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Maintaining Boundaries: Masculinizing Fatherhood in the Feminine Province of Parenting

Abstract   Today's fathers are more involved with childcare than the generations that preceded them. There is evidence to suggest that men consider fatherhood and their relationships with their children as more important than ever before. Still, society generally deems the activity of "parenting" as feminine. Thus, men who choose to identify with hegemonic notions of masculinity have few pre-existing father identities to choose from. I argue that fathers actively masculinize their parenting in order to protect their masculine identities. I use qualitative methods to examine the different approaches that they take to conciliate their actions as fathers with their identities as men. They do so by stressing different areas of importance when it comes to parenting, by adding masculine elements to their fathering activities, and by staying away from parenting activities that are generally marked by society as feminine.

There is a great deal of literature regarding gender roles in the family and, specifically, the differences between motherhood and fatherhood. The literature suggests that parenthood is deeply gen-

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dered and takes on different meanings for men and for women. Not only do women continue to take on the lion's share of childcare duties (Hochschild 1989; 1997; Shelton and John 1996; Coltrane 2000; Sayer 2004; Poortman and van der Lippe 2009; Bianchi and Milkie 2010; Hook 2010) but men tend to view their roles as fathers as mediated and organized by their wives. In fact, men tend to see children as an extension of their marriage, and often it is their female partners who decide when to have children and in which way to raise them (Di Leonardo 1987; Hochschild 1989; Lorber 2005; Townsend 2005).

Once children are born, they are often viewed to be their mother's priority. Motherhood becomes a romanticized identity, and mothers tend to feel "mor-

ally transformed" (McMahon 1995). Fathers, on the other hand, are often viewed as "helping out" or as "babysitters" when it comes to their own children. Indeed, when a man is the primary care-giver to a child, it is deemed to be an extraordinary situation, sometimes even newsworthy (Lorber 2005). By contrast, motherhood traditionally places women at the epitome of their femininity and at the height of their gender performances (Eichler 1988). One wonders, then, how fathers who take an active role in parenting navigate and negotiate their participation in the feminine domain. This is precisely the focus of this paper.

There is evidence of the increased accessibility and involvement of fathers in the lives of their children in the last several decades. There has been a steady increase in the time that men have been spending with their children, as well as an increase in the practice of co-parenting (Furstenberg 1988; Pleck 1997; Deutsch 1999; Yeung et al. 2001; Craig, Mullan, and Blaxland 2010; Turner and Welch 2012). In the past it was assumed that fathers make very little contribution to their children's well-being and researchers supposed that fathers took a back seat to mothers when it came to exerting influence over children (Smith 1998; Lorber 2005). Today, these notions are considered outdated as father involvement has become associated with greater well-being for men, as well as for children (who tend to do better in school, have fewer behavioral problems and higher self-esteem than children with less involved fathers) (Eggebeen and Knoester 2001; Buckley and Schoppe-Sullivan 2010).

Yet, while the practice of fatherhood has been changing, the culture of parenting still revolves

around motherhood. This culture is strongly rooted in the social structures of media, religion, school, and family. Thus, fathers who choose to be involved parents find themselves struggling with the culture of hegemonic masculinity and must reconcile their fathering with their masculine identity. In this study, I use qualitative methods to examine the different approaches men take to conciliate their actions as fathers with their senses of masculine identity. I found that fathers actively masculinize their parenting behaviors as a means of protecting their identities as men—identities which are threatened upon their entering the feminine domain of parenting. The strategies which emerge are: stressing different areas of importance when it comes to parenting, adding traditionally masculine elements to fathering activities, and staying away from parenting activities that are marked by society as ultra-feminine.

Theoretical Background: Fathering Behavior, Culture, and Hegemonic Masculinity

The social construction of fatherhood has changed over time from the patriarchal father figure, who held authority over his wife and children and who was primarily responsible for discipline, to the more nurturing father figure that we are familiar with today. The rise of industrialism created a separation of work and home and had the result of pushing fathers into two opposing groups: absent fathers (who spend a great deal of time at work and/or who have abandoned their roles as heads of households) and involved fathers (who have been given societal "permission" to show warmth and nurturing towards

their children) (Bernard 1981; Turner and Welch 2012). Cultural conceptions of fatherhood have changed so that active participation in childcare is not just accepted, but somewhat expected. Today's fathers believe that active and nurturing involvement in childcare is an integral part of fathering roles (Gerson 2010a; Taylor at al. 2013).

Indeed, fathers have become more and more active in childcare over the years. In 2013, seventeen percent of single parents in the United States were men and an estimated two-hundred and fourteen thousand men worked as stay-at-home fathers (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). Studies have also shown a general increase in the amount of time fathers spend carrying out childcare activities (though the data consistently show that mothers still carry out the vast majority of this work) (Coltrane and Adams 2001; Gershuny 2001; Yeung et al. 2001; Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie 2006).

A central claim of this paper is that fathers actively masculinize parenting in order to enhance their own masculine identities. There are, of course, many different forms of masculinity. While it is important to acknowledge the existence of a variety of different masculinities, it is vital to recognize that society assigns disproportionate values to different forms of masculinity. That is, some forms of masculinity are more highly valued than others. The term "hegemonic masculinity" refers to the form of masculinity which is most desired and tends to correspond with qualities that people recognize as traditionally masculine, such as strength, power, control, and success. Other forms of masculinity are then viewed as lesser forms and, subsequently,

less desirable. Most importantly, "hegemonic masculinity" is constructed in relation to the concept of femininity, being strongly defined as its opposite. Activities that fall into feminine gender schemas, then, threaten hegemonic masculine ideals (Kimmel 1994; Connell 1995).

Activities and qualities connected with parenting have traditionally fallen into feminine gender schemas and are most often deemed a part of women's domain. Indeed, a model of fatherhood that includes strong emotional ties, physical closeness, intimacy, et cetera is often at odds with hegemonic masculinity as it is these very qualities that the dominant form of masculinity tends to repress (Magaraggia 2013). While my study suggests that this can be somewhat limiting for fathers, narrowing the range of father identities that they have to choose from, Miller (2011) posits that fathers are empowered by a greater diversity of choices when it comes to paternal identity as they can present themselves as good fathers in terms of involvement or in terms of being good providers (and everything in between).

Indeed, many men have attempted to renegotiate the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity, moving beyond the good provider model to incorporate various levels of egalitarianism, ranging from men who incorporate mothers' employment into their masculine ideals yet still do not take equal responsibility for childcare, to those who share equally in the domain of childcare. The adoption of these different levels is, of course, partly embedded in larger social constructs including race and class (Shows and Gerstel 2009; Gerson 2010b).

Kaufman (2013) speaks of such levels in her notable work on what she calls "superdads." Kaufman outlines three different types of fathers: old, new, and super, and points out that even the most traditional "old dads" are more focused on their children than the generations of fathers that preceded them. She explains that "new dads" make greater attempts than "old dads" to balance both work and family and to accommodate their partner's employment while, at the same time, not seriously challenging their work arrangements. Thus, their commitment to egalitarianism is significant, yet limited. Furthermore, Kaufman claims that this "new dad" type of fathering has become normative. Lastly, Kaufman describes the lives of "superdads" who place children above career, share in the responsibility for parenting equally with their partners, and who make all decisions about their paid employment with their children's best interest in mind.

There have been several works that advance gender neutral parenting, calling for a degendering of this domain and promoting equality in the area of parenting (see, for instance, Kimball 1988; Lorber 2005; Mannino and Deutsch 2007). However, many scholars still insist on painting the realm of parenting feminine and define the active participation of men in childcare as "mothering" in attempts to reflect contemporary mainstream beliefs (see, for instance, Robinson and Barret 1986; Ehrensaft 1987; Risman 1998; Crittenden 2001).

Doucet (2006:210), in her influential work, *Do Men Mother?*, examines this pairing of men and motherhood, ultimately concluding that, "these fathers are not mothering and they are not mothers. Rather ...

these *fathers are reconfiguring fathering and masculinities.*" Indeed, the assertion that men mother can be somewhat problematic for men as they attempt to gain access to the province of parenting which has already been deemed a feminine domain. Doucet (2006) questions the constant contrasting of women and men in terms of parenting skills and calls on both scholars and policy makers to note the unique abilities and parenting approaches that fathers bring to their families. Doucet (2009) points out that when women make space for men to cross the threshold into the parenting realm, fathers come to take on responsibility for children in terms of both community and emotion. She points out that much of the retention of traditional gendered parenting roles stems from the marginalization that fathers often feel in female dominated early childhood settings, such as parenting groups, and notes that women and men experience different pressures when displaying childcare in community settings (Doucet 2006; 2009; 2011).

Lastly, Townsend's (2002; 2005) work on fatherhood and the mediating role of women provides valuable insight for scholars examining gender and parenting. Townsend (2005:105) describes how his respondents viewed, "'marriage and children' as elements of a 'package deal' which cannot be easily separated." Women, he argues, are often the decision-makers when it comes to having children. They often take on the roles of "default parents." Furthermore, Townsend argues, women play the role of mediator when it comes to fathers' involvement, outlining the conditions around fathering behavior. Townsend (2002) argues that men's mediated roles are a result of paid employment and that

it is their identity as providers for their family that is used to express closeness to their children. The emphasis placed on provision limits men's time within the home, leading their roles to be mediated by their wives.

Methodological Approach

I gathered data from a series of thirty-three semi-structured interviews with father respondents who have young children. The majority (twenty-eight) of these interviews were conducted in Wisconsin; four were conducted in Indiana and one in Ohio. Nineteen of the interviews were conducted as part of earlier research and, for those respondents, their partners (the mothers) were also interviewed. My original study, in which I interviewed forty parents (19 fathers and 21 mothers), centered on the practice of maternal gatekeeping, exploring this process of mothers limiting the involvement of fathers in childcare. During these interviews, however, an interesting theme emerged inductively. I noticed that the fathers seemed to feel both a sense of pride, as well as a sense of discomfort when it came to their fathering behaviors. They were happy to report to me what they were doing as fathers, but also felt the need to add a touch of masculinity to these behaviors; they felt the need to distinguish their parenting roles from those of their female partners. This motivated me to investigate further. As the original study focused on maternal identity in relation to maternal gatekeeping, I wondered what part paternal identity played, if any, in creating this interesting dynamic. I decided to add to my data set fourteen more interviews just with fathers.

I used a snowball sampling technique to carry out this research. As my initial focus was on maternal gatekeeping, I sought out families in which parents were either married or living together. As such, only three men were not married but were cohabiting with the mother of their children and only one respondent was divorced from (and attempting a reconciliation with) the mother of his child. Initial respondents were obtained while observing parenting "in situ" at places where parents and children can be found, including parks, child-themed cafes, libraries, and restaurants. I would simply approach people in these settings who had children with them, introduce myself, obtain their phone numbers, and then set up an appointment for an interview at a later date. I also obtained respondents from everyday public settings, asking people in restaurants, cafes, stores, and on the street if they would be willing to let me interview them. Several interviews were carried out by research assistants under my supervision who both took advantage of referrals from names I had collected, as well as recruited respondents from their own places of work.

As my attention shifted away from maternal gatekeeping and towards fathering, my sample became more purposive and I sought out fathers who showed a measure of involvement in their children's lives. While involvement can be broadly defined, to recruit respondents, I relied on the appearance of involvement (men who took their children to parks, libraries, and restaurants and who were actively engaged in parenting activities: playing, feeding, disciplining, etc.), as well as on statements from men themselves concerning their

involvement with their children. In general, this approach yielded a relatively diverse sample, consisting of several different religious, ethnic, and socio-economic groups. Respondents ranged in education level from high school diploma to PhD and were employed in occupations that included jobs in the medical field, in the field of religion, students and academics, military personnel, fire-fighters, and sales. Several men were unemployed, worked only in odd jobs, or were home on disability. I was also able to interview families where fathers acted as primary caregivers to their children. (This, however, had more to do with these men being unemployed than it did with gender ideology and speaks to the class diversity of my sample.) The sample also consisted of families that were formed by adoption and step-parenting. While I did not limit the sample by age of respondents, I only interviewed men who were raising children under the age of eighteen years old. The respondents ranged in age from twenty-four to fifty years old, the majority being in their late twenties or early thirties. The ages of their children ranged from newborn to thirteen years old (with one respondent having an additional adult child whom he did not discuss during the interview). For a list of respondents and their biographical data, see: Appendix A. All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

This sampling strategy was also somewhat limiting for my study. In addition to excluding divorced and separated fathers, my sample did not contain respondents raising children with same-sex partners or parents who were atypically young (such as teenage parents). As well, this sampling technique may have generated a sample that was slightly

more invested in their parental identities as I only approached those who had children with them in public places. This may have eliminated from my sample fathers who do not often go to child-centered places nor often take their children out in public. It is difficult to assess how this may have impacted my findings. However, one might ponder whether the respondents may have added pressure placed on them to masculinize their parenting since they do so in the public eye. Perhaps my respondents were more likely to engage in masculinizing than fathers who limited their involvement to activities carried out in the home.

Fathers, in general, were eager to speak about their parenting roles, and thus rejections were few and far between. When recruiting, my research assistants and I made a point of explaining to respondents that we were interested in hearing about fathers' perspectives in particular (as opposed to just concentrating on the roles of mothers in parenting). This went a long way in making respondents feel appreciated. Still, in the majority of cases, the interviews were set up through the respondents' partners. This is noteworthy itself in light of the literature that suggests fatherhood is mediated through wives and mothers. It was most often the mother who agreed first and then recruited her partner. Even in the 14 cases where only fathers were interviewed, it was surprising to note how many of the respondents were recruited by asking mothers if their partners might be persuaded to be interviewed. This, of course, demonstrates a predisposition of the research process itself, whereby even researchers view parenting as feminine domain and feel the need to ask permission from

mother gatekeepers before eliciting the opinions of fathers. Indeed, on several occasions, women explained they would be happy to be interviewed, but their husbands or live-in boyfriends were very busy and would most likely refuse. Once these fathers were asked, however, they (with only two exceptions) agreed to the interview and often spent longer speaking than their mother counterparts. In general, respondents mentioned they felt special to be included in a study of an academic nature as, for them, this was an exceptional experience. (One respondent actually joked that he could now cross this off of his lifetime bucket list.)

Each interview was based on a series of prepared questions pertaining to the respondents' parenting experience. I typically began by asking fathers how they came to be parents: a question which gave me insight on the respondents' initial involvement in the parenting process but which often elicited slight laughter from my respondents, and thus doubled as an ice-breaker. Other questions concentrated on the first few months after their children's arrival, specific fathering activities they engaged in, involvement in parenting groups, and their own definitions of "good father" and "bad father." These central themes were explored yet the interviews allowed flexibility in terms of probing thought-provoking answers. Interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to over two hours and were transcribed verbatim.

Using the methodological framework of grounded theory, I was able to generate theory from the data throughout the research process. This valuable approach allows researchers to let their data

dictate their findings, and thus also uncovers what aspects of the research are most significant to their research subjects. It allows respondents to inform, and the researcher to convey the local meaning that respondents create in a situation. This method was especially useful for this study as grounded theory is both detailed and rigorous yet also permits the flexibility and freedom required to gain new perspectives on common situations. This allows for greater diversity in findings, especially when investigating multifaceted social phenomena. (For a more detailed account of grounded theory, see: Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Charmaz 2006; Bryant 2007.) Using open-ended questions constructively facilitated the kind of flexibility that allowed the respondents to concentrate on the aspects of parenting that *they* found most meaningful, thus giving my subjects voice in my research.

Once complete, my data were openly coded for analysis using codes such as: BP (baby preparation—referring to how fathers prepared for their child's arrival), BT (bedtime—referring to bedtime routines), GF (good father—referring to any mentioning of the concept of being a good dad), et cetera. I then organized relationships between the codes, combining them into common themes. Thus, concepts became categories of analysis. For instance, I noticed that the data coded for "good father" were often also coded for "finances," as well as for "involvement." This led me to create a secondary coding that combined these initial codes such as GF-F (good father-finance) and GF-I (good father-involvement). Other examples of categories of analysis that emerged from my secondary

coding include: M-B (masculinizing-building) and M-EW (masculinizing-emotion work). This axial coding was useful in organizing the data, adding depth to the categories, and further shaping the data for analysis. Several of these groupings were unexpected. For instance, one might expect the initial code FG (fathering groups) to be linked with the code FI (father identity). However, I found that fathers more often associated fathering groups with the dissemination of information on fathering, leading to the code FG-Info instead.

I completed my data analysis with a third, selective coding, creating substantive theory from the categories of axial codes. For example, I reexamined the codes on fathering groups and information, uncovering evidence that fathers do not often use fathering groups because they view them merely as venues for gathering information on fathering and they do not feel they need this service. Thus, through the process of memoing, the core narrative of my research emerged and I began answering the broader questions of how men reconcile their fathering practices with their senses of masculine identity.

Findings

When I began researching parenting, I was interested in how mothers sometimes limit the involvement of their children's fathers, a phenomenon known as maternal gatekeeping. This initial research was inspired by watching my friend's family after the birth of their first child and noting the ways that my friend seemed to be pushing her husband away from childcare duties. While this was

relevant to the concept of maternal gatekeeping, there was another aspect to this: Why was her husband, who was actively seeking involvement with his son, so willing to be pushed out of intimate and domestic childcare duties? Furthermore, if he was being, albeit readily, pushed, where was he being pushed to? I noticed that when locked out of holding, feeding, and diapering, he concentrated his parenting in different areas: taking care of financial obligations, arranging his son's circumcision, organizing the home, et cetera. Indeed, as I conducted research on parenting in general, I found that fathers were often pushed, and, more importantly, often *pushed themselves* into this other realm of parenting. It became clear that this push was deeply rooted in gender roles and relations. Fathers seemed, like my friend's husband, to be torn. They wanted to be involved in parenting and yet would go to great lengths to remove themselves, or allow themselves to be removed, from this feminine domain. They seemed more comfortable parenting, however, once they took steps to masculinize any parenting activities that they performed that might otherwise fall into feminine gender schemas which challenge hegemonic definitions of masculinity.

Adding the Masculine

The respondents in my study often attempted to reconcile their participation in childcare with hegemonic definitions of masculinity by adding a touch of masculinity to childcare activities. Indeed, they would navigate feminine territory by participating in activities that fell into masculine gender schemas yet still allowed them entry into the womanly world of parenting. Respondents did

this in a variety of ways: Firstly, they would use terminology taken from the masculine domains of sports and/or the military to discuss their children. For example, several respondents spoke of "tag-teaming" with their partners—a term from wrestling—or used various football terms to discuss their children. Many of them were also involved in coaching their children's sports teams. In contrast to Miller (2011), who found that fathers described themselves in language that was associated with femininity (but only in the domestic arena, thereby reinforcing, not challenging, gendered divisions in childcare), the fathers whom I interviewed discussed involvement with their children using gendered, masculine terminology. Tom, for instance, discusses roughhousing with his daughters by saying that they were, "beating me up," while Jacob refers to his roughhousing and wrestling with his daughter as, "dad things." This was coupled with men having reported that they prepared for their children's arrival by reading books that emphasized masculinity in parenting. Jordan's wife, Lisa, told me: "We read our own books. He had, you know, *Dudes Guide to Parenting* and whatever, and I read my *What to Expect When Expecting*." Fathers also sometimes attended classes on parenting that intentionally used masculine imagery such as "Daddy Bootcamp," which plays on the hegemonic masculine role of soldiering as a metaphor for fathering.

While the books and classes that masculinize fathering are easy to find, some of my respondents took matters into their own hands and found their own ways to add the masculine. Robert, a stay-at-home father who did stage-hand work at night

from time to time, began adding the masculine to the job of diapering before his child was even born. He planned out the buying of diapers months before his baby's arrival, calculating how many diapers would be needed per day, et cetera, and then calculating how many weeks before the baby would come, and then buying the needed amount of diapers to stockpile every week until the baby was born. This plan involved far more calculations, estimates, and planning (all of which are considered traditionally masculine activities) than simply placing some cash aside each month in a diaper fund.

Another respondent, Alex, reported having researched on the Internet for months to help him find something that he could use to carry both his coming child and other things at the same time. Instead of going with a stroller, he decided to make a special baby scooter which he could ride while the baby would sit on the bottom. (After someone voiced concern for the child's safety, he crafted a seatbelt from some rope.) He spoke of the scooter with great pride and as his child got older, he reported that the scooter became like a "carnival ride" for his child's friends. This endeavor moved his parenting activities out of the feminine realm of shopping for and pushing a stroller into the more masculine pursuits of researching, building, and riding.

The emphasis on building as a tactic to masculinize parenting, evidenced in Doucet's (2004) work in which she discusses this effort in terms of "self-provisioning," was demonstrated by fathers in this study as well. For instance, Joe, a lawyer

and father of four, took it upon himself to build both a mini baseball field for his children, as well as an actual ice rink in their backyard so that his child could further his interest in hockey. He also learned to play hockey in order to be more involved with his child (though he did not learn other, less masculine activities his children were involved in, such as piano). When asked about what aspects of parenting he might be better at than his wife, he answers: "I probably am better at the sort of dad things. You know, like, I built the ice rink." In fact, in his fifty minute long interview on fathering, Joe mentions and/or discusses the ice rink in eight different places. He explains how his role differs from that of his wife:

> Like I said, she's doing the nursing, she's doing the laundry. I'm doing the, oh, I'm going to build you, kids, this; I'm going to build you, kids, that ... She's just more motherly and more nurturing ... I'm more active with my hands ... and she's more nurturing and thoughtful and patient.

Other respondents involved their children in their building projects, even when the involvement was pretended. Paul, for instance, would involve his daughter in his "basement projects," giving her a fake hammer and allowing her to bang away at the furnace, the workbench, et cetera. Jacob, a stay-at-home father, also discusses having his daughter "help" him with his tools. When asked to explain his use of the words, "dad things," he replies:

> Interviewer: What are "dad things?"
> Jacob: Um, like I take her in my car. I have a muscle car so she helps me with that stuff like fixing some-

thing or trying to find me the tools or something like that. Um, but she likes to ride in that car, um, a couple days ago she helped me put the trampoline together.

While Paul and Jacob use playing with tools and tinkering with "muscle" cars as methods of drawing masculine boundaries around their childcare activities, Barry uses these activities to both reinforce his own sense of masculine identity, as well as to build one for his son. He refers to this as "man training":

> You know, for the first six, eight years, he's learned to be polite, etiquette, you know, how to be a good person in society. Well, there are other aspects of life that mothers can't teach sons. That's where man training comes in. And I teach him, I teach him mechanical stuff, uh, about the natural world, hunting and fishing, that sort of thing.

Here, Barry places manners and etiquette squarely in his wife's domain and makes clear that his own parenting activity highlights manly activities, thereby reinforcing the boundary between hegemonic masculinity and the feminine work of childcare by adding a manly aspect to parenting.

Emphasizing the Masculine: Safety, Finance, Emotional Control

We live in a society that views fathers as less capable parents than mothers. However, my research backs up the contention that fathers place emphasis on aspects of parenting that are different from, but no less important than, those of mothers. Indeed, many of the respondents indicated they believed women were not necessarily better parents but that

men and women simply have different parenting priorities. What fathers chose to prioritize, however, often corresponded to dominant notions of masculinity. Indeed, as opposed to emphasizing parts of parenting that involved hands-on caring, intimacy, and affection, many of the respondents in my study chose to emphasize traditionally masculine aspects such as protection, finance, and emotional control.

Safety: "Protector of the Family"

One theme to emerge from the data was that of safety. Fathers tended to stress this issue in their interviews and noted that safety issues took precedence for them over basic caring tasks such as feeding and bathing. David, for instance, articulates this well when he discusses his child's experience at daycare:

> Not that … I'm not responsible, but [she does more of the day-to-day caring tasks] … When it comes to his well-being … and if we feel that he's at risk … I'm more of the aggressor … I don't know if she told you about the daycare that he was at … he had fallen and bumped his lip … and then I found out that she [the daycare provider] had fed him toast … he wasn't ready for that type of food … She ran out of baby food and didn't tell us … [and my wife said] "Let's wait 'til Christmas [to remove him from the daycare] like we planned on." And I'm like, "No, he's not going there." So as far as finding him a daycare and stuff like that I'm more of the person who goes out and does those sort of things, like who handles the business portion of life and the well-being and safety types of things.

David later adds: "Well, she might do a little bit more at home, but I'm the guy that's out there making sure that … he's not subject to any harm that, you know, injury or malnutrition or like, you know, just trying to make sure that he's safe." Indeed, many respondents spoke of protecting their children (especially their daughters) from harm. Tom, who worked as a stay-at-home father for much of his daughters' childhood, does not emphasize his role as nurturer during his interview, but instead tells me: "I'm the protector of the family, you know." Joe reiterates these sentiments, linking them directly with his transition into fatherhood. He explains, when asked how it first felt to be a father: "I would say the only thing that changed was my stress level went through the roof, um, when it came to safety. I'm a safety freak … and that started when I had kids."

Not all fathers had as much power in their family relations as those described above, yet they still emphasized in their interviews their roles as the protector of their children's safety. Tod, for example, took issue with his oldest daughter's being allowed to spend time alone in a vacant house owned by her grandfather. Even though he tended to give his partner almost complete control over decisions that involved their children, he reports choosing to argue with her over this and feeling powerless:

> … there's nobody there, what if something happens? What if she chokes on something? You know, there is nobody there … and it makes me mad. But, she's [his partner] stubborn so, you know, you only butt heads with her so much on stuff. She … wants her [to go to the house by herself] so I just let it go and, "Okay." But, I worry about it, you know?

Although Tod is ultimately unable to control this situation, he joins the respondents in my sample who defined their parenting in terms of the masculine model of protection.

The "Paternal Instinct to Provide"

Another area respondents tended to emphasize during their interviews on fathering was that of finance. I recall, when I had my first child, having asked a nurse about "nesting" and how families in general prepare for a new baby. She explained to me that the cleaning and physical baby preparations that were referred to as "nesting" were only for mothers; fathers' main preparation for children, she said, had to do with finances. While at the time I wrote her off as hopelessly traditional and somewhat closed-minded, this statement should not have surprised me given that men in our society are most often judged by their job status, which falls under masculine domain, not their family status, which is gendered as feminine. Indeed, when questioned about fathering, and particularly about preparing for their newborn's arrival, respondents' comments backed up my nurse over and over again. For instance, Adam, a professor with three children, in response to a question about how he prepared for his first child, states: "The first thing was to figure out whether, or, I guess not whether but how we could afford it." Another respondent, Alfred, who makes clear in his interview that his wife, "was kind of the more dominant figure when it came to the baby," when asked the question, "How did it feel at first to be a father?" answers: "It was a strange feeling. By strange I mean, now, I have another mouth other than my wife to feed,

and now I really have to go to work, to put a roof over their head, and do whatever else I need to … to maintain the lifestyle here." This, of course, meshes well with Townsend's (2002) finding that men take care of their families financially as a means of expressing closeness with their children, as well as Doucet's (2004) finding that the link between fathering and providing financially for the family is strong even for those men who provide higher levels of childcare than most.

Indeed, the concern over general finances and "providing" (a word that many respondents used) for family was one of the most dominant themes emerging from my interviews. Respondents stressed this over and over again. For instance, Sid, when asked to name the largest issues facing fathers today, answered: "I would say money. I think money is the biggest thing." Another new father who agreed to be interviewed, but who did not end up following through, told me, without prompting, when I simply asked if I could interview him about his role as a father: "It's mostly the financial aspects."

While most father respondents spoke about saving money as part of baby preparations (a theme that seldom arose during my interviews with mothers), what is interesting is that they seemed to link this directly to their new roles as fathers. John, a sales coordinator whose wife worked as a pizza delivery driver, speaking about the first month after his daughter arrived, begins by explaining how tired he was from not sleeping through the night, but quickly turns to talking about his role as financial provider. Note how he contrasts his wife's new sense of maternal identity with his own paternal identity

as financial provider: "My wife was just trying to adjust to, you know, being a mother. I mean, she took to it right away ... Um, but just, you know, I was trying to do my job and be the breadwinner." This statement illustrates how fathers use financial responsibilities as a means of entering the world of childcare. Dividing up childrearing duties in this fashion—mother versus breadwinner—both allows John entry into the world of parenting yet maintains the boundaries set by hegemonic masculinity.

No respondent articulated the connection between paternal identity and concern over finances better than Joe, a lawyer with four children. Right after discussing his stress concerning his children's safety, he explains his anxieties over finances. He links this directly to his role as father: "[Another] part that contributed to my stress was my, um, I don't know if you call an instinct, but my sort of paternal instinct to provide. So I would stress out about ... where am I going to get a job? How much am I going to earn?" It is clear that fathers are placing financial issues at the top of their parenting priorities and linking their ability to provide to their status as fathers. This often takes precedence over other aspects of parenting. Joe makes this clear as he continues talking about when his first child was born: "So those two things [safety and finance concerns] is probably what changed. But, my physical day-to-day routine didn't that much. Or, maybe not as much as people may think."

Involvement and Emotional Control

While fathers linked their finances to their roles as fathers, this role was often at odds with another area that fathers emphasized over mothers' in-

volvement. When asked what it meant to be a good father, the majority of men highlighted the idea of taking an active role in their children's lives. Over and over again fathers responded to the question with a comment about involved fatherhood ("being there," being "involved and engaged," "gotta be there," "taking part in your kid's life," "being there all the time," etc.). They also responded to questions about what makes a bad father with comments about not being involved, being absent, and "taking a back seat." One father, the only divorced father in the sample, even went so far as to call himself a bad father due to the fact that he did not see his children as often as he felt that he should. This corresponds well to Miller's (2011) finding that fathers felt it was important to "be there" for their children and partners. While Miller posits that this grants men greater flexibility in terms of available fathering roles (because many different fathering practices can fulfill the requirement of "being there"), it is interesting to note that none of the mothers I have interviewed ever mentioned simply being there as an aspect of good mothering. This may be explained by Miller's contention that good mothering is more narrowly and somewhat idealistically defined compared to fathering. However, this may simply be a result of men feeling that they have a choice in the matter of whether to be present as parents, whereas women do not.

Interestingly, fathers sometimes carried out their involvement with their children through their wives. This finding meshes well with earlier studies that suggest men's roles as fathers are mediated by their spouses (see, for instance, Townsend 2002; 2005). Indeed, many respondents spoke of their new father

responsibilities as coupled with a greater emphasis on caring for their partners. They often spoke about helping their wives, not just with childcare but by taking care of their wives' needs, being "on call husbands." While caretaking work is typically gendered as feminine, taking care of women and meeting women's needs may also be gendered masculine (and is often connected to meeting financial needs). Indeed, the respondents in my study tended to use the feminine notion of caring in a particularly masculine fashion. Mason, for instance, a school principal with two children, links care work to the idea of role-modeling. He explains, when asked, "What would encompass [being] a good father?" that: "being that role model ... [by being good] to my wife ... to their mother, I think is number one. I mean, that's what they see ... most of their life." However, for some fathers, it was also about supporting their children by supporting the person who took care of them the most. Cam, a thirty-eight-year-old father of three, explains:

> You know, the most important thing that's in my head of being a good father is I always put both my children and my wife first. And even to the point that I put my wife in priority before my children. Because the main reason being is, she, I know that unquestionably the mother of these children. My wife. Puts our children first. So I've always said I am gonna put her first ... so I need to look at supporting my wife more on a personal level, on an emotional level, and telling her that she's first because I know damn well that, you know, that I am one hundred percent certain that she puts the children first.

While respondents' sudden emphasis on the well-being of their partners seems to be well-inten-

tioned, this newfound focus on their spouses can also be explained through an analysis of boundary maintenance. Taking care of children falls into feminine gender schemas, while taking care of women falls under masculine headings. Moreover, if men feel pushed out of childcare (or feel the need to push themselves out of this territory), taking care of the caregiver makes sense as a way to become involved. Jordan, for instance, explains how he felt pushed out of feeding his newborn because his partner, Lisa, was breastfeeding. He says: "Since I can't nurse him, I'm basically the gofer ... It's a strange feeling ... you want to take care of the baby and yet you really can't supply what the baby needs." When asked to clarify what he meant by "gofer," it is Lisa who answers[1]: "Making sure that I was taken care of." Jordan backs this comment up saying: "Making sure that Lisa's taken care of." The couple then explains together (in fact, speaking over each other) that Jordan takes care of her physical needs (getting things, etc.), as well as dealing with her emotional needs (comforting her, etc.), and household arrangements such as organizing the child's circumcision event.[2] While Jordan and Lisa's narrative sounds sweet, it illustrates how fathers must find alternate routes to involvement in their children's lives.

Emotion Work

Related to the idea of caring for children by caring for mothers is the concept of "emotion work," a term coined by Hochschild (1983) to refer to the

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[1] This was one of the few interviews where both mother and father were interviewed together.
[2] This refers to the Jewish ritual of *brit mila*.

management of emotions and the manufactured display of appropriate emotions for particular situations. Respondents engaged in the emotion work of managing any feelings related to parenthood that did not fit well with hegemonic definitions of masculinity. For John, this emotion management began even before his child was born. Faced with an unplanned pregnancy, John reports that he hid his feelings from his wife as a way to protect her from emotional overload. It is also noteworthy that it was John, and not his wife, Tanya, who was happy about the pregnancy (a reversal of expected gendered behavior). He states: "Well, so this nice surprise came along and she was terrified and I was thrilled, but she didn't know it. [*Laughs*]. Until it was okay for her to be happy about it ... I knew better than to go 'Oh, this is a good thing' when she's freaking out." Cam also tells a story of how he managed his own feelings in order to protect those of his wife when she left the house for classes. He admits (with a bit of pride) that he routinely lied to her about how the baby behaved in her absence:

> ... I used to lie my butt off left and right because I knew if I said, "Oh my God, this was the hardest three hours of my week," every single week ... So it was like no matter how bad it gets kid, you know, wipe the tears off your face and smile when she comes home because ... she missed time away just as much as anybody else does. It's one of those parent things.

It is interesting to note that while only one father, Sid, spoke about carrying out emotion work with his child (holding back his tears when his daughter was crying over having to be away from him for a trip with her mother), most respondents spoke of emotion work only in terms of managing their emotions as a way of protecting and facilitating the mothering work of their partners. Jordan, for instance, laughs about how his partner, Lisa, would read up on, "how many poops need to be made" by the baby per day and would want to call the doctor if the baby did not make enough of them, or how Lisa would jump every time the baby made a noise in her sleep. Jordan, on the other hand, was the calmer parent and he seemed to view it as his job to take care of Lisa and help calm her during these times. Lisa explains her desire to comfort her child as "a mothering thing," a comment which may suggest that keeping mother calm can be viewed as a fathering thing. Remaining calm requires controlling one's emotions. This is intricately linked to hegemonic masculinity as displaying emotions is considered a weakness in this dominant model.

Other respondents had similar narratives as many fathers explained that their children's mothers were more easily ruffled and less laid back in their day-to-day parenting. One respondent, Jack, stood out in that he related he was the parent that was more stressed, not his wife. However, he expands on this point, explaining that he carried out the necessary emotion work so as to shield his wife:

> Interviewer: How did it first feel to be a father?
> Jack: Honestly, completely overwhelming. I was so stressed out about being around and dividing my attention and not dropping her [the baby] that I felt really anxious. It kind of changed when I saw how stressed my stress was making [my wife].

Several respondents were asked, during their interviews, if they had ever had an emergency situation with their children. Those who answered yes, usually with stories about visits to the emergency room, tended to report that it was their partner who was "freaking out" and that they were the calm parent. Robert, for instance, reported that he is good at shutting down emotionally in an emergency situation, that he drove to the ER fast, and that the baby was calmer than his partner, Ashley, was. This account illustrates that the emotion work that fathers engage in is highly gendered and serves the main purpose of keeping fathers from showing emotions that portray weakness, over-sensitivity, or inability to keep one's cool in stressful situations. Thus, their calmness aids them in adhering to masculine ideals.

Father Is Not a Group Identity

One characteristic that all of the father respondents had in common was their dislike of, and reluctance to join, any fathering groups. Indeed, none of the men in my sample had become active in any type of parenting group, even in cases where their partners did claim membership.

Their answers as to why tended to focus on the utility of the groups themselves, as opposed to speaking about the role of fathering groups in creating and mapping out the boundaries of group identity. For instance, after being asked if he was a member of any parenting groups, Alfred answered, "No, I didn't find it necessary. I mean, the books helped ... but it was much more a hands on thing." Cam answers in this way as well, saying that he and his wife, "pretty much try and figure everything out on our own." Two other fathers, Ian and Joe, explained that they did not consider joining a fathers' group because their wives were their main resource of information on parenting and so they simply did not find it necessary. Sid, too, explained that fathering groups are places where one is told what to do and he did not feel that he needed this help. This idea was reinforced by Alex, who did attend a parenting group with his wife at first, but did not like the way some individuals there pushed their parenting ideas on others. Clearly, respondents viewed fathering groups as a type of resource and not as a means of forming or enhancing a father identity. In fact, respondents whose partners were members of mothering groups such as La Leche League International (a breastfeeding group) or the Holistic Moms Network did not attend meetings with their wives. They were supportive of their wives' involvement but simply did not see the utility in joining themselves. Jacob, whose wife, Chantal, is active in La Leche League, reports that he tries to recruit members for the group by speaking with women whom he meets about whether or not they are breastfeeding. Still, he did not attend many meetings of the group himself. Indeed, while this group, as well as the Holistic Moms Network, do welcome men, they were clearly not designed to include them, and this fact was not lost on my respondents who did not feel that there was a place for them at meetings. For the respondents, parenting groups fell squarely into the feminine domain, and crossing that border presented a serious threat to maintaining hegemonic conceptions of masculinity.

Several respondents spoke of being "dragged" to group meetings or to parenting classes. One respondent, Jack, who was not dragged and who reports wanting to attend fathering classes, discusses how he ultimately felt pushed out by other fathers who were not as motivated to attend as he was:

> I went to a fatherhood class, but it was sort of a joke so I didn't go back ... Well, ah. This sounds bad. It was all these white guys in a room talking about how their wives made them go to this class, and I just felt bad. I went because I wanted to. The content of the class itself was interesting—how to make your wife comfortable during the pregnancy, how to connect with your child, how to change diapers. But, I guess the people in the class were just such a turn off that I couldn't find it in me to go again.

Cam echoes Jack's sentiments, explaining that he did not feel connected enough to other fathers to want to join a parenting group:

> I haven't really felt a huge connection to other fathers out there. Maybe because I am not around them very often ... but I don't necessarily think that for me to speak as us, as fathers, I am not sure if I feel disconnected because the only thing I need to be connected to are my kids.

These comments make clear that while fathers do not use groups and classes because they fail to see their utility, they also avoid these settings because they do little for them in terms of making connections with and identifying with other fathers. "Father" is not a group identity.

Defining Fathers as Mothers

It seems that even as respondents involve themselves in fathering activities, they continue to define childcare activities as feminine in nature. Jack, for instance, when asked what it meant to be a good father, answered: "Doing all of the things that women are supposed to do." He continues by explaining that a bad father is uninvolved, forgets birthdays, does not know clothing sizes, et cetera. He then adds: "Maybe it's not normal that I'm not like that. [*Laughs*]. I'm alright with not being normal." Jack, thus, explains his fathering as the exception to the rule. He is a good father, because he is like a mother. Other respondents echo these sentiments. When asked about the possibility of staying home with his children, Steve refers to the idea as being, "Mister Mom." John, who prides himself on doing a great deal of fathering activity, explains that he does all of the "women's work" and says: "I'm content being the stay-at-home parent and working around the house, you know. I mean, I'm almost a throwback to a fifties housewife." It is amazing that Steve chooses to refer to his childcare activities in relation to the feminine identity of a "fifties housewife" as opposed to using his own activity and action to create a new identity as an involved father. This echoes the parenting literature that pairs parenting with motherhood and which insists that active fathers are not fathering, they are mothering. Fathers are limited in their choices when it comes to finding a pre-existing fathering identity that fits. This may lead them to view their childcare activities through feminine lenses, which leads to the need to masculinize these activities and which also serves to alienate them from a solid paternal identity through which to form any type of group identification.

Conclusion

Today's fathers are more involved with childcare than the generations that preceded them. There is evidence to suggest that men consider fatherhood and their relationships with their children as more important than ever before. Still, the activity of "parenting" is deemed by general society as feminine. Fathering, even though carried out by men, has been boxed into rigid gender schemas and tainted as womanly. Thus, men who choose to identify with hegemonic notions of masculinity have few pre-existing father identities to choose from. Good fathering has been painted as "mothering," for lack of a better framework. This leads men to negotiate their paternal identities as they participate in these female domains. They do this by adding masculine elements to their childcare activities, by prioritizing aspects of parenting that fit more closely with hegemonic definitions of masculinity, by avoiding the display of emotional weakness, and by bypassing areas (such as parenting groups) that are generally considered to be feminine domains.

Several scholars have drawn attention to not only the differing activities that mothers and fathers engage in but the differing definitions of mother and father. Hooks (1984:137) posits that: "Women and men must define the work of fathering and mothering in the same way if males and females are to accept equal responsibility in parenting." Other scholars, such as Lorber (2005:39), call for a complete degendering of the work of parenting, calling for, "No More Mothers and Fathers." These scholars are not simply calling for further father involvement, they are challenging the very way in which society conceives parenting and gender roles. While complete degendering may seem impractical and, even, somewhat extreme, it is important to note the role of hegemonic masculinity and fixed definitions of fathering and mothering in determining behavior. Learning how fathers conceive of fathering and how they negotiate their masculine identities within traditionally feminine domains can aid in creating social services and social policies that encourage further male involvement with parenting (which is beneficial to women, men, and children alike). Understanding how men navigate the female territory of parenting can also be useful for future comparative studies on men's entrance into other traditionally feminine areas of family life such as housework, cooking, holiday celebration coordinating, and maintaining contact with relatives (all of which have traditionally been viewed as women's work).

This study, while informed and inspired by fathering studies that came before it, also raises numerous questions for further research. How does men's masculinizing of their fathering activity carry over outside the home? How do mothers react to these activities and how do they perceive the masculinity of their father partners? This study also opens many questions considering parenting groups. What is it that women "get" from these groups that men do not? Do fathers identify their masculinity in a different fashion than non-fathers? Do they use these groups for practical information or do they desire a connection with other fathers? Clearly, as fathers continue the trend of parental involvement, these feminine waters will be muddied with masculinity. This will be both exciting and intriguing as we continue to explore the waters of parenting.

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Appendix A

Pseudonym	Age	# Kids	Ethnicity/Religion	State	Married?
Daniel	35	2	not specified	WI	Y
Jim	32	2	Pagan	WI	Y
Steve	27	2	Christian	WI	Y
Mathew	29	1	Christian	WI	Y
Hector	24	1	Mexican	WI	N
David	27	1	Catholic	WI	Y
Robert	37	1	Irish	WI	N
Richard	33	2	Lutheran	WI	Y
Henry	40	2	Lutheran	WI	Y
Reuben	33	5	Christian	IN	Y
Tom	30	2	not specified	IN	Y
Adam	31	1	Pentecostal	IN	Y
Tod	42	3	not specified	WI	N
Jordan	34	1	Jewish	OH	Y
John	32	1	Pagan/Native American	WI	Y
Don	47	1	New Zealand	IN	Y
Jerry	unknown	1	Lutheran	WI	Y
Jacob	unknown	1	Christian	WI	Y
Gabe	34	2	Lutheran	WI	Y
Barry	40	1	Christian	WI	Y
Paul	28	1	Episcopalian	WI	Y
Sid	39	3	Pagan	WI	divorced
Joe	34	4	not specified	WI	Y
Cam	38	3	not specified	WI	Y
Adam	38	3	Christian	WI	Y
Ed	45	2	Lutheran	WI	Y
Bert	42	3	Christian	WI	Y
Jack	32	2	Japanese/Atheist	WI	Y
Ian	35	2	Protestant	WI	Y
Mason	36	2	Catholic	WI	Y
Alfred	50	3	African American	WI	Y
Ken	26	2	Biracial	WI	Y
Alex	36	2	Italian/English/Atheist/Buddhist	WI	Y

Source: Self-elaboration.