

**Mechtild Oechsle, Ursula Müller, and Sabine Hess
(eds): Fatherhood in Late Modernity. Cultural Images,
Social Practices, Structural Frames**

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An-Magritt Jensen

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How do men react to new expectations to fatherhood? Why has the adaptation to equality in the home been so slow? What defines fatherhood? These are the basic questions explored in this volume. We are taken through a journey on fatherhood over 14 individual contributions representing a variety of scientific fields. The volume is divided into three sections: cultural, social, and institutional fatherhood.

Much attention is given to the “new” fatherhood but what is new, and how do we know, Ralph LaRossa asks at the start of this book. We are warned that cultural images and actual behavior belong to different spheres. Culture and conduct may work in concert, but also as opposites. This reminder is timely since the leitmotif for the subsequent contributions is the exploration of cultural images along with contradictions of men’s provider and protector roles.

Changes and variations in fatherhood are traced in a variety of cultural images. In literature, Walter Erhart illustrates the weakening of fatherhood by Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks* from 1901 and contrasts this to John von Düffel’s description of the disintegration of the family by Houwelandt (2004). Through Hollywood films, Lisa Gotto draws the link to ongoing debates of changes in fathers’ family role while historical pedagogic images express fathers’ loss of authority combined with their helplessness in finding a new role in the family (Sabine Andresen). Moving to politics, Irina Novikova provides a fascinating description of the transition to the market economy in Eastern Europe. While fathers were distanced at home under state socialism, they are now expected to regain domestic power. This chapter demonstrates how the “caring father” can easily be co-opted by an agenda of reinforcing paternal authority.

There is a general agreement on gendered social practices where women’s outflow from the labor market has not been “balanced” with men’s inflow into the

A.-M. Jensen (✉)
Department of Sociology and Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology,
Trondheim, Norway
e-mail: anmagritt.jensen@svt.ntnu.no

home. The question is why. Cornelia Behnke and Michael Meuser identify four couples representing consistently involved fatherhood from a larger qualitative study. These men are less career-oriented and their wives are less home-oriented. Involved fatherhood and gender equality is not linked (a point also made by Holter). Rather, these fathers pursue their own personal needs. In general, Cornelia Helfferich (among others) claims that social power among modern men is rooted in their provider role. Fatherhood represents the end of youth, and expectations of entering the female sphere of care for children. Taking a step away from the (still) dominant pattern of fathers in nuclear families, William Marsiglio turns to groups with a marginalized relationship to fatherhood: male young workers without children, stepfathers, and gay men/fathers, demonstrating diversity in men's relations to children. What theories, economic or sociological, are better to explain husbands' low engagement in household work? In a quantitative and longitudinal study, Florian Schulz and Hans-Peter Blossfeld analyze couples and conclude that habits shaping everyday practices are crucial. Sociological theories of behavioral patterns are more helpful than the economic.

What forces are at play in retaining the fissure between work and home? What happens when the spatial division of the two spheres is eliminated? Susan Halford finds that home-working fathers exert some flexibility but do not take over responsibilities for children during working hours. Work and family boundaries are upheld. From a different approach, Elin Kvande examines controls over work in knowledge-based institutions. Employees' feelings of empowerment are combined with a strong and internalized self-discipline in a seductive and greedy labor market. The impact on fathering is negative. Similarly, Norbert F. Schneider and Katharina S. Becker assess reconciliation of work and family in a gendered status-ranking system. As long as status is derived from work rather than from family, significant changes in men's participation at home is deemed unlikely. Analyzing gender role attitudes in European countries confirms that the idea of mothers as home-stayers and fathers as breadwinners remains strong. Also, Øystein Gullvåg Holter points to the different rewards and risks of gender equality, a "plus factor" to women, and a "minus factor" to men. Through surveys and family policies in Norway he finds no strong link between active fathering and gender-equality orientations. In this "frontline" country, gender equality is combined with a gender-segregated labor market, suggesting that gender differentiation may be embedded in "modernization". The final contribution by Richard Collier uses changes in family law (in the UK) to illuminate general issues of fatherhood. While marriage laws were the "ties that bind" men to children, fatherhood is now exposed to "fragmentation and genetization". Increased emphasis on genetics has politicized fatherhood, where a "pro-fathers social policy agenda" potentially downgrades the role of mothers and the need of children. Collier concludes that the new model of fatherhood is associated with a neo-liberal economic agenda with a transnational dimension in debates about fatherhood.

There is much to learn from this volume of highly qualified contributions. Readers are referred to the editorial introduction for a thorough discussion of the perspectives of the volume. But it is also clear that we find weaknesses familiar to a conference-based publication. In this case, it has taken a long time (from 2007). The

result is a collection of individual contributions with little, if any, relationship between them. The majority, but not all, of the contributions stem from Germany, with few, if any cross-references to similarities and differences in other countries. Finally, many chapters take the family unit and couple as underlying principles while more men remain bachelors, have no children, and have children in different households. Is there an untold story here about masculinity and fatherhood?