

Men, Fatherhood and work:
Findings and lessons from a
longitudinal study in the UK.

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Overview of presentation:

- Setting the context – change and continuities in family lives and balancing work and family responsibilities and demands
- What are men's expectations of fatherhood in the 21st Century? How do they anticipate their role and responsibilities as a new father *and* worker?
- How far are men's expectations met as new fathering experiences unfold? Can work and family life be reconciled/ balanced?
- Lessons from the findings
- Lessons from the research
- Conclusions

Setting the context: economic and social change and changing family/work contexts



- Men as fathers are more visible
- More women in paid work (feminization of the workplace)
- More mothers combine paid work outside the home with caring/domestic commitments
- Changes in marriage/divorce
- Families have become smaller
- Fertility rates are in decline
- First births occur later
- Economic patterns and associated types of employment have undergone significant change
- Discourse of the emotionally 'involved father' now more prevalent in parts of Europe.

Situation across many European countries:

“Rising rates of female employment have impacted on the role of the male breadwinner and the restructuring of wages has decreased the capacity of the family to live on a single wage” (Featherstone, B. (2009) *Contemporary fathering*. Bristol: Policy Press).

O’Brien, et al argue that the evidence from an analysis of 173 countries

“highlights the importance of a country’s policy framework, particularly financial incentives, in shaping fathers’ propensity to take family leave”

Social and cultural factors have always shaped the organisation of family/work life: new possibilities?

- Role of men in the family and workplace has become a matter of social and political debate
- Constructions of gender have become more fluid – and 'gender fates' are no longer assumed (Beck, 1995)
- Increasing recognition of masculinities – rather than a unitary model of man or father
- Discourses of the 'involved father' more prevalent
- New constructions of involved fatherhood emphasise hands-on caring and not (just) economic provision as the 'breadwinner'

Responses to these changes: patterns of parental leave across Europe

- Different types of leave: 'maternity', 'paternity' and 'parental' and different national approaches/ welfare systems etc...
- Leave policies currently receiving a lot of attention across Europe – mostly in relation to increasing the scope of leave entitlement *and involving fathers*
- Measures to *increase take-up* where policies exist have been focused upon – especially for men as fathers
- More emphasis in policies on *parental 'choice'* – but also evidence which suggests women in practice may have little choice

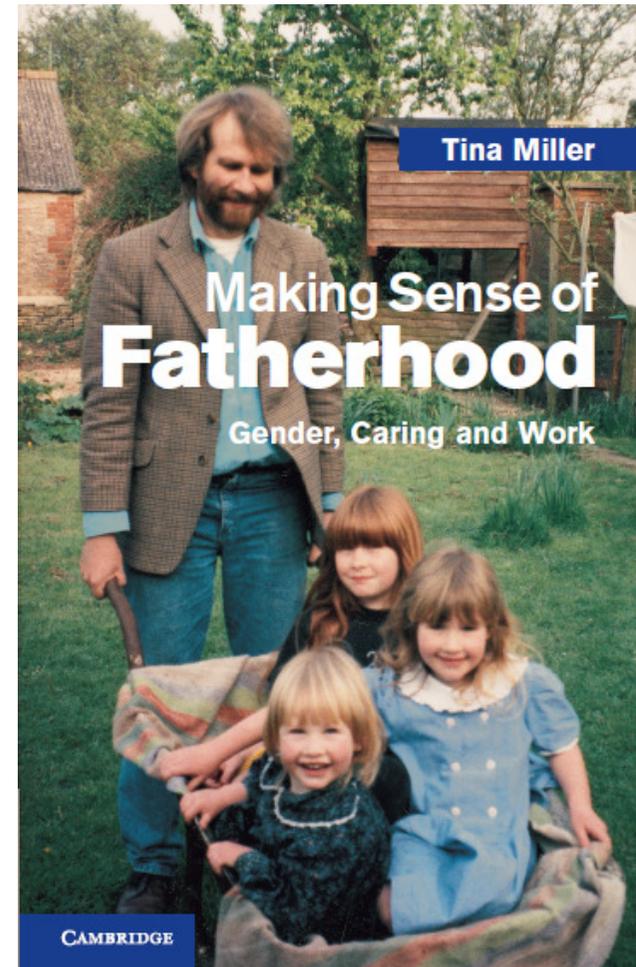
The micro level: 'Transition to first-time fatherhood' (UK)

- Qualitative in-depth longitudinal study (ongoing)
- Sample = 21 men (includes 4 teenage fathers)
- Sample = white, heterosexual, employed in a range of occupations from semi-skilled to professional
- Married or cohabiting
- Interviewed before the birth of their first child and on three occasions up to child's 2nd birthday
- Email and questionnaires (interactions between face-to-face interviews)
- Research examines gender, family and work practices **from a male perspective** (*'How do men experience fatherhood?'*)
- This repeats an earlier study on motherhood:

Miller, T (2005) *'Making sense of motherhood: A narrative approach'* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

How do men make sense of fatherhood in the 21st Century? *Men's expectations and intentions*

- Before the birth men positioned themselves as 'willing learners'- role of father-to-be not as clear as mother-to-be
- The men emphasised 'being there' as an important feature of involved fatherhood – this was different to the fathering they had experienced
- The men expressed a desire to 'share caring' for their child – in emotional and not (just) economic ways

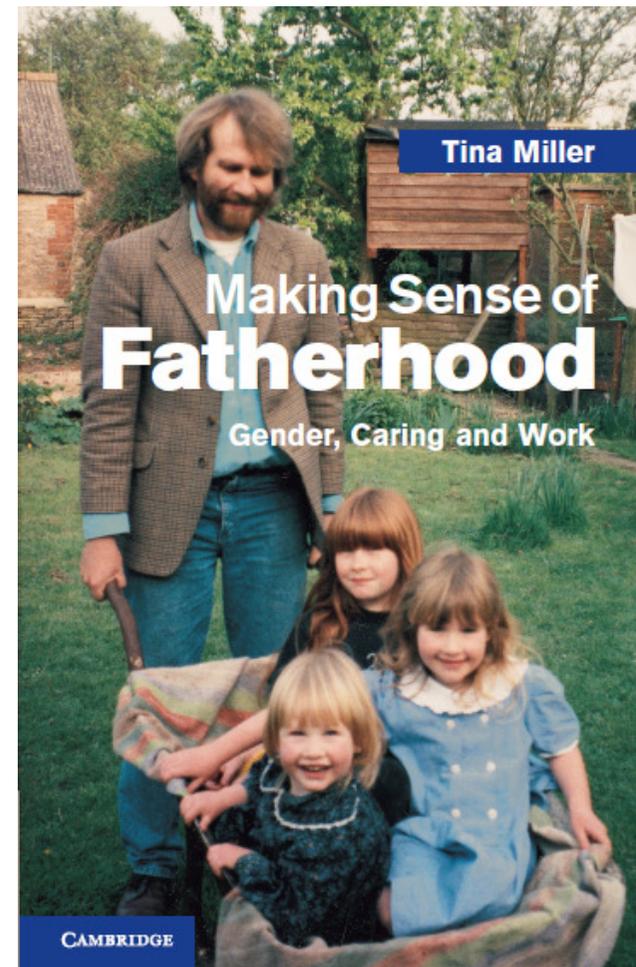


Anticipating being an 'involved' father:

- *"but right from the start I would like to negotiate work (so) that I have a day off work a week **to be a father** and to do child care and to be involved....." (Dylan. 1st Interview)*
- *"At this stage I want to say [I will be involved in] everything. I want to take the baby round the supermarket and do the weekly shop, I want to be doing the bath and staying at home so that [my wife] can go out and all that. **I want everything to be divided down the middle.** How much of that is a fantasy and in six months time I might be very grateful that I'm the one who is going out to work" (Nick. 1st Interview)*

Early fathering experiences: what the longitudinal data reveals

- All the men took paid paternity leave (2 weeks) or saved holiday leave
- During the two years after the birth – men spoke of the 'hard work' of caring, of needing to 'fit fathering in' of their own need for 'support' and of experiencing 'stress' and trying to 'hold everything together' (work and family life)



Becoming a father: 'caring masculinities'

- "I knew, obviously, that you're child's going to be born, and you know that you're going to love it, but I don't think..... You're not quite prepared for the strength of that...when you hold him in your arms **just this immense feeling**. I wasn't, you know, I wasn't prepared for it to be that strong, it was just like 'wow, this is.... very overwhelming', you can't, **you can't quite believe that you can love something that much**" (Gus. 2nd Interview)
- "I just couldn't stop holding them, looking at them, you know cooing, ah you just can't take your eyes off them, well I couldn't anyway. **Well we were both the same, we are quite similar in the way we are with them....** (Gareth, 2nd Interview. Father of twins)
- "One of the biggest things I've noticed is, it's just this little baby, **but how much time it will take up**, that was... yeh, that's the most phenomenal thing, we just weren't prepared for that"

What does men's involvement look like as new fathering experiences unfold?

- “I managed to get about three weeks off in the end and ...it feels like a special time in my head because I was around the whole time and at nights I would get up with [wife] because you don't know what you are doing so we were doing it together ...and then you go back to work and ...I needed to get more sleep so Hannah dealt with the night a bit more and then whole days and **then suddenly you become a bit more secondary... when you go back (to work)** suddenly the routine is continually changing so just when you think you have got it he is changing ...[and] I don't think I quite know all of the issues now... I get to see him a bit at the weekends but just lately I had deadlines as well so I was working sort of seven days a week for a couple of weeks and quite quickly you can feel out of it” (Ben 2nd Interview)

What does men's involvement look like as new fathering experiences unfold?

- “But yeah, I had **work obligations** already within a few days of baby being born...I sort of manage quite a lot of my work myself, so I was popping out doing an afternoon here, a morning there you know all day... **and I regret that**” (Dylan)
- “I mean I say that I'd love to have her (baby) all day and I would do, but after three or four weeks I don't know if I'd feel the same, **I'd like to think I'd want to look after her all the time, but going to work is quite nice**, you get that break and like I say it's great for me, I sort of see her in the morning and have a play with her and I come back and I play with her and it's great” (Joe, 2nd interview)

Reconciling work and family life

- “I went back to work and it really hit home that **I’m not going to be able to do this job and have a family** and you think well I’ve just got to work harder at both ends, but you know literally there are only 24 hours ...things had to change from a work/ life perspective.... as I say, they said they were family friendly as a company...but most employers don’t do a great deal for their staff because it’s all about money” (James. 3rd Interview)
- “I just wish I had a bit more energy to do more with her [daughter] really. I feel a bit of a spectator rather than a partaker which is... **I just get really tired at weekends ... I mean I need my rest as well** and I’m not really, when I went to see the doctor and described a typical week to him, he said ‘well no wonder you’re not very well, what do you expect’” (James 4th Interview)

Being the 'breadwinner'/ work 'choices'

- "I like working too much. I love going to work so, I mean for me obviously I love them but I love going to work more than I do sitting here all day looking after them. ... *I definitely see myself as a breadwinner....* But yeah I definitely see myself more in the kind of, in terms of them, silent, strong person in the background that ...*I don't know whether it's a traditional thing but that's just the way I feel* about it, whether that's right or wrong I don't know" (Gareth. 3rd Interview).
- "No, I would go mad, I'm fairly sure I'd go mad yeah, I couldn't be a stay at home dad" (Gus. 3rd Interview)

Men, flexible working and 'career progression'

“Another reason why (changing work patterns) might be unpopular is just that, as well as the practical difficulties of doing it, there is an emotional **difficulty...I felt tremendously guilty on my non-working day**, doing the childcare or going out and about... while everyone else is working and coping with the work issues. There's a sort of element of practical difficulties, **I'm sure there's an element of career progression** and thinking about how am I getting on in the office, *am I you know achieving enough to progress....* I don't know whether women feel more comfortable with that than men do, because *I suppose it's more expected of women to take that option*” (Stephen. 4th Interview)

Lessons from the research findings:

- This is a complex arena in which paid work outside the home remains important in how '*successful masculinities*' is understood in the Western world. Fathers continue to have more 'choices' available to them in relation to their fathering/family involvement. But important changes are discernible across the data.
- Paternity/parental leave policies need to take account of how gendered assumptions can influence apparent 'choices' around work/caring practices
- Leave policies need to be developed as part of total packages of support for employed carers (Moss and Wall, 2007)
- But paternity/parental leave policies do not automatically result in take-up – levels can be disappointing (UK)

What *should* parental leave look like?

- Evidence from cross-national European research suggests that if fathers are to take parental leave it should be,

“...an individual entitlement, paid at a high rate of compensation, and be *flexible*, making possible shorter and longer blocks of leave either full or part time”

(Featherstone, 2009:134)

Taking a longitudinal qualitative approach

- This involves theory generation rather than hypothesis testing
- Particular approach emanates from a focus on periods of potential changes/transitions in a life – ‘biographical disruption’ and how individuals make sense of the change e.g. transition to first time fatherhood
- Longitudinal focus enables experiences as they unfold to be gathered – intentions often to do not (fully) coincide with everyday experiences. The research seeks to understand why this is.
- This approach enables a more nuanced and finely focused understanding of the complex range of factors which shape men’s engagement in family and work life
- This approach has greater ‘internal validity’ in the claims that can be made about the data.

Cultural and gendered change?

“PRIME MINISTER DAVID CAMERON IS TAKING HIS STATUTORY PATERNITY LEAVE... TO BE WITH HIS WIFE SAMANTHA.

BUT IT IS AN EXPERIENCE THAT NOT ALL HIS FELLOW FATHERS FEEL THEY CAN JUSTIFY. THANKS TO DECADES OF SHIFTING ATTITUDES, THEIR RELUCTANCE IS NOT BASED CHIEFLY ON CHAUVINISM OR A BELIEF THAT CHILDCARE IS WOMAN'S WORK. THE PROBLEM, INSTEAD, IS MONEY.

SOME 45% OF NEW FATHERS SAID THEY DID NOT TAKE PATERNITY LEAVE, ACCORDING TO A 2009 REPORT BY THE EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION. OF THOSE, 88% SAID THEY WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HAVE DONE SO, AND 49% SAID THEY COULD NOT AFFORD IT”

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11086630>



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