtually all of the significant and influential theories about child development (over the past century) accepted the principle that mothers are most important in child development. This can be seen in psychoanalytic theory, specifically, as well as psychodynamic theories. They generally assume that the mother-child relationship (especially during early development) is critical for normal child development. Early attachment theory also overly emphasizes the mother-child bond, as did significant portions of learning theory and cognitive developmental theory (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987). Additional influences that prevented the view to uphold and support fathers nurturing and showing warmth and love to their children are underpinned in cultural construction that a father best serves his family by supporting and providing for a child's mother. It was not that long ago that tending to the basic needs of a child could be seen as less masculine and there was a lauded postulation that men in general lacked the abilities for a suitable job of childrearing. The significance and study of this important relationship was fully understood or considered for centuries.

Once behavioral scientists gradually began to recognize that fathers should not be disregarded in child development (as well as family studies), we began to conceptualize the glaring evidence that we had been getting it all wrong for so long. Some of what we learned when empirical studies published

findings showed considerable impacts to children when they had a warm and nurturing connectedness to their fathers. Rohner & Veneziano, (2001) summarize one domain as, “ Boys seemed to conform to the sex-role standards of their culture when their relationships with their fathers were warm, regardless of how “ masculine” the fathers were, even though warmth and intimacy have traditionally been seen as feminine characteristics.”

Newer research has also demonstrated that engagement which includes the amount of time father spends with a child, the accessibility the child has to the father and level of responsibility that the father takes lends itself to cognitive and social competence. Children with these relationships have a better opportunity to develop stronger cognitive abilities to be more empathetic and psychologically adjusted (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001.) This study did not delineate between actual caring for a child and caring about the child. Recently (1980s and 1990s) behavioral scientists used analyses that permitted them to determine both fathers’ and mothers’ behaviors are associated significantly and uniquely with specific child outcomes.

It is further concluded that the influence of mother love sometimes disappears altogether, leaving father love as the sole significant predictor of such outcomes as personality and psychological adjustment problems, conduct and delinquency problems, and substance abuse. The numbers for single parent paternal lead households have more than quadrupled in America during the last few decades. Laws governing divorce and custody have slowly changed in ways

designed to treat spouses and parents more equally. This has facilitated more father custody in many situations. Single men are even making their mark on t adoptions in America. “ However, it is estimated that in recent years, about 3% of adoptions through foster care have been by single men, often gay, and adoptions by single men through foster care are usually of older, harder-to-place children’ (Koch, 2007.) New studies show that men are becoming more confident and capable of their parenting, reporting few behavior problems with their children.

Studies of this period that included a group of single mothers for comparison concluded that single-father respondents were doing pretty well- in fact, similar to or better than many single mothers. For instance, single fathers reported better child behavior and higher satisfaction than did single mothers in the study. This conclusion is based on the attribution that fathers were more likely to be complemented, offered help and appreciated for parenting. That appreciation was reflected to their children who then also expressed more appreciation of their fathers. Mothers, in comparison, did not receive the same level of kudos and aid, resulting in a reported a lower level of appreciation from their children.

Teachers, social service providers, community services, and the courts should continue to (or increase efforts) facilitate father responsibility and inclusion in the family template. Even when fathers are not custodial parents it is paramount to include them . Communicating with them directly, not through the mother or child will help prepare men who might end up being primary custodial parents in the future. Increasing the supports for fathers’ in social services and even in local community centers also increases

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the idea that men can be capable and nurturing caretakers. Fathers need to be better apprised of social and community supports in order to help facilitate this vital piece of child rearing.

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