Parenthood from the father's point of view

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The recent change, fragmenting or even crisis of fatherhood is very well documented in various books and articles within social sciences (e.g. Susan Faludi 1999; Robert Griswold 1993), but the potential directions or trends of future fathering are not so easily in full view of scholars and experts. Looking at the issue broadly we might speak about two opposite tides, the *diminishing* and *intensifying* cultures/ discourses of fatherhood (Alan J. Hawkins & David C. Dollahite 1997; David Blankenhorn 1995), which both are already prevailing in our public debate. The diminishing culture of fatherhood may be seen in that kind of a public discourse which considers solely mothers and, on the other hand, in the factual decreasing presence of fathers in many families. Correspondingly, the intensifying or *strengthening* culture of fatherhood is generated by the discourse focusing on committed fathering and shared parenting, as well as by the growing number of involved fathers, who already try to live that kind of life as true.

Moreover, I try to clarify the concepts of "father", "fathering" and "fatherhood", much in compliance with David Morgan's recent writings. Also I am going to reflect, how the concept of fatherhood can be divided into various segments according to the man's position in relation to the child. In this respect we may identify genetic/biological, juridical, social and psychological "fatherhoods". Respectively, in relation to society – and in relation to the mother - many kinds of categorisations of fatherhood types have been documented, but one of the latest (Loren Marks & Rob Palkovitz 2004) is somehow interesting: "the good", "the bad", and "the uninterested". Particularly, the discourse on bad fatherhood and "deadbeat dads" is worth of reviewing. Finally, the question about fatherless society is rising along the late demographic trends, which reveal that in several countries men have and want fewer children than women, and especially in the near future, more men than women will live the whole of their life without any kind of personal parenthood (David Eggebeen 2002). If this is

a sort of threatening scenario, a part of the diminishing culture of fatherhood, or a demographic fact among many others that has no explicit impact on our future everyday fathering, we don't know yet.

THE TERMS FATHER, FATHERHOOD, AND FATHERING

The term "father" is not any more unambiguous, neither the concept of fatherhood. In the case of the term "father" we are concerned with processes by which this term becomes attached to a particular individual. We reveal the distinctions between biological, juridical and social fathers and analyze the ways in which societies privilege the biological fathers (Barbara Hobson & David Morgan 2002). We may get information about the fathers by listening to the experiences of men called fathers. In this meaning the term "father" refers to the mode "being".

If fathers are seen in relational terms to mothers and children and as elements of social structure, fatherhood can be seen as the cultural coding of men as fathers (norms, sanctions etc.). Here, we are dealing with the rights, duties, responsibilities and statuses that are attached to men called fathers, as well as the discursive terrain around good and bad fathers. The tensions within fatherhood discourses are interesting by revealing something essential in our understanding about fatherhood.

As Barbara Hobson and David Morgan (2002) argue, the words "father" and "fatherhood" are well established in the English language and readily translatable into other languages, but the same cannot be said for the term "fathering". The parallel terms are "mothering" and "parenting". In formal terms, the distinction might seem to signify one between being and doing, between a status or identity and a set of practices. The matter in question is the part of a man's "doings" which are closely connected to the well-being of a child. However, all the fathering practices do not always require the actual co-presence of a child when, for example, a father puts in a request for parental leave.

The different meanings of "father" may be specified as follows:

(1) *Genetic or biological father* refers to the biological origin of a child: a man whose sperm has fertilized the ovum. In some cases the man may be characterized sooner as a "sperm donor", because of the artificial or unaware nature of the conception.

(2) *Juridical father* is the lawful father in a child's life. He is a man who has established the legal paternity, which always means certain statutory rights and responsibilities given to him. For example, in many post-divorce circumstances a father's legal position is carefully evaluated and, possibly, re-evaluated.

(3) *Social father* is a man who is sharing his everyday life with a child, living together with him or her, and responding to the daily needs of the child. A common post-modern

family situation, in which a man is not a biological but definitely a social father, is a "new" family, a stepfamily where a mother is the biological mother for every child, but the man is not the biological neither juridical father for any of the children.

(4) *Psychological father* is a man who has established a close, reciprocal relationship with a child, living or not with the child, but, at all events, he or she regards the man as his/her father. The term "psychological" refers to a kind of an attachment or a bond between a child and a man, and therefore this kind of a father or fatherhood may be assessed as the most meaningful form of the term "father".

In modern societies like the Nordic countries, the concept of father is fragmented, not only at the conceptual level but also in practice, so that many children actually have two fathers in their everyday lives: the juridical non-residential father and the social stepfather living with the child and his/ her mother. However, it seems that the biological roots of the term "father" are still prevalent and so tenacious that we need more public debates on this issue.

Table 1. The manifestations of the different meanings of "father" in diverse family types

Father's position in family context	Form of the manifestation of fatherhood			
	Genetic/ biological	**Juridical**	**Social**	**Psychological**
Two-parent family	Nearly always	Always	Always	Presumably always
Stepfather in a "new" family	Never	Rarely	Frequently in practice	Frequently in the long run
Non-residential, "remote" father	Nearly always	Always	With restrictions	Becoming often fragile
Single father	Nearly always	Always in general	Always	Always

As the table above indicates, diverse family types constitute a varying terrain for the manifestation of a man's fatherhood. It should be noted that the armour of a man's fatherhood is vulnerable even in the nuclear family, especially on the part of the psychological fatherhood. On the other hand, even though the role of a single father is not considered as enviable, in most cases he is living the life of a "full" father.

DIMINISHING AND INTENSIFYING CULTURES OF FATHERHOOD

Alan Hawkins and David Dollahite (1997, 4-5) have launched the term "diminishing culture of fatherhood", by which they mean above all the decreasing presence of fathers in families and its destructive consequences for children, communities and society. They refer to David Blankenhorn's well-known book "Fatherless America", and his statements on the biological origin of the nature of men's fathering behaviour. Blankenhorn (1995, 3) asserts boldly what others quietly assume that fatherhood is a problem, because men are not biologically suited to responsible fathering: "Men are inclined to sexual promiscuity and paternal waywardness … unwilling or unable to make that vital investment." Therefore he suggests authoritative cultural coaxing and guiding into responsible fatherhood through a set of legal and extralegal pressures that require men to maintain a close alliance with their children's mother and to invest in their children.

Even if I question Blankenhorn's analysis about the cracking down on fathers' paternal waywardness, it is easy to agree with him that there is a diminishing tendency in the contemporary culture of fatherhood, and the danger of that is real. Also John Gillis (2000) refers almost to the same phenomenon by the term "marginalization of fatherhood", by which he means the discourses that downplay the meaningfulness of fatherhood in men's lives, as well as the actual inappropriate behaviour of some fathers.

This diminishing tendency of post-modern fatherhood can be identified in three different fields of modern life: in discourses, social conventions and family practices. The value or meaning of fatherhood and fathering may be decreased, first of all, by such public discourses that stress for example "the male freedom and optional fatherhood", as well as by discourses on "bad fathers", "mother's superior care" or "men as sperm donators". Even if a certain public debate, like above-mentioned, is not malevolent or demolishing the value of fatherhood as it is, nevertheless it turns the general interest away from the importance of fatherhood. Similarly, some social conventions, like post-divorce settlements that disfavour male care, or growing demands of work life that pass over the needs of fathers, are ruining little by little the importance of fatherhood. Actually, it means that a given father is gradually drawn away from sharing the everyday life of his child without the father's own intention. As generalized this kind of conventions are creating the diminishing culture of fatherhood. And finally, some family practices, like the growing numbers of absent fathers, who are not present physically or psychologically in their children's everyday life, are producing the diminishing culture of fatherhood. Fathers whose relationship to the child is only biological and/or juridical, busy fathers or uninvolved fathers as well are contributing to the diminishing tendencies of fatherhood.

On the other hand, there can be identified an intensifying or strengthening culture of fatherhood in many western societies. This new culture is produced and maintained by the very similar mechanisms as the culture of diminishing fatherhood: by discourses, conventions and practices. Firstly, discourses on "new" fatherhood and shared parenting stress involved

fathering. In contemporary social discourse, the term "new fatherhood" has been introduced in many ways each encompassing various aspects of new fathering; for example, "hands-on fathering" (Daniels & Weingarten 1988), "generative fathering" (Hawkins & Dollahite 1997), "nurturant fathering" (Pruett 1987), "positively involved fathering" (Pleck 1997), and "responsible fathering" (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erikson 1998).

Secondly, social conventions like welfare state's family policies, family-friendly work place arrangements, and positively stressing public opinion towards more involved fathering are such factors that have a great impact on the intensifying culture of fatherhood. For instance, fathers' right to an increasing portion of parental leaves has been documented as one of the most successful way to reinforce men's involvement in their fatherhood. And thirdly, certain family practices, like fathers' growing proportional engagement (relative to mothers) in child care and housework, or in prenatal classes, childbirth and father-child groups, are practices which serve as good examples or encouraging models for other men and all community. At the moment, there is a remarkable lack of survey research concerning the (true) family practices around fathering. Actually we do not know the extent or proportions of these two different cultures of fatherhood from the viewpoint of family practices.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UNINTERESTED: CONTEMPORARY TYPES OF FATHERING AND FATHERHOOD

As we know, generalized and typologized discussions of fathers or any particular groups of human beings discount both inter-individual and intra-individual variability. However, there is a degree of legitimacy to carefully generalized discussions of fatherhood, be it contemporary or historical, because most fathers share some universal characteristics. Further, descriptions of different styles of types of fathers can serve as helpful ideal types that are of great utilitarian and heuristic value in assessing the social reality of the "typical" father.

Loren Marks and Rob Palkovitz (2004) have identified four contemporary types of fathering, especially from the American point of view: the new, involved father, the good provider, the deadbeat dad, and the paternity-free man. The first two, the new, involved father and the good provider, can be classified as "the good", the third one as "the bad", and the fourth one, the paternity-free man, as "the uninterested". Actually, typologizing fathers along the moral dimension good vs. bad is nothing new (e.g. Furstenberg 1988), but perhaps Marks and Palkovitz have caught something crucial and representative in the post-modern family life.

As already mentioned above, *the "new, involved" father* is one prevalent portrayal of modern fatherhood, which suggests that we are witnessing an increased level of father involvement, a rising number of men who have given more time and commitment to their hands-on fathering while at the same time trying to be providers, too (Wilcox 2002).

Specifically, although the greater responsibility might be in the hands of the mother, these new fathers are much more likely to change diapers, care for, and nurture their children and engage in domestic tasks than previous generations, or the other current father types. In other words, in accordance with David Morgan's "fatherhood triangle", this type could be defined as a "package" in which the father is biological or/ and social, fathering consists of nurturing and caring, and the fatherhood of the man could be characterized as generative or hands-on.

The other of the "good" father types, *the good provider*, is somewhat controversial by nature: their fathering consists of bread-winning as well as of playing with children, and the main feature in their fatherhood is the economic responsibility. Although a father's ability to provide may have many positive intergenerational effects on children through observational learning, educational opportunities, and other aspects of developing human capital and needed skills, the crucial question will be directed to the nurturing role of the father. Is he balancing satisfactorily the economic provision with close-at-hand father involvement? Loren Marks and Rob Palkovitz (2004) put the question as follows: "How 'good' does a good provider have to be?" Parents are consistently pressured to provide their children with the latest entertainment, technology, and fashion in a society where consumerism and status are hegemonic. These pressures toward provision of status can be juxtaposed with the ideal that parents should create a home that is emotionally and relationally stable.

Furthermore, there have always been *"bad fathers"* with varying interpretations and emphases, but currently divorces, mother-headed households, and defaults on court-ordered alimony and child support payments have reached near all-time highs (Palkovitz, 2002). These and other similar negative indicators have been interpreted to suggest that contemporary patterns of fatherhood are far from reflective of a "new breed" of fathers and indicate a fathering deficiency and decline. Pleck and Pleck (1997, 48) characterize "bad fathers" as follows: "The bad dad has always been the man who failed to live up to his parental responsibilities. Those responsibilities have always been defined in part as acknowledgement of paternity and responsibility for child support. Even though the good dad has possessed a variety of qualities, failure as a breadwinner has always been a significant feature of the bad dad". Conversely, some co-residential fathers may provide economically but miserably fail to adopt the social and emotional roles of fathering. Such men are physically present but psychologically absent fathers.

PATERNITY-FREE MEN AND FATHERLESS SOCIETY

A declining tendency in the importance of marriage and parenting has been greater in the lives of Nordic men than in the lives of Nordic women. This declining tendency has been documented also elsewhere in Western countries (e.g. Forste 2002). David J. Eggebeen

(2002) contrasts elements of the good father type with that of paternity-free manhood by stating that "it is ironic that, at the very time that the changes in the practice of fatherhood are being praised, fatherhood is becoming a less common activity". Why is this? Renata Forste (2002) argues that present answers are "vague at best". Certainly, some childless men desire to have children but do not become fathers due to infertility, mental disorders, lack of a partner, economic circumstances, or other personal reasons.

There might be some male specific reasons like Peter Pan phenomenon, to which Griswold (1993, 228) refers with other words. With Peter Pan phenomenon is meant that kind of young men's subculture where life is seen as groovy, individualistic and freewheeling, and in which kind of life commitments and generative thinking are not on the personal agenda. In addition, sometimes the homosocial cohesion of a male group is so tight that there is no room for personal solutions like a marriage or cohabiting. Also a profound commitment to working life or male hobbies may cause a way of life in which parenthood, or even pair relationship, has no place. Or else – if the cohabitation or marriage is regarded as convenient under these circumstances, the fatherhood (and the potential child) is seen strongly optional. These post-modern busy husbands actually will live a single man's life with the presumption that the spouse or partner will be endlessly patient in the case of having a child. As William Marsiglio (1998, 94) argues, men may be reluctant to assert their preference [to not have a child] if they are in love with a partner who forcefully asserts her desire to give birth to their child. In this type of situation, it is often the case that men's procreative consciousness is interwoven with their feelings toward their partner identity.

The paternity-free thinking might also be down to the norms and obligations of modern involved fathering. Some men may judge these cultural expectations too demanding, and they assess their potentialities insufficient for good fathering. And finally, could it be possible to speak about the paternity-free attitude in terms of "not interested in children" or even "don't like children"? However, the fact is that there is a growing group of men, both married and unmarried, who appear to prefer paternity-free manhood over the alternative.

After all, as Marsiglio (1998) puts it, it might be realistic to assume that the paternal motivation may be related to a father's involvement with children so that men who want to be fathers are more likely to be involved fathers. Conversely, men who do not desire to be fathers, but who biologically and juridically become fathers, are less likely to be involved financially, temporally, or relationally, especially across time. Perhaps future fathers will increase in quality while decreasing in quantity.

But if in the future there stay alive strong reverse tendencies, our communities are becoming more and more fatherless societies with an increasing number of men without any kind of personal fatherhood, with an increasing number of families without a man, and with increasing numbers of absent fathers in general. Fatherless society refers also to the diminishing culture of collective fathering, which means, for example, lack of male mentors, coaches and male workers in schools and kindergartens as well as in social work or in health

care. Concretely, the lack of collective fathering is visible in the immediate neighbourhood by the fact that there are fewer and fewer fathers or men playing with children outdoors.

The pessimistic scenario of future fatherless lays stress on the declining value of male generative behaviour in society. It means that the egocentric, "cv-oriented" way of life has become so prevailing and self-evident for many men that they have no room for thinking about other people or being responsible for the younger generation. From this point of view, the lack of generative behaviour can be recognized also elsewhere in our society, like in political, societal and working life, in which generative activities are out of fashion or they are excluded from normal manners. Ultimately, the question is, how do we understand the collective responsibility for other people.

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