

**Title:**

## **Involved fatherhood in the Nordic context: dominant narratives, divergent approaches**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper focuses on narratives and practices of ‘involved fatherhood’, the ideal of an emotionally present and nurturing father. The geographical context of the study is Iceland, one of the ‘father-friendly’ Nordic welfare states. Of particular concern in this paper are connections between involved fatherhood and constructions of masculinity. The emergence of involved fatherhood is often linked to changes in masculinity ideals, from ‘old’ to ‘new’. Our analysis, which is based on qualitative interviews with parents of young children, indicates a more complex picture. Our point of departure is the narrative of involved fatherhood which is dominant in Nordic policy formation. This narrative is strongly linked to early childhood care and the development of fathers’ individual caring practices – often presented as a prerequisite for gender equal parenting. Other types of fathering are positioned in contrast, representing outdated and deficit forms of fathering. Our analysis suggests, however, that involved fatherhood is portrayed and enacted through practices linked to both ‘orthodox’ and ‘inclusive’ masculinity, both among middle-class fathers who identify with the primary carer narrative and a more diverse group of fathers who do not. We conclude that involved fatherhood comes in different forms that should be further explored in terms of their respective potential and limitations for gender equal parenting.

**Keywords:** fathering; Iceland; involved fatherhood; men/masculinity; parental leave

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## **Introduction**

In this paper we analyse how fathers of young children in Iceland, one of the ‘father friendly’ Nordic welfare states (Brandth & Kvande, 2003b), understand their role in infant care. More specifically, we will focus on how fathers engage with the dominant narrative of involved fatherhood and how different articulations of fatherhood relate to ‘old’ and ‘new’ forms of masculinity. The analyses are based on qualitative interviews with parents from diverse social backgrounds, with the specific aim of highlighting variations among fathers. In line with Coltart and Henwood (2012), we will be challenging ‘uncritical celebration of new fatherhood and attempts to dismiss it as cultural fallacy’ (p. 36).

An important backdrop for our analyses is the cultural shift in fatherhood ideals that has taken place during recent decades throughout the Western world. The ‘old’ provider patriarch has gradually been replaced by a modern, more involved father figure (Williams, 2008). Contemporary representations of fatherhood emphasize greater emotional closeness in fathers’ relationships with their children, as well as an increased sharing of childcare between mothers and fathers (Brandth & Kvande, 1998; 2003b; Miller, 2011; Wall & Arnold, 2007). Others have argued that, although men have largely incorporated the ideology of gender equality and the new ideal of involved fatherhood, the hegemony of the masculine ideal of the male provider persists. The situation is described by Miller (2011, p. 1094) as a ‘stalled’ and ‘slow’ process of change, and several other researchers have described how, although ideals may be changing, men, in practice, continue to act as primary breadwinners and secondary carers (e.g. Bø, 2008; Pétursdóttir, 2009; Wall & Arnold, 2007).

Embedded in the perception of the new involved father, lies the anticipation of changing gender relations in the home as well as in society at large. The traditional division of tasks between women and men cannot be seen as merely a practical arrangement, but is historically linked to power relations placing women and the private sphere in an inferior

position vis-à-vis men and the public sphere. While this paper's main focus is differences in fathering practices, and thus aims at discussing within-gender differences, the larger picture of gender equality and gender difference is not unimportant. Naturally, men do not make decisions about their fathering role in a vacuum, but in close relations to the way women make decisions about their mothering role, and cultural ideals connected to these practices (Brandth & Kvande 1998; Doucet 2012).

The Nordic region is an interesting context for the study of involved fatherhood. Family policy scholars commonly refer to the Nordic countries as having the most pronounced father-friendly policies (Ellingsæter, 2011; Gornick & Meyers, 2009; Lister, 2009), often with reference to the long paid parental leave for fathers, given on a 'use-or-lose' basis: the *'father's quota'*. Among the Nordic countries, Iceland, where our study is set, has implemented the most radical proactive policy model for involved fatherhood. In 2000 Iceland passed a ground-breaking parental leave act<sup>1</sup> that granted parents three months of non-transferable leave each, plus an additional three months to divide between them as they choose, all with a high rate of compensation. Following the act, Icelandic fathers' share of the total parental leave period increased rapidly. While mothers still take up the majority of leave days, men constituted 47%<sup>2</sup> of the applicants for parental leave in 2008 – the year most of the focus children in our sample of families were born. The introduction of the father's quota was a rapid success, in terms of uptake, in other Nordic countries as well (Duvander & Lammi-Taskula, 2011).

This suggests a general move towards involved fatherhood in the Nordic region. At the same time, we agree with Johansson and Ottemo (2013) that there is a need for studies that highlight variation and complexity in the articulation of new ideals of fatherhood and how they intersect with social structures such as class, and that is what we aim to accomplish here. More specifically, we will trace aspects of what Anderson (2005) calls 'orthodox' and

'inclusive' masculinity in the accounts given by Icelandic couples when discussing men's involvement in early childhood care. This analysis should illuminate a more nuanced picture of changes in fatherhood within the Nordic context. Furthermore we wish to discuss the way change is perceived, valued and narrated within the context of the Nordic policy framework. In the following section, we will situate our study within the field of research on involved fatherhood in the Nordic context.

### **Research on involved fatherhood in the Nordic context**

Three broad strands in research on men's involvement in early childhood care in the Nordic context can be identified. All address relationships between policies and practices, although in different ways. The first deals primarily with *policy interpretation*, focusing on the logic and processes behind the introduction of policies related to involved fatherhood. Researchers commonly aim to describe and assess policy measures in light of given objectives, such as gender equality potential, and the analysis thus operates mainly on the macro level (e.g. Ellingsæter, 2006; Eydal & Rostgaard, 2011; Lammi-Taskula, 2006).

The second strand deals with *causal effects* related to the implementation of policy measures. Studies in this strand aim to measure causal effects at the societal level, for instance on attitudes concerning gender equality and division of housework (Eydal, 2008; Cools et al., 2010; Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011). Qualitative studies may also point to causal effects. One example is Brandth and Kvande's (2003b) much-cited Norwegian study which investigates changes in fathering practices occurring *as a result of* the father's quota.

A third strand understands the policies related to involved fatherhood as a contextual frame within which parents map out their parenting practices. This research aims to explore dimensions of meaning attached to the father's quota and fatherhood in general, as well as variations of ways of articulating or *doing* fatherhood related, for instance, to work life (e.g.

Haas and Hwang, 1995; Halrynjo & Lyng, 2010) or class contexts (Plantin, 2007; Stefansen & Farstad, 2010; Stefansen & Aarseth, 2011). Studies on shifts in masculinity ideals (e.g., Aarseth, 2009; Bekkengen, 2002; Johansson & Klinth, 2008) are a part of this strand, and our study also clearly links to this topic. We see the Nordic policy for involved fatherhood as the context for our analysis, in which we study expressions of masculinity connected to fathering. In this sense, our approach is in line with micro oriented studies focusing on how gender is done and undone in care work and in fathering (Doucet 2012).

### **The metanarrative of the ‘new’ father**

Laying the groundwork for our analysis, we also wish to draw attention to a dominant narrative in the Nordic region concerning proper ways of being a father. Eerola and Huttunen (2011) refer to the metanarrative of the ‘new’ involved father, and from their Finnish context they argue that it has become a culturally dominant story about what it is to be a suitable father (p. 213). This metanarrative is characterized by shared parenting and the father’s role as a ‘mother-like’ caregiver. According to Eerola and Huttunen, the metanarrative of the new involved father is widely spread and rarely questioned

As a contrast to the metanarrative of the ‘new’ father, Eerola and Huttunen point to a counter-narrative; the traditional father who appears psychically distant, but is fulfilling his parental duty by providing for the family. This traditional male provider model exemplifies fatherhood practices that policy makers have aimed to move away from in the pursuit of gender equality.

Although the metanarrative of the involved father is generally recognizable, it is important to identify its local and phase-specific articulations. The construction of the father’s quota may be informative for this purpose. The aim of the father's quota system is to support the notion that both parents can be primary carers in infancy and beyond. The measure is

meant to ensure that the father can replace the mother when she returns to work, which means that he must be able to take full responsibility for all aspects of childcare. Although it is possible to spread the leave over shorter periods, the core idea of the quota system is also linked to the importance of the father spending continuous time *alone* with the child, taking sole responsibility for daily care. Emphasis on the father's continuous time alone with the young child reflects what Dermott (2008) calls the 'dyadic turn' in the understanding of intimate relations, where emphasis shifted from the household or nuclear family to the relationship between individuals. In Norway Brandth and Kvande (2003a, 2003b) have argued that men spending time alone with their infant children (during parental leave) is a 'critical point' in order to develop caring competency oriented towards the child's needs. The decision to take leave at the same time as the mother is often interpreted as upholding traditional masculinity norms, and thus not contributing to change towards gender equal parenting (Brandth & Kvande, 2013).

We suggest that the metanarrative of 'new' involved fatherhood in our context of study, and for the early childhood phase, constructs the father as a *primary carer*, able and wanting to 'mother'. This narrative defines both the traditional male provider and the supporting and helping father as a *secondary carer*, emphasizing the deficiencies in men's parenting (see Daly, 1996). These categories also produce a distinct story of social change – where the primary carer role, and gender symmetry in the division of tasks and time spent on childcare, is the only route towards gender equality (Brighouse & Wright, 2008).

We agree however with Johansson and Ottemo (2013) who argue for 'more careful, detailed and empirically oriented studies of men and men's practices' (p. 4) in order to theorize processes of social change. Drawing on qualitative interviews from one point in time, and not longitudinal data, we are, of course, not able to study change in the concrete sense (Shirani & Henwood, 2011). Our analysis focuses on different articulations of masculinity

within early childhood fathering and beyond. These articulations are then discussed in terms of what types of changes in gender relations, they may be indicative of. Our aim is to move beyond fixed categories (new and old, modern and traditional) in the analysis of fatherhood and to pay attention to shifting positioning in fathers' accounts of everyday practices.

### **Competing forms of normative masculinity**

In our study, fathering is understood as a gender project, as enactments of normative masculinity (Creighton, Brussoni, Oliffe & Olsen 2014). By introducing Anderson's (2005, 2009) concepts of orthodox and inclusive masculinity to this area of research, we wish to draw attention to aspects of continuity and change found both outside and within dominant articulations of involved fatherhood. Anderson (2005) developed these concepts in a study of heterosexual men's performances of masculinity in a 'feminized terrain'. Anderson's terrain is different from the context we are using. He studied the sport of cheerleading in American colleges. However, care for infants can also be seen as a feminized terrain in Anderson's sense, i.e. a cultural context that historically has been dominated by women and where men have been marginalized. Based on fieldwork among heterosexual men in cheerleading, Anderson draws a distinction between two competing forms of normative masculinity: orthodox and inclusive. In this arena orthodox masculinity is linked to devaluation of women and gay men, along with a focus on strength, competitiveness and other traditional masculine traits. Men adhering to inclusive masculinity perform traditionally feminine roles in the sport and support female teammates who perform more masculine-coded roles, for instance roles associated with physical strength.

Anderson (2009) presents the picture of a general change in masculinity away from the orthodox form towards the inclusive. He suggests also that different masculinities are increasingly positioned upon a horizontal, and not a vertical axis. Hence, men may draw on

different models depending on the context. Anderson's perspective thus opens up the possibility for shifting and disparate positioning among fathers.

In a study of fathering in sports Gottzén and Kremer-Sadlik (2012) utilized Anderson's concepts to highlight modern fathering as a balancing act of fostering competitiveness and performance (orthodox values) on the one hand and offering unconditional support and care (inclusive values) on the other: '... we suggest that fathering through sports involves negotiation and juggling between two contrasting cultural models of masculinity, between orthodox and inclusive masculinities (p. 641).' The metaphor of a balancing act of different cultural models of masculinities has informed our analysis. A key question is however if such balancing acts plays out differently among different groups of men.

### **Data and method**

This paper is based on in-depth interviews with 14 cohabiting, heterosexual Icelandic couples, each with a child under the age of two. The families in the sample were purposely chosen in order to explore possible links between fatherhood practices and level of education and employment position. The participants were selected in order to ensure socio-economic variation with regard to education level and employment position. Still, a small majority had earned university degrees and were employed accordingly.

All of the families but one resided in the capital, Reykjavik, or in nearby municipalities, and all participants worked or studied part- or full time. Recruitment was performed through contact persons within the researchers' personal and professional networks, and through a child care centre. After the first phase of recruitment, a majority of the participants had higher education and typical middle-class occupations, such as researchers, lawyers, and teachers. Through chain referral sampling and the use of different



contact persons, the sample became broader in terms of both levels of education and types of occupations.

The interviews were conducted as joint couple interviews. The parents were asked to elaborate on reasons for their care and work-life arrangements and also to reflect on both alternative solutions and the childcare benefits granted to them. Part of the interview was organized as a 'life mode interview' (Haavind, 1987) focusing on care routines and tasks during one specific day, from morning to night, in detail. Each interview lasted for about ninety minutes and took place in the family's home.

The benefits of joint couple interviews include the partners' ability to co-generate data and round out each other's accounts – a mechanism referred to as 'the cuing phenomenon' (Morgan & Krueger, 1993) (for a broader discussion of joint couple interviews, see Bjørnholt & Farstad, 2012). In this paper we focus mainly on the way fathers articulate their fathering practices and how this resonates with different forms of normative masculinity. However, during the data generating process, the voices of the men's partners were also heard, and they add to the understanding of fathering practices in the families. For an analysis of both fathers' and mothers' views on childcare involvement within an Icelandic context, see Farstad (2014).

### **Analytical approach**

The interviews were analysed in a two-step coding process. In the initial process, we listened for accounts of the fathers' approaches to involvement in early childcare. A differentiated pattern appeared related to the fathers' sense of urgency in establishing an emotional, dyadic bond with the young child. This pattern was especially salient when the participants discussed the use and arrangement of the parental leave. This distinction was used as a basis for the more detailed analysis of representations of fatherhood. In the second step we followed Miller's advice that analysis of fathering should 'focus in more precise ways on daily

practices which either reproduce or reduce gendered patterns of caring' (Miller, 2011, p. 1095). As Williams (2008) notes it is also important to focus on the variety of tasks performed by fathers – some of which may fall outside narrow definitions of care. The analysis revealed similarities between fathers across the sample, but also differences. We comment on the similarities first before further exploring the differences.

### **Empirical patterns<sup>3</sup>**

Several researchers have noted that child-centred parenting is common in modern families and may be regarded as a hegemonic ideal in today's society (Jamieson, 1998; Bekkengen, 2002), a claim that is supported by our interviews. All fathers in the sample expressed a wish to prioritize family time. Taking care of children did not seem to challenge their sense of being men. Most of the men also presented themselves as different from their own fathers in terms of the time spent with their children and their interest in being physically and emotionally present in the home. For some, their fathers served as negative role models (cf. Brandth & Kvande 1998; Dolan 2014) reflecting an outdated form of masculinity. Gunnar, for instance took a strong opposition to his father's approach to fathering:

He was never at home. The other kids were talking about their dads, I thought; you do things with your father!? I never met mine. He was working like crazy.

What comes across as important for the fathers is a parenting practice previously associated with mothering, based on 'being there' (Dolan 2014) and emotional closeness. Adding to this and across the sample, breadwinning was not portrayed as a central dimension of male parenting, contrary to the findings in British studies (Dolan 2014; Miller 2011; Williams 2008) in the UK. While fathering indeed entailed breadwinning for all the men in the sample, and more so for the men than for the women, this was not dwelled upon in the interviews. We

see this as reflecting a general support for the dual-carer/ dual-earner model within the Nordic context. The pattern indicates as well that the role of the provider has become secondary as a basis for men's identity as men – an interpretation put forward by Brandth & Kvande (1998) in a study of Norwegian fathers on parental leave.

Two different conceptions of being present were evident, however – and seemed to be linked to class position and other aspects of fatherhood involvement: in one group, which was predominantly middle-class, the fathers talked about and practiced fatherhood in line with the metanarrative of the involved father outlined in the introduction. This group of fathers expressed a sense of urgency in establishing a primary caring role for the infant child. Commonly these men had work life arrangements where they enjoyed a certain degree of flexibility, and they were mostly employed in the public sector. In the other group of fathers, involved fatherhood was expressed as emerging over time. The father's bonding with the child was not determined by his participation in infant care. This group was more heterogeneous in terms of class, but what the fathers had in common was a low degree of flexibility at work and that, in some cases, they were required to put in long hours. In the following we analyse how the different articulations of involved fatherhood that we found in the sample relate to orthodox and inclusive masculinity. The analysis is presented separately for the two groups of fathers. We focus on three key themes: how fathers see their role in infant care and beyond, how they engage with traditional 'female tasks' related to childcare and how they perceive their female partners' roles and childcare routines.

#### *The father as primary carer*

In six of the interviews, the fathers described a range of practices that are in tune with the metanarrative of involved fatherhood. One recurring theme is the fathers' sense of urgency to

develop an individual care practice in the early phase of childhood, in infancy, and to spend as much time as possible on intimate moments with their young children.

This ideal of early engagement was expressed in different ways during the interviews but was particularly articulated in the fathers' plans for the parental leave. All of the men in question had intended to take their parental leave alone, after the partner had finished hers. In most instances this meant after the mother had taken both the three-month mother's quota and the three months of shareable leave. In some cases this did not go according to plan, and the reflections these men offered point to a narrative of fear of not being there at the right moment. One example is Gunnar and his wife Margrét who, due to illness, were on leave at the same time, a solution neither of them considered to be optimal. Gunnar, for one, expressed regrets for not getting more time alone with their son, who at the time of the interview was sixteen months old. His fear was that his son would not form an emotional attachment to him, and that they would be estranged from each other in the long run. For Gunnar, as well as the other men in this group, there is a feeling that there is a rather narrow time frame in which the fathers must be present in order to form the strong emotional connection with the child that mothers naturally do. In this sense, motherhood – or the closeness of the mother-child dyad – becomes the standard for evaluating fatherhood.

The emphasis put on being alone with the child relates to this idea and is reflected in the account of Örn, who, in contrast to Gunnar, did use the earmarked part of the parental leave alone after his wife had finished her part. As Gunnar had, he felt this was important in order to establish an individual relationship to his daughter:

I mean in the first weeks and the first month, the mother is the primary care provider anyway, so actually just to get the mother out of the house and having the father alone with her, with the child, it's, it's a very different picture. I mean, I thought it was great just to get Kristin (his wife) out of the house so that we could be alone together. I just think it, I think it creates a

closer bond between the father and the child to be alone and get the mother out of the equation.

Another recurring theme in the interviews with this group of fathers was their focus on learning to know the child through all stages of development. Gunnar, for instance, explained how he finds that the child changes from day to day, and that he needs to be present to learn all the child's quirks and mood changes. This means that he has to be directly involved in all aspects of childcare, including the tiresome and boring parts. As he expressed it, this is important in order to achieve the same position as his wife relative to their son. This insistence on being involved in all aspects of caring for the young child is indicative of inclusive masculinity, of men moving into domains traditionally associated with women. There is, however a double-sidedness to some of the fathers' accounts on establishing an individual relationship with the young child. Their efforts seem to reflect traditional masculine values such as self-reliance and avoidance of dependence.

For some fathers, like Örn, this idea of being equally as important as the mother, or fathering on one's own terms, led to the establishment of new routines when they took over the daily care of the child. In the interview Örn's wife explained how she had struggled to find a good sleeping routine for their daughter. Örn for his part felt it was imperative *not* to adopt her routines when he was taking his leave. According to Örn, an important part of taking parental leave was showing the child that the father is up to the task:

It's not only educational for the father; it's also educational for the child or gives a message to the child. OK, I mean that 'Sideshow Bob' that has been there for the first few months, well he can actually just you know, he can run the show if the mother is not around.

In this narrative it may seem like the father needs to compete with the mother in order to achieve the same level of closeness to the child. The mother's presence is more of a disturbance than a help, and if the child relates differently to the mother than the father, this becomes a problem in itself, as we also found in the interview with Gunnar. These aspects show how these fathers engage with both inclusive and orthodox forms of masculinity. Being close to the children from the very early stages of childhood is an important part of these men's fatherhood ideal. This may be interpreted as inclusiveness, where these types of 'soft' values are not at odds with their masculinity. At the same time they express an ideal where they as fathers wish to be alone with the child, independently, and make decisions about caring routines without the mother's interference. In some cases the mother's routines are even rejected. This may be interpreted as an expression of an orthodox form of masculinity emphasizing independence and authority rather than co-dependence.

Another common theme in the interviews with the middle-class fathers was the value placed on spending time *with* the child as opposed to spending time on practical tasks – time *for* the child. This distinction has been described earlier, in a study of Swedish middle-class parents (Forsberg, 2010). The valued form of interaction for middle-class fathers is 'face to face' and not 'side by side' activities traditionally favoured by men in close relationships (Brandth and Kvande 1998; 2003b). Johannes, for instance, explained how he set aside special time for the children, not letting practical tasks get in the way. The mode of involvement Johannes describes is a commitment of undivided attention towards the child:

So I am just present. But I think perhaps I have the conscience to play and just leave other things... the practical things.

The dyadic bond with the child is at the centre of many of these men's narratives. This may be interpreted as a child-centred fatherhood model that clearly links to inclusive masculinity.

At the same time, the weight put on the emotional bond, and not the work that needs to be done, can be linked to orthodox articulations of masculinity: unlike mothers, fathers may treat the day-to-day tasks parts of childcare as optional. This is in line with Bekkengen's (2002) argument that child-centeredness has a flip side; that of disregard for the practical aspects of childcare and housework. As Bekkengen (2002, p.108) argues from her Swedish interviews, men are not expected to learn from women's experiences, but rather to be allowed to do things their own way.

To summarize, the notion of involved fatherhood put forward in the interviews with middle-class fathers seems to involve a simultaneous process of embracing the female terrain of infant care, and of ensuring what Anderson (2005) refers to as *masculine space*. Anderson further argues that the claiming of masculine space within a feminized arena can be seen as an articulation of hegemonic expectations of masculinity. This is evident in our material in the way that some of the men insist on making their own individual routines, with the mother, as Örn stated, 'out of the equation'. This wish to be independent of their partners may be interpreted as a devaluation of feminine standards, and thus be linked to an orthodox form of masculinity in which the man's standards take precedence. The practice of establishing new routines can also be linked to what Shirani and Henwood (2011) have described as men's feelings of being excluded from care because of the strong connection between mother and child, especially when they have anticipated and longed for a high level of involvement from the time of the birth.

#### *The father as secondary carer*

Eight of the fathers described practices that may be understood as opposing some of the ideals imbedded in the metanarrative of the involved father – and the ideals put forward by the middle-class group of fathers. This group is more heterogeneous in terms of class positions.

While four of them have typical working class occupations like mechanics and factory workers, the other half are self-employed and/or working in the business sector. The centrality put on the father's quota of the parental leave, and the early phase of childhood, among the middle-class fathers was not present in these interviews. In contrast, a common theme was the centrality of the father's job commitment when organizing childcare. This was not expressed, however, as a matter of male pride or commitment as a breadwinner, as Miller (2011) found in her study of British fathers, but as a question of having a strong worker identity. Also, the idea of the father having time alone with the child, in order to create a stronger bond, was not expressed. Most of the fathers in this group took their leave at the same time as their partners. In this sense the fathers positioned themselves as the secondary carer during infancy, with the mother as the self-evident primary carer, often linked to the special bond that pregnancy and breastfeeding creates between mother and child. The father's role in early infancy was presented as more of a bystander role, implying that men do not need to engage fully with the feminine terrain of infant care. This pattern resonates well with Dolans (2014) study of working-class fathers in the UK who "relegated themselves to a 'secondary' position behind their wives or partners' (p. 9) in issues of child care.

Special circumstances may alter this picture. Two of the fathers in this group had not intended to use their parental leave at all, but ended up doing so due to unemployment. One of these fathers, Sveinn, appears to be primarily a breadwinner, organizing caring tasks around his job commitment. At the time of the interview he had just started in a new job after having been unemployed. This was not his 'dream job,' which caused him to focus more on his time at home with his one year old son:

Yeah, I want to use my time with him, not at work. Or with, you know, like it is right now.

But you never know, maybe you get the dream job, you know you're forced to accept, or you know, give more time to work.



Sveinn's account thus points to the relevance of a situational perspective on fathering. Fathers who appear to be 'traditional', and embodying orthodox aspects of masculinity, may enter the arena of infant care and find meaning and deep satisfaction in relating to the child - if their situation changes. The ease with which this happens suggests that, in a cultural context that idealizes involved fatherhood, shifts from absent to present fatherhood can happen quite easily.

Both generally and compared to the middle-class fathers, the fathers in this group were less preoccupied with spending time with the child at an early stage. In terms of involvement they were 'future-oriented' (Shirani & Henwood, 2011, p. 21) and highlighted the importance of becoming more involved as the child grew older, a pattern consistent with other studies on working-class fathers (Stefansen & Farstad, 2010). One example from our sample is Magnús, who started his leave when his son was eighteen months old and had been cared for by a child-minder in the interim period following the mother's parental leave:

Well for one thing it's much easier to play with a one-and-a-half-year old than a nine-month-old, and I think probably, you know, eh, it's better quality time, you know. Because he's a little bit more mature and, you know, I think it's better for us as bonding, it's what I imagine. At nine months he's more reliant on his mother.

Magnús sees the child getting older as a prerequisite for bonding. This is a very different notion of how fathers and children form attachments than the one expressed by the middle-class fathers. An opinion similar to that of Magnús is presented by Ívar, a father of two, who had used his leave periods while his wife was still at home. Spending time alone with his young son was not the main reason he used his entitlement to a leave. According to Ívar, he did not connect with his children in any real sense during the first twelve months of their

lives, mainly because he feels it is difficult to communicate with very young children. During the interview, Ívar talked about the time he spends with his older daughter, who is six. He revealed a keen interest in his daughter's life, for example when he talked about how they prepared her for the baby that was coming, in order to prevent her from developing feelings of being left out and jealous. This pattern resonates well with Doucet's (2009) observation that, for men, the emotional responsibility for children may shift over the years. While the emphasis fathers in this group put on their work may be read as an enactment of orthodox masculinity (non-involvement with the 'female' terrain of infant care), the emphasis they put on emotional presence in their relationships with their older children is more in line with inclusive masculinity.

Both Ívar and other fathers in this group talked about setting aside special time for the children – as did the middle-class fathers. Their sense of commitment towards the form of interaction implied; face-to-face and with undivided attention, was not as strong however. The fathers in this group seemed to regard spending time with children as something that might or might not fit in with everyday tasks or interests that the fathers have, depending on the circumstance. Hilmar, a father of three, for instance, described how he would pick the oldest son up after day care when he was a toddler and they would spend time talking together while driving around to do errands. This was a valued and intimate time for both of them, although it can be interpreted as a 'side-by-side' activity. With the youngest child this changed – the day care he attended was only 50 meters down the road. Hilmar seemed quite relaxed about this situation and was not considering ways to compensate for the lack of alone-time. Hilmar explained how he enjoys bringing the children along in his projects around the house, but he did not emphasize the emotional bond this could create between him and his children. In this way these fathers present an image of fatherhood consistent with an orthodox masculinity. Infant childcare is presented as linked to motherhood, while the fathers enter the stage when

the children learn to walk and talk, and are able to join in on the activities that the fathers like to do. When the fathers do enter the terrain of care they present themselves as emotionally present and nurturing. Gottzen and Kremer-Salik (2012) describe similar practices among fathers engaged in older children's sporting activities and link these practices to inclusive masculinity: 'This nurturing, we suggest, is associated with a caring fatherhood and with an "inclusive" masculinity that is expressive and encouraging' (p. 640).

As a contrast to the middle-class men, none of the fathers in this group emphasized the need to establish their own childcare routines distinct from those of their partners. The emphasis is rather on doing things the way they feel works well, and often this is achieved by following the routines that the mother has established during her maternity leave. Talking about his one-year-old son, Jakob stated that he did not think that his son noticed the difference between his and the mother's care: "You know, it's another person, but the routine stays the same."

Jakob referred to this as a positive situation, focusing on the child's need for stability. This is truly a different type of fatherhood participation than that expressed by the middle-class group, but it is still hard to define as exclusively orthodox. The pattern described here also resonates with findings from previous studies. Stefansen and Farstad (2010) describe how middle-class parents' notions of the young child, as a robust individual who can cope with and benefit from shifts in care arrangements, is a necessary precondition for the shift in carer arrangement preferred by the middle classes. Among working-class parents, the child was seen as more vulnerable to shifts and disturbances, a construction that makes it more difficult to alter the care arrangement during infancy.

Albert, a father of three, exemplified how some fathers do not necessarily view childcare as being strongly connected to the emotional bond between father and infant, unlike the middle-class fathers who adhere to the ideal of the father as primary carer. Albert had

taken his part of the parental leave while his wife Elín was still at home, and he spent some of this time studying for his further education. He talked about staying at home with the children as ‘doing almost nothing’ and mentioned that he preferred going to work. Both he and his wife presented a fairly gender-differentiated picture of the family organization, where she was more invested in the early childhood care than he was. Since Elín did shift work, however, Albert was highly involved in the everyday tasks and childcare in the family:

Albert: But I do almost everything, because she is working nights also, evenings...

Interviewer: So in that way you are kind of part of their routines anyway. But still you felt like when you were on leave that it was too little?

Albert: Well, no it was enough to do, just the ordinary stuff, but... just to stay and do that would probably drive me crazy.

The practical tasks connected to childcare are in this way presented as the ‘ordinary stuff’, rather than as opportunities for creating individual practices in childcare, or to bond in the dyadic sense with the young child. In the interview Albert strongly expressed a wish to be different from his own father, who had been absent and, in Albert's mind, unengaged during his childhood. Importantly, the practical tasks were not presented as optional for the father.

In summary, this group of fathers are less involved in hands-on child care during infancy, and they do not regard involvement in the infant phase as a prerequisite for establishing a secure and close emotional bond as the child develops. Since these fathers see their own roles as caregivers as different from those of their partners in the early phase of infancy, they are expressing an orthodox form of masculinity. Their strong worker-identity may also be interpreted in lights of a traditional male provider role although they did not emphasise the provider role in the interview (cf. Brandth & Kvande 1998). However, these men are also presenting a form of inclusive masculinity since they take for granted that they are part of the child's upbringing. An even more interesting point is that these fathers do not

see the mother's presence or the following of her routines as a threat to their fathering practices or male identity. They express a willingness to adopt and learn from their partners' practices and experiences, an attitude that may be seen as indicative of an inclusive form of masculinity.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Based on interviews with parents of young children in Iceland, we have identified two different approaches to involved fatherhood within the context of a 'father friendly' welfare state. The first approach, articulated primarily by middle-class men, portrays fathering in ways that mirror the main aims of the fathering policies in the Nordic countries and echo what we have put forward as a dominant narrative of involved fatherhood in infancy – in this particular cultural context. In this narrative the father is positioned as a primary carer on par with the mother. The other approach, which in our study is articulated by a more diverse group of men but mostly in working-class positions, defines the father as a secondary carer that takes a bystander role in this phase of childhood, reflecting a more traditional fathering role. These constructions may be seen as clearly demarcated binary categories, one 'new' and one 'old'. In our analyses we see a more complex picture.

Both approaches seem to involve competing forms of normative masculinity – as fathers, men experience what Coltart and Henwood (2012) term a *push* towards new forms of subjectivity, and a *pull* from old discourses. On one hand, fathers present themselves as good carers and place great emphasis on emotional closeness to their young children, suggestive of a transition from orthodox to inclusive masculinity. Across social milieus, it is not just acceptable for men to 'mother', but expected. The distant provider-dad model is no longer an option, and neither is the fulltime housewife model for mothers.

On the other hand, we see traces of orthodox masculinity in both approaches, a finding that points to the persistence of traditional notions of manhood. The importance placed by middle-class fathers on parenting on one's own terms seems, for some, to foster a devaluation of the mother's care work. This orientation mirrors what Johansson and Klinth (2007) found when interviewing Swedish men about the parental leave system; they saw involved fatherhood as something men should enter into for their own good, and possibly for the sake of their children and the family. Rarely was the will to change power relations between men and women mentioned.

Gender equality was not a central topic in the interviews with fathers identifying with a secondary carer role either. For this group of men the link to orthodox masculinity is more self-evident than for middle-class fathers: they may simply opt out of infant care if it is practically possible. If not, they are obliged to do their duty. At the same time, these men draw on inclusive forms of masculinity when relating to care work and their partners' efforts: they learn from the mother, and get the job done. For middle-class men inclusive forms of masculinities are played out in their overall orientation and commitment to forming a strong and close emotional connection with the child and engaging in traditional feminine forms of intimacy with the child.

In conclusion, we interpret these patterns as indicative of two distinct forms of involved fatherhood, both of which entail simultaneous processes of continuities and disruptions of traditional masculinity. This double-sidedness in both approaches is overlooked when the dominant narrative of involved fatherhood, with its emphasis on alone time with the infant child, is taken for granted as inclusive masculinity. When this is the case, fathers who do not live up to its narrow standards may be seen as failures in terms of establishing a modern, nurturing fathering role. Hence, the change, in terms of degendering of care and changing gender relations, that their type of fathering represents is misrecognised. The fit that

our study has shown between the dominant narrative of involved fatherhood and middle-class fathering brings attention to the class politics that are interwoven with standard typologies of fathering.

Our study also points to the different ways in which both orthodox and inclusive masculinity enters into the picture for different groups of men. These patterns reflect, we believe, the cultural embeddedness of different articulations of inclusive fatherhood, as captured by the term ‘situated fathering’ (Marsiglio, Roy & Fox 2005, p. 3). In this sense the patterns we have described seem to indicate that fathers actively construct the message from the father-friendly policies of the importance of paternal care in early childhood so that it is possible to integrate with their outlook on and way of life in general. One interpretation could be that flexibility in the policy regime is what makes it work on a general level – it allows for different articulations of involved fatherhood to emerge and to contribute to changing gender relations by different routes.

Our study leaves us however with many questions regarding the potential for gender equality of the different forms of involved fatherhood. For instance: does it matter if orthodox elements are included in a mostly inclusive form of masculinity related to fathering or if it is the other way around? As Doucet (2012, p. 304) points out, the diversity of fathering forms means that it is difficult to paint one clear picture of fathering and changing gender roles in relation to both childcare and domestic work. Overall however we conclude that within our context of a father friendly welfare state, men from different levels of society are indeed moving into the terrain of child care without much hesitation. Being a caring father seems nothing less than culturally obligatory.

The two forms of involved fatherhood that we have identified revolve however around different forms of father presence – that we have termed the urgent and the emergent fathering role, and each, we believe, with its limitations and possibilities to fuel further change towards

gender equality in families with young children. Our study is exploratory and limited in terms of sample size and time frame. Therefore we refrain from drawing conclusions on this matter. One way forward for further research is to include larger and broader samples and longitudinal designs in order to gain more insight into how different models of involved fatherhood contribute to the reconfiguration of gender relations in the family over time as well as on a general level. Such research should also take shifting and differentiated constructions of good motherhood into account, something we have done to a lesser extent.

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<sup>1</sup> Act no. 95/2000

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Iceland: "Recipients of payments in relation to maternity/ paternity leave by birth year of child 2001–2011," retrieved May 15. 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Quotations are presented verbatim in English, except for one interview that was translated from Danish. Names are replaced by pseudonyms for the sake of anonymity.