

**Men, Fathers and Work:
theoretical frameworks
and empirical
perspectives.**

Catholic university of Milan.

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Professor Tina Miller
Department of Social Sciences,
Oxford Brookes University, UK.
email: tamiller@brookes.ac.uk

Setting the European context

- More women in **paid work** (feminization of the workplace)
- More mothers **combine** paid work **and** caring commitments
- Economic patterns and **types** of employment have undergone significant change – **global phenomenon**
- UK context– family lives and **'social problems'**

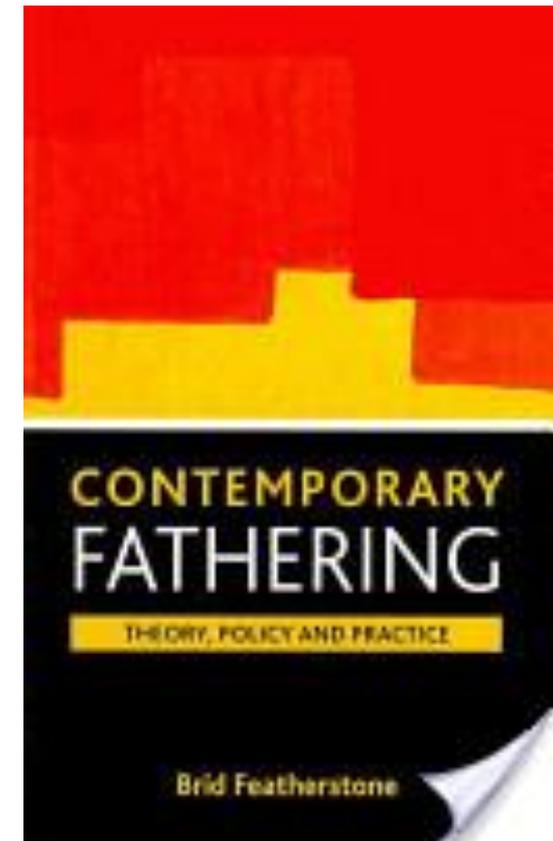
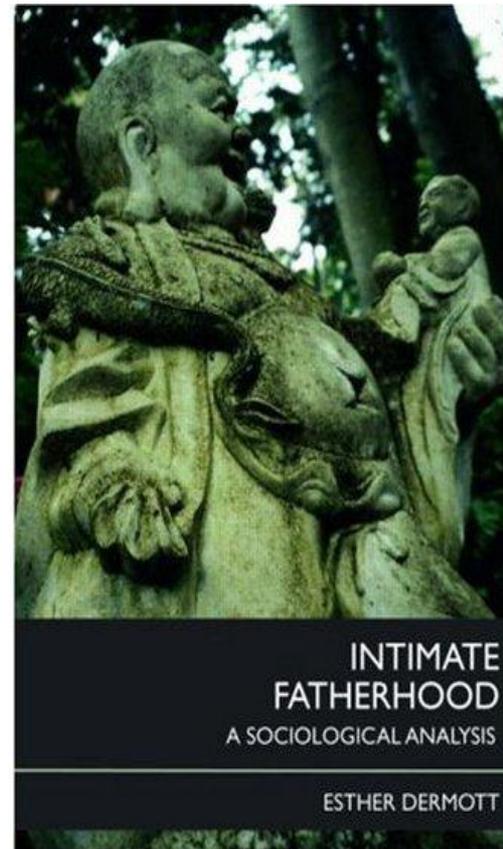
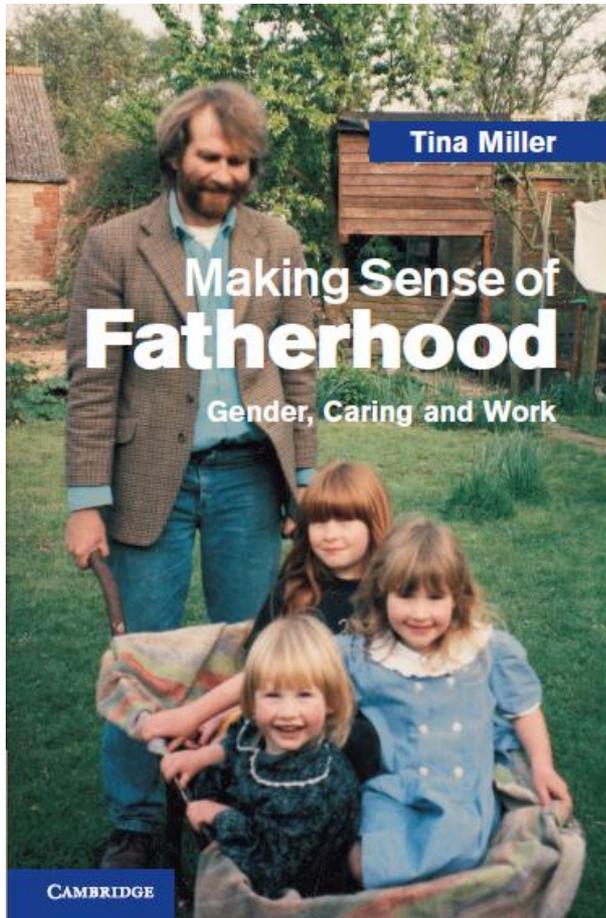


Setting the European context



- Significant changes in family lives/ demographics
 - – e.g. rates of marriage and divorce
 - families have become smaller
 - fertility rates are in decline
 - first births occur later
 - Grandparents working too
- The idea of the emotionally 'involved father' now more prevalent in parts of Europe
- Men doing fathering are more visible in family lives

Growth of interest and research on Men, Fathers and Work in the UK.



Interest in men, fathers and work in the UK and across Europe – *how theorized?*

- Through a focus on *changing* work place and economic/market place demands
- Through a focus on changing ideas about *gender* – masculinities and femininities (more possibilities/fluidity as social actors)
- Theorised as a response to changes in late modernity - requires that we *re-think* and *re-organize* how taken-for-granted practices and institutions are configured and connected e.g. *who are 'workers' and who are 'carers' ?*

Research collaborations and questions across Europe:

- Collaborative work *“Men, work and family life: A comparison of men’s work/family reconciliations in the UK and Italy”*.
- International meeting – Oxford September 2011: Colleagues working in Sweden, Denmark, France, Italy and UK
- Key research questions arising from meeting:
 - *Who* is talking about this topic and why?
 - *Policy variation* across countries
 - Should we assume *the importance of policies*?
 - *Are fathers’ practices changing* in relation to care?
 - Power and gendered identities

An overarching focus is on



- How can/do the state, governments and companies **reconcile** paid work and family life?

Reframing the relationship - Macro and micro level responses:

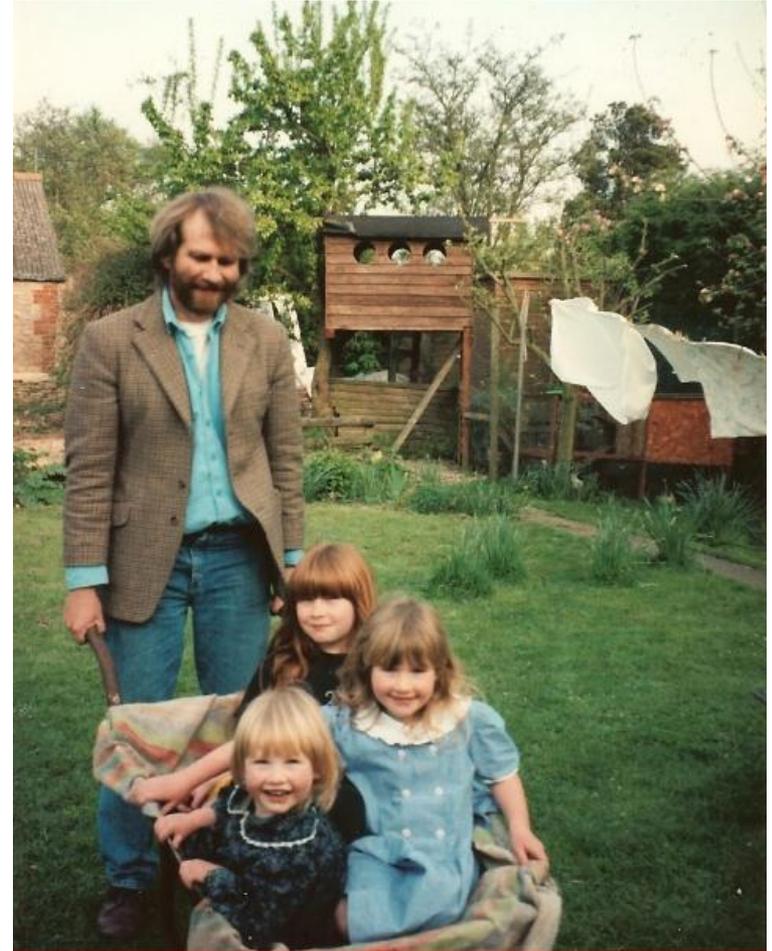
- **National** contexts differ - welfare systems, role of state etc...
- **Political concern** in the UK – ‘healthy, working families’ - engaging (young) men in work and family life, teenage pregnancy, elder care
- **Policy responses** – Paternity leave (introduced 2003)
- New policy on shared maternity/paternity leave – fathers able to share
- Parental leave – workers have a right to request

Reframing the relationship - macro and micro level responses:

- **Macro Industry/Company levels:**
 - link between contented workers and productivity
 - requirements of corporate social/family responsibility
 - some excellent 'pockets' of practice
- **Micro level of family relationships** (see Miller, T.2011 *Making sense of fatherhood: Gender, caring and work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
 - How are *reconciliations* managed at the level of individual and family life?
 - What *differences* can policies make?

Key findings from qualitative longitudinal study on 'Transition to Fatherhood' study:

- The men emphasised 'being there' as an important feature of involved fatherhood – different to the fathering they had experienced
- They expressed a desire to share caring for their child – in emotional and not (just) economic ways
- During the year 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' trying to 'hold everything together' (work and family life).



Key findings from the UK Fatherhood study:

- **PATERNITY LEAVE:** Two weeks statutory leave introduced in the UK in 2003 - facilitates early learning *and sharing* of caring skills
- **CARING:** for a baby is hard work and societally undervalued *'it is literally 24 hours a day'*
- Juggling work/family life *'holding it all together'* can be experienced as highly stressful and relationships can become strained
- New fathers can feel unsupported, and isolated lacking some of the support they see new mothers enjoying
- Dominant ideals of masculinity can make it difficult to show 'weakness', ask for help, admit to not coping or feeling stressed – *'a male pride thing'* can be obstructive
- Different discourses available for men and women in relation to motherhood/fatherhood and caring/work

Fatherhood and paid work in the UK

- Context - Men in the UK have the **longest working hours** in Europe
- Research shows that men who are fathers tend to **increase** their working hours
- Two weeks **paternity leave** – important but short and under paid (£123 a week)

“I went back to work after the two weeks paternity leave and that is probably *the only two weeks I've ever spent with her* now ... and you think oh, it's funny how that is it isn't it. *That is quite sad really.* It is actually when you think about it, isn't it?”

But the findings from my study reveal the **complexity** of change and reconciliations

- Work outside the home **easier** than caring
- Issues around “career progression”
- Concern about “letting work colleagues down”
- Some felt that companies/employers **didn't really support paternal/parental** leave policies – experiences ranged widely
“do bosses really believe in it anyway?”

One father reflects on combining work and child care

- “*I felt tremendously guilty* on my non-working day, doing the childcare or going out and about [and] *doing fun things* sometimes, while everyone else is working and coping with *the work issues* you know... and I’m sure this is a factor in other people as well. 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.* But I think there might also be a sort of *am I letting the side down, am I letting the team (work colleagues) down* by not being there to help when there are difficult things on and maybe, I don’t know, maybe you can say whether women feel more comfortable with that than men do, because *I suppose it’s more expected of women to take that option*” (Stephen)

But we know that policies are important:

Margaret 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”

Take away points:

- Need to think about the possibilities for fathers reconciling family and work **across the life course** (birth, starting school, teenage years and care of old, dependent parents)
- Need to recognise that **policies alone** are not enough – but along with company initiatives can be **very important** in signalling cultural and social change – and CSR (examples from Northern Europe).
- Need to take account of the inter-related factors which shape **parenting and work identities** and use innovative and relational research approaches to examine what is actually happening at the level of **micro and everyday negotiations**.