Commission on the Family

Fathers

Irish Experience in an International Context

A Report by

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Harry Ferguson works as a senior lecturer in the Department of Applied Social Studies, University College, Cork (UCC). Prior to moving to UCC in 1995, he worked for five years in the Department of Social Studies, Trinity College, Dublin. He completed his post-graduate research at the University of Cambridge, and his doctorate was on the history and sociology of child abuse and child protection. He has researched and published widely in the areas of child protection, domestic violence and gender issues, with particular reference to men and masculinity. His books include co-authorship of *Taking Child Abuse Seriously* (with the Violence Against Children Study Group), London: Routledge, 1990; *On Behalf of the Child: Child Welfare, Child Protection and the Child Care Act 1991* (with Pat Kenny), Dublin: A&A Farmar, 1991; *Protecting Irish Children: Investigation, Protection and Welfare* (with Tony McNamara), Dublin: IPA, 1996. He has worked professionally with violent men and has been involved for many years in delivering workshops and other initiatives aimed at men’s personal development. This includes being in a men’s group with Kieran and Dermot which provided a vital foundation of mutual support, trust and commitment with which to meet the exciting personal, intellectual and ‘political’ challenges that this Report posed in terms of trying to articulate a coherent and shared perspective on fatherhood, men and gender relations.

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Introduction

Kieran McKeown, Harry Ferguson and Dermot Rooney

“Fathers and families need new images of what a father can be, images that go beyond the idea of father as outsider, father as provider, or father as intruder in the home. There is a need for images that acknowledge father as a potent nurturant force within the family as well as a creative liaison with the world outside the family”
Colman and Colman, 1988, p.2.

This book was written to answer a number of key questions about fathers:

• what changes are affecting the role of fathers?
• what is the function of a father?
• what differences do fathers make to the development of children?
• what do fathers do at home?
• how does work impact on the fathering role?
• are the rights and responsibilities of fathers adequately protected in the Irish law?
• what services and supports facilitate good fathering?

These questions are symptomatic of the change and uncertainty which is affecting not only of fathers but of men generally. They are questions which have not been addressed before, at least not in Ireland and not with the sustained analysis which we have attempted in this book.

A central theme in the book is the relationship between fathers and their children. Relationships between fathers and mothers and between mothers and children are also explored because they are inseparable from the relationship between fathers and children. The book is grounded in the soil of Irish experience from where we draw many examples and for which we suggest measures to help promote good fathering.
The word “father” has many different meanings. It means the biological father, the symbolic father, and the person who engages in the practical act of fathering. All of these may be different people and are usually men; however it is symptomatic of the changing ground of fatherhood in our time that the father figure in some “fatherless” families may not always be a man. We state this at the outset so as not to exclude any person who is actively engaged in the art of fathering. For the purpose of this book we limit our inquiry to men in their roles as real and symbolic fathers.

The word “father” also has many different images. There is the image of the “traditional” father who is a hard working breadwinner but is often absent, both physically and emotionally, from his children. There is the “modern” father who pushes prams and changes nappies, takes his children to school and plays with them in the park, reads to them at night and discusses the events of the day. There is the “non-resident” father—be he single, separated or married—who may see his children regularly, or he may make an appearance only once or twice a year, or he may lose contact with his children completely.

There are also images of the father which depict particular qualities. There are loving fathers, dependable fathers, involved fathers, committed fathers, strong fathers, adoring fathers. Equally, there are images which depict negative qualities. There are disinterested fathers, unreliable fathers, workaholic fathers, abusive fathers, weak fathers, violent fathers. These different images are also part of the way in which men are seen in society.

Expectations are changing of what it is to be a good father. Good fathers are increasingly expected to be emotionally involved with their children. They are expected to share housework and take an interest in the children’s schooling. It is no longer presumed that the father is the sole breadwinner or that his role is simply to
supply the weekly wage packet. There is a presumption that fathers will want to be at the birth of their children and that they will have the same practical skills of childrearing - apart from breast-feeding - as the mother. We are not in a position to judge how fathers measure up to these standards. However we suspect that few contemporary fathers have actually experienced this type of fathering themselves. As a result, many of them cannot rely on their own fathers as models of good fathers, even if they were good fathers by the standards of their time.

All of the contemporary images of the father - both the positive and the negative - are true in the sense that they reflect some aspect of how fathers are experienced. Just as there are many different ways of being a man, so there are many different ways of being a father (see Connell, 1995; Ferguson, 1997a). The public imagery associated with fatherhood tends to be contradictory and to involve both positive and negative aspects. These contradictory images are, in our view, a reflection of the change and uncertainty affecting the cultural meaning of men and fatherhood. By contrast, the public imagery associated with motherhood tends to be consistent and positive - sometimes to the point of veneration - although some writers have drawn attention to ambiguities within the role of mother (see for example, Featherstone and Holloway, 1997; Hooper, 1992).

One commentator has attributed this change and uncertainty to the "demise of cultural consensus on the meaning of manhood [which] has left men in a no man's land, searching for new meanings and definitions of maturity" (Gerson, 1993, p.5). The contemporary experience of fatherhood in the United States, as described by one writer, is probably not very different to that in Ireland: “fatherhood in recent decades has become a kaleidoscope of images and trends, a sure sign that it has lost cultural coherence. ... . Buffeted by powerful demographic, economic, and political changes, fatherhood in American culture is now fraught with ambiguity and confusion. Not surprisingly, so, too, are fathers themselves” (Griswold, 1993, p. 244). We believe that the writing of this book is itself a sign of change and
uncertainty and of the need to take stock of the position of fathers in families and in society generally.

The public imagery and private experience of fathers mutually influence each other. In view of this it is worth looking at how a number of leading commentators have depicted the contemporary image of the father. In the United States, a Jungian analyst has made the following observations about the public image of fathers: “when we watch Dad on TV sitcoms and the accompanying ads, he’s a rather foolish man. He’s not quite with it; a piece of him is astray. Commentators on contemporary fatherhood complain that he is being deliberately made to look foolish and antiquated, because this weakened image helps take down the stuffed-shirt power of the patriarchy, makes more equal the relations between the genders, and blurs the hierarchical differences between fathers and children. Therefore wives are shown to be more practical and connected, children to be more with it and savvy. Even if he’s a good guy, Dad is a little dumb” (Hillman, 1996, p.80). In Britain, another commentator has written about the negative image of fathers: “many of the images we have of fatherhood today are negative. Fathers are seen as absurd, pitiable, marginal, violent, abusive, uncaring and delinquent. ... As it has become more difficult to give emotional meaning to paternal absence, the image of the absent father has gathered force and negativity, and father-absence associated with the rising tide of out-of-wedlock births has become a symbol of moral degeneration” (Burgess, 1997, pp.19-20). Some of the literature compounds these negative stereotypes by characterising men’s motivations as rational and selfish in contrast to women’s motivations which are seen as selfless and altruistic: “male individualism is counterbalanced by female altruism, ..... rational economic man is taken care of by irrational altruistic woman” (Folbre, 1994, p.119).

The negative imagery associated with men and fatherhood also appears in discussions about how to involve men in child care. For example, a seminar on Men as Carers for Children which was organised by the European Commission Network
on Childcare in 1990, raised a number of concerns about the prospect of greater involvement by men in childcare: “The prospect [of men being more involved in the care of children] raised a number of anxieties and concerns - for example, about child abuse, about men invading ‘women’s space’ and being too dominant, about fathers taking over the more rewarding and pleasant childcare tasks” (European Commission Network on Childcare, 1990). At the same conference, one commentator even suggested, as a reason why men should participate in the care of children, that “closer contact with children will help men to express themselves in less aggressive and abusive ways” (Ibid, p.5). Does this imply that men normally express themselves in aggressive and abusive ways?

This negative imagery is not just bad publicity for men and fathers, although it is certainly that. It has a base in the experiences of men and women and, in turn, helps to mould that experience. The imagery, even if it is truly representative of the lives of only a small minority of men and fathers - who knows? - is now part of our collective consciousness and seems to “go with the territory” of being a man and a father in our time.

This negative imagery is both dismaying and challenging to men because it asks questions of every man and father: is this a true image of me? am I a good man and a good father? For society generally, it raises questions which are just as serious: does society want men and fathers to be characterised in this negative way? what images of men and role models of fathers does society wish to promote and facilitate? what impact is this negative imagery having on men and fathers? by what ideals and values are boys to grow into men and fathers? These questions cannot be avoided, either individually and collectively. Indeed, the negative imagery may become even more negative if these questions are ignored and the consequences for men and society may become even more negative. Accordingly, the theme of fatherhood touches deeply on matters that are personal as well as political, private as well as public. They concern men first, and fathers second, since no one can become a father
without first becoming a man. In other words, a “good father” must first become a “good man” and must search for the meaning of those terms in his life.

This book is based on an extensive review of the growing literature on fathers, particularly in the areas of psychology and sociology, but also in psychoanalysis, social policy and legal studies. In reviewing this literature we have come to the view that promoting the active involvement of fathers in the care and upbringing of their children is an ideal worth aspiring to, irrespective of whether the father is married or not, separated or not, resident with his child or not, heterosexual or not. We agree with the Commission on the Family on the importance of joint parenting: “Joint parenting should be encouraged with a view to ensuring as far as possible that children have the opportunity of developing close relationships with both parents which is in the interests both of children and their parents. The option of joint parenting may not always be available or indeed optimal (for example, when violence, abuse or extremes of conflict are involved). In cases where children’s interest is best served by joint parenting, public policy has a key role in promoting this interest” (Commission on the Family, 1996, p.14).

In forming this perspective, we have sought to understand the significance that fathers can play in the lives of children as well as the different factors - in the home, in work, in law, in services, in cultural expectations - which have inhibited fathers from being more involved in the care and upbringing of their children. While the specific focus of the book is on the caring relationship between fathers and children - itself a major issue - we see this as part of the broader issue of what it is to be a man and to be a carer of others. Men, like women, have obligations to care for others throughout their adult lives, including care for frail parents and older relatives, care for older children as well as for grandchildren. In our view, men need to actively negotiate these caring responsibilities and share them with women at each of the different stages over the course of a life.
The kernel of our analysis is that the ideal of greater involvement by fathers in the care and upbringing of their children - which is increasingly presented as the ideal and standard towards which the modern father should aspire - is either opposed or not supported by many of the structures, policies and practices which directly impact on fathers. Our analysis shows this in many spheres of public and private life:

- in the symbolic sphere, where the father-child relationship is treated as secondary to the mother-child relationship and the crucial role of the father - as seen in the psychoanalytic perspective of Freud, Lacan and others - is ignored. In this perspective, the father’s role is crucial in drawing attention to the fact that mother and child must desire and connect with a world outside of each other if they are to live and grow as separate independent persons;
- in the sphere surrounding the birth of children - including preparation for parenthood - where the father is treated, often unwittingly, as a secondary, supporting parent;
- in the sphere of work, where some fathers work very long hours thereby reducing the time and energy available for involvement with the children but also, at a deeper level, sustaining the self-image of father as the principal breadwinner;
- in the legal sphere, which confers greater parental rights on mothers than fathers, particularly pronounced in the case of separated and unmarried fathers;
- in the sphere of State services and supports which often treats parenting as synonymous with mothering and ignores fathers or fails to make the necessary contact with them.

The net effect of these forces is that the overall involvement by men in the care and upbringing of children may actually be declining precisely at a time when a growing number of fathers appear interested in having closer emotional involvement with their children. This is so for a number reasons. First, a growing number of children are placed in childcare facilities each working day, where virtually all the staff are
women, thereby reducing their contact with men and fathers. Second, a growing number of children are in lone parent families under the sole custody of the mother and the amount of access by fathers to these children - whether because the mothers restrict access or because the fathers do not wish to have more access - may be on the decline (see Table 1.2 below).

In this scenario, it is hardly surprising that children learn to perceive caring as women’s rather than men’s work and, out of these experiences, are formed the attitudes that sustain the distancing of men from children for the coming generation. In our view, this pattern will not change unless there is a concerted and sustained effort to support those fathers who wish to be more involved with their children as well as supporting those men who wish to work with children in the caring professions.

It is possible to advance four different reasons or perspectives for promoting the greater involvement of fathers in the lives of their children: (i) benefits to children’s development as a result of being emotionally close to both parents and (ii) benefits to families in supporting the interdependent relationships - economic, social and emotional - which holds its members together, including members of the extended family (iii) benefits to women in the form of greater equality in the labour market and in the domestic division of labour (iv) benefits to men in the form of greater involvement as fathers with their children which can lead to their own and their children’s personal development and growth. Many of the arguments, both in Ireland and elsewhere, tend to cite the benefits for women and children of greater involvement by fathers (see for example, Second Commission on the Status of Women, 1993, Chapter Three; Employment Equality Agency, 1996; Moss, 1993). However there are fewer arguments citing the benefits for fathers from being more involved with their children - although there is plenty of criticism for their failing to do so - and there are fewer arguments still from the perspective of the needs of the family as an interdependent unit of relationships. Our book endeavours to broaden
the agenda about fathers’ involvement with children by including all these perspectives as ways of looking at relationships within families.

The scale and scope of the agenda involved in promoting men’s greater involvement in caring for children and others should not be underestimated. The traditional division of labour between men as providers and women as carers has deep roots in our values and attitudes about the nature of men and women and in the structures of society which express and support those values. These structures have created inequalities in power, property and other resources between men and women. We agree with the feminist analysis that this system has not been in the best interests of women; but we would also argue that it has not been in the best interests of many men or children either. It is our belief that men and women have a shared interest in working for change and developing relationships - personal, social, economic, legal, et cetera - which allow the full potential of each person to be discovered and expressed.

Our book comprises seven chapters or essays. In Chapter One we discuss the traditional definition of father and observe some of the changes that have occurred in the institution of fatherhood in recent years and how men and women are responding to those changes. In Chapter Two we summarise the psychoanalytic perspective on fathers which tries to explain, at a deep level within the psyche, the importance of the role of fathers in establishing meaning and identity for the child. In Chapter Three, we review a number of empirical studies which examine the impact of fathers on child development. In Chapter Four, we describe what fathers do in the home, drawing on a range of empirical studies and teasing out the underlying theoretical perspectives which inform those studies. In Chapter Five, we explore the impact of work on fathers and draw upon the results of a special analysis of the 1996 Labour Force Survey in order to throw light on the specific labour market characteristics of fathers with young children. In Chapter Six, we review how the law and the legal system impacts on different types of father, most notably, married,
separated and unmarried fathers as well as abusive fathers. In Chapter Seven, we review and comment on research which has examined the way in which State services and other supports interact with fathers.
Chapter One

Fathers in a Time of Change

Kieran McKeown

"The information necessary to create a male is encoded in our DNA, but it takes all the institutions of a culture to produce a man. The male body is the biologically given 'hardware', the myth of manhood is the 'software' inserted by society through a series of formal and informal rites of passage."

Sandor McNab.

1.1 Introduction

The concept of father, in its most basic form, involves a relationship with a child that is both biological and psycho-social. That is the normal meaning and usage of the term father. In exceptional circumstances, there are fathers (such as adoptive fathers and step-fathers) who do not have a biological relationship with the child just as there are biological fathers (who have never seen their child) who do not have a psycho-social relationship with the child. In the main, however, a man’s standing as a father - notwithstanding the law (see Chapter Six below) - rests on both his biological and psycho-social links with the child. Whether the father is the biological father or not, the vital issue - as we argue in Chapter Two below - is that the father takes up his symbolic role in the family.

It is true that the father’s relationship with the child’s mother is often used, particularly in the Irish Constitution and its laws, to define and differentiate fathers. Thus married fathers are treated differently to separated fathers and both are treated differently to unmarried fathers. This procedure can create enormous legal complexities but, more importantly, as indicated in Chapter Six below, it effectively undermines the status and standing of fathers - since some fathers are more equal than others - and can cause hardship and injustice to men who find themselves in one of the legally unprotected categories of father.
Our purpose in this chapter is to explore the roots of our present understanding of fathers and the underlying structures and values which inform that understanding. We begin this process by describing the traditional image of father and the structures which have supported it (section 1.2). The role of father has been affected by changes in family structures (section 1.3) and by a range of more specific changes (section 1.4). It is symptomatic of the changes affecting men and fathers that a number of men’s groups and gatherings have been organised in Ireland in recent years to discuss and engage with these changes (section 1.5). The process by which a man becomes a father is not straightforward and an examination of this process helps to throw light on why fathers often seen themselves - and are seen by others - as the secondary parent (section 1.6). The question is then addressed of how to define a good father. Our answer to this question acknowledges that there are many ways to be a good father although some core principles inform all types of good fathering (section 1.7). Finally, we present our conclusions and recommendations (section 1.8).

### 1.2 Changes in the Role and Image of Father

One of the most influential images of fatherhood over many centuries is the patriarch which literally means “father and ruler”. In the hands of medieval Church and State, the image of the patriarch became the over-arching image of patriarchy in both heaven and earth with one layer of fatherhood resting upon another. In this imagery, God is the father and ruler of heaven and earth; the king is the father and ruler of his people; the priest is the father of his flock and the man is the father and head of his family. Throughout the generations, this imagery and, more particularly, the structures which support it, has conferred power and status on men - or at least on some men - in the public spheres of work, politics and religion. At the same time, it has also allowed women - or at least some women - to exercise considerable power in the home, particularly in terms of rearing and influencing children, preparing
them for life outside the home, and forming bonds of emotional attachment with them.

This patriarchal structure suited well the needs of the industrial and post-industrial society as men worked outside the home and assumed the role of the main provider in the family; gradually, the patriarch became the provider and the roles of father and mother became increasingly segregated, even polarised. Men were - and often still are - seen as naturally de-skilled in the art of child-rearing and care-giving. As we note in our Introduction, both men and women suffer the consequences of patriarchy. Despite the fact that men have apparently benefited a lot more than women, many theorists are arguing that the present social structure is having a destructive effect on both sexes. Neither men nor women are able to adequately express themselves within these confines, and there is a great need for this to be researched, particularly for men in their role as fathers.

In the Christian tradition the father is a central image of God. The unseen father God in the New Testament is incomprehensible but intimately involved with human affairs. It is symptomatic of the esteem in which fathers were held that the image of the father should be used to express the power and goodwill of God in the “other world”. Conversely, since God cannot be separated from the images of God, the decline of belief in God - and, within Ireland, the tendency for believers to shift from believing in God as a person to God as some sort of spirit or life force (Hornsby-Smith and Whelan, 1994, p.34) - may itself symptomatic of the decline in the symbolism of the father, and possibly vice versa. It is as though the father figure has lost its power to signify the world of goodness and desire that the human heart seeks. How the human desire for “otherness” and the “other world” gets symbolised and mythologised in the wake of the declining potency of Christian and patriarchal imagery is a major challenge of our time and is further addressed in Chapter Two where the role of the symbolic father in establishing meaning and identity for the child is seen as a central theme of psychoanalysis.
In the incarnate world of real fathers, the Bible has many stories of fathers - particularly fathers and sons - from Abraham who was prepared to sacrifice his son, to the figurative prodigal son who is reconciled with his father, the latter indicating, according to one commentator, that “reconciliation between father and child is one of the fundamental projects in a person’s life” (Abramovitch, 1997, p.32). Joseph, the adoptive or foster father of Jesus, is presented as a decent, hard-working carpenter but does not come across as an effective father in the symbolic sense (see Chapter Two). Some of the early paintings depict Joseph as caring in practical ways for the baby Jesus but, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, his position, like that of fathers generally, is presented as more remote from the child and his domestic involvement vanishes (Burgess, 1997, p.11). However it is the relationship between Jesus and his father in heaven which captures some abiding themes in father-child relationships: Jesus is called or sent to do his father’s business - which he is happy to do - and is crucified for it; he also feels abandoned on the cross by an apparently absent father, an experience that is not uncommon in father-child relationships. Thus the Christian tradition - like the tradition of Greek mythology - reflects the different aspects of fathering, with its shades of brightness and darkness, joyfulness and sadness, that are an inescapable part of how fathers are imagined, symbolised and lived. In recent times, God the father has shared with his incarnate fathers a decline in status and esteem and both seem to have lost their potency as images of power, goodness and desire.

Moving from religion to myth, one finds a parallel decline in the standing of heroes who have traditionally been male or at least the embodiment of masculine energy. Heroes have an uneasy position in contemporary culture and society, waiting precariously for their weaknesses to be exposed and their characters brought low (McNeely, 1996). Women have not escaped this trend but men, because they are more numerous in public positions of power, have had greater exposure to its biting and levelling influence. This pattern reflects a rejection of the traditional male hero
as unassailably strong and invulnerable in favour of an antihero who is ordinary and fallible (see Silber, 1990). Indeed one writer has described the notion of hero a “male pathology” which should be “relegated to the historical scrap heap” (Keen, 1991, p. 153; see also Bateson, 1990). The vacuum left by these developments has been described by one Jungian analyst in the following terms: “The Greek idea of the hero, or today’s antihero, may have done much to put men into relationship problems, perhaps more than any other set of myths. How many men, in today’s socioeconomic climate of dog-eat-dog competition, can achieve something heroic in the eyes of women?” (Ryce-Menuhin, 1996, p.64).

Fatherhood, like motherhood, is a social construct which, in Western society, has traditionally been built around marriage. The social contract between fathers and mothers, which was solemnised in marriage, required the father to work as the bread-winner outside the home and the mother to work as the carer inside the home. In an economic sense, mothers and children became dependent on fathers as the source of family income just as, in an emotional sense, fathers and children became dependent on women as the source of caring within the family home.

This social contract, whose ideal is embodied in the Irish Constitution, implied a strict, almost polarised division of labour between men and women, both inside and outside the home. The social contract had paradoxical consequences for fathers as one sociologist has observed: “In this golden age [sic] of the modern conjugal family, paternity appears to be characterised by an ambiguous and ambivalent social status: on the one hand, the father’s role was completely central and powerful, given that he retained the near monopoly of the access to the family’s subsistence resources, and on the other, his role as bread-winner for the family distanced him from it physically because of the distance between place of work and the family home, and symbolically because he is relatively marginalised in daily life” (Schultheis, 1993, p.232).
The traditional social contract also had a number of consequences for mothers whose lack of economic and political power outside the home contrasted with their power and influence inside it, particularly in matters affecting the rearing and education of children and the inculcation of moral and religious values. One sociologist has documented the influence which Irish mothers have exercised on the education of their children, particularly in farming families; these mothers see education as a form of human capital which, unlike the physical capital of the farm, is not under male control and not subject to inheritance by the eldest son (O’Hara, 1997). She writes: “Women embraced the challenge of preparing children for the wider society, not just because it gave them power and authority in a social form constructed on patriarchal lines, but as a way of resisting patriarchal dominance and creating a separate sphere of influence” (Ibid, p.153). Another sociologist has drawn attention to the crucial role of mothers in the inculcation of moral and religious values: “The Irish mother has, then, been responsible for the moral training and discipline of children within the home. She is the last but vital link in the Catholic formation of each new generation. It is often because of her, and an interest in maintaining the solidarity and prestige of the family, that children maintain their adherence to the Church in later life (Inglis, 1987, p.69).

It is clear from this therefore that fatherhood is never simply the product of individual decisions by men and women about child rearing. Fatherhood is a social practice which is shaped by its social context. Thus, just as the Irish Constitution accords primacy to the role of the mother in the home, it simultaneously implies that the father’s role lies elsewhere. As Articles 41.2.1 and 41.2.2 state: “In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved” and “The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home”.

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Traditional fathers were not expected to be directly involved in child care and housework. To say this does not mean that traditional fathers did not love their children. Nor does it mean that fathers were never intimate with and present for their children. Recently published reflections by Irish men’s on their fathers reveal that while many were indeed largely absent, this was a matter of degree and a variety of fathering practices went on (Hyde, 1996). The point rather is to draw attention to the fact that the norms of the time dictated that a father's love was expressed in one dominant way: by going out to work and providing. The "good provider" model (Bernard, 1983) was the defining core of fatherhood and masculinity. Women became the "specialists in love and the emotions" as men, in playing out the idealised male breadwinner role, lost touch with the emotional basis of their lives and of society generally (Giddens, 1992). Good fathers were, inter alia, good breadwinners; conversely, as one commentary has suggested, failure as a breadwinner has always been a significant feature of the bad dad” (Pleck and Pleck, 1997, p. 48).

This traditional model of the family - and its related roles of father and mother - remains strong in Ireland but is changing, as the analysis in the next section reveals.

1.3 Changes in Family Structures

In order to throw light on the overall structure of families in Ireland, a special analysis of the 1996 Labour Force Survey was carried out. Table 1.1 is derived from this analysis and shows the proportion of adults who are parents in Ireland in 1996.

This reveals that half the adult population (49%) - defined in this instance as persons aged 20 and over - in Ireland in 1996 were parents. Correspondingly, the proportion of adults who were not parents was 51%. It is also worth noting that the number of mothers exceeds the number of fathers. The reason for this is that a parent is defined as someone who lives with her or his child and mothers are more likely to live with
their children; the reasons for this, in turn, are discussed later in this chapter and elsewhere in the book (see notably Chapter Six).

Table 1.1 Proportion of Adults Who are Parents in Ireland in 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent / Not a Parent (1)</th>
<th>Men (4) %</th>
<th>Women (5) %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent (2)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a parent (3)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) The Labour Force Survey defines parents as those adults who are living with their children of any age. This has three limitations. First it includes children over the age of 18 and who, while living with a parent(s), are not children in the legal sense of the term. Second, it excludes a number of men who are fathers but are not living with their children. Third, it excludes men who are stepparents or boyfriends but not fathers but who play fathering roles within the family. In our analysis, we have added a fourth limitation by defining as adult any person aged 20 or over; this will exclude a very small number of fathers but was necessary since the next available statistical cut-off point, at 15 years, includes too many children. It also includes a relatively small number of parents (83,000 comprising 43,000 women and 40,000 men) - equivalent to less than 1% of all parents - who are 65 years or over and who are unlikely to be active parents.
(2) The total number of adults who are parents is approximately 1.2 million.
(3) The total number of adults who are not parents is approximately 1.2 million.
(4) The total number of men aged 20 and over in Ireland in 1996 was 1.1 million.
(5) The total number of women aged 20 and over in Ireland in 1996 was 1.2 million.

In order to find out more about parents, a more detailed analysis was undertaken of the distribution of parents between different household types. The results are summarised in Table 1.2. Table 1.2 distinguishes between older families (where none of the children are under 15) and younger families (where at least one of the children is under 15) and, within these categories, between one and two parent families. From this it emerges that in 1996 two thirds of parents (68%) lived in younger families and one third (32%) lived in older families. Most parents live in two parent families (90%); one parent families are much more common among older families because many of them involve widows or widowers living with an adult child.
Table 1.2 also distinguishes between the number of earners within each family type. Both older and younger families are similar in that approximately half of each type are one earner families. However they differ dramatically in that younger families were twice as likely to have two earners (39%) compared to older families: one in three of younger families (36%) are dual earners compared to one in six of older families (17%). They also differ dramatically in that older families were twice as likely to have no earners compared to younger families: more than one in three of older families (39%) have no earners compared to nearly one in six of younger families (15%).

These results are significant because they reveal that only half of all families - irrespective of whether they are younger or older - conform to the traditional image of having one breadwinner. In younger two parent families, a very substantial proportion (39%) are in fact two earner families. At the same time it is also worth noting that a significant minority of younger two parent families (11%) are no earner families and are therefore likely to be living at or below the poverty line. The same applies to the majority of one parent families (64%) which also are no earner families. These families and their children are likely to be living in poverty; it has been estimated that between 26% and 39% of all children in Ireland in 1987 were living in households below the poverty line, defined as either 50% or 60% of average household income respectively (Nolan and Callan, 1990).

The various types of families depicted in Table 1.2 also highlight the emergence of a polarisation between “work rich” and work poor” families which has been observed in other EU countries. In Britain, for example, it has been found that the proportion of dual-earner and no-earner families has grown at the expense of one-earner families (Gregg and Wassworth, 1995). No comparable data exists in Ireland on the trend over time. It has also been found that dual-earner families in Britain tend to be better qualified and to have higher status and higher paid jobs while those with no earner tended to be the opposite (Ferri and Smith, 1996). This is also the case in Ireland, particularly among younger families. Table 1.3 reveals that two parent, dual
earner families tend to be of higher socio-economic status than one earner families and higher still than no earner families. As regards one parent families, Table 1.3 reveals that those with one earner tend to be of higher socio-economic status than those with no earner.

From the perspective of fathers, the changing family structure in Ireland has a twofold significance. First, more than half of all families do not rely on fathers as the exclusive breadwinner; many of these rely on income earned by both parents or on income transfers from the State in the form of social welfare payments. In other words, breadwinning is no longer the monopoly of fathers and this clearly signals a change in their power and status within families. Second, a significant minority of families live without a father since the vast majority of one parent families are in fact fatherless families. These families are symbolically important in showing that families can exist without fathers thereby making fathers appear dispensable, at least for this type of family.

It is worth teasing out in more detail the factors which have contributed to the declining significance of fathers within families since they are central to understanding the present situation in which fathers find themselves.

### 1.4 Changes Affecting the Role of Fathers

In our view, there are four main factors which have affected fathering in recent decades. The first is the growth in the number of women, especially married women, working outside the home. In the 25 years between 1971 and 1996, the proportion of women in the Irish labour force - the labour force participation rate - increased from 28% to 36%; in the same period, the labour force participation rate of men fell from 81% to 69% (Department of Enterprise and Employment, 1996, p.28). In 1996, just under half (47%) of all women in the labour force were married compared to just over half (58%) for men. The projection is that these trends will continue: “Male
labour force growth is forecast to be about half the female forecast trend, due in part to the dramatic increase in the participation of married women in the labour force” (Ibid, p. 29). These developments are helping to break the mould which sustains the gendered division of labour in the workplace and thereby reduces - perhaps more symbolically than practically - the role of the father as the sole breadwinner by showing that women can be both breadwinners and care givers. This development contains a challenge to fathers - at least implicitly - to combine breadwinning with caregiving.

The second factor is that the breadwinning role of many men is severely threatened by the persistence of high levels of unemployment in Ireland, particularly since the 1980s. Unemployment makes it difficult for young men to make the transition to adulthood and fatherhood (Hannan and O’Riain, 1993) and there is evidence that some women may prefer the prospect of lone parenthood than sharing child rearing responsibilities with a young unemployed father (Wilson and Neckerman, 1986; Roberts, 1996). Older established fathers have also seen their breadwinning role wiped out through unemployment and the prospects of returning to that role diminish with each passing year of long-term unemployment since the prospects of employment diminish rapidly with each additional year of long-term unemployment (see Department of Enterprise and Employment, 1996, pp. 42-43). One study of the psychological impact of unemployment in Ireland found that unemployment causes a higher level of psychological distress among men than among women and higher still among married men than among single men due essentially to the erosion of their role as breadwinners, itself undermining their self image as men (see Whelan, Hannan and Creighton, 1991, pp. 41-44).

The third factor is the growth in the number of one parent families. In the 15 year period between 1981 and 1996, lone parent families as a percentage of all families with children under the age of 15 years increased from 7% in 1981 to 11% in 1991 to 18% in 1996 (Census of Population, 1981, 1991 and 1996, Volume 3). This is due
mainly to marital breakdown and births outside marriage. In a narrow economic sense, the welfare state, through the One Parent Family Payment and other measures, may have helped replace the breadwinning role of the traditional father and made these families economically viable, even if only barely so (see McCashin, 1993; 1996). For the mothers concerned, the dynamics of the social welfare system are such as to make the father’s absence a condition of receiving payment thereby helping to compound the separation of fathers from their children. As already indicated, some young women, particularly in disadvantaged areas, may be choosing to bring up their children with the support of the One Parent Family Payment because the fathers of those children are unable or unwilling to play the breadwinner role of husband and father. Moreover, since most one parent families (87%) are headed by a mother this is sometimes taken to prove - both symbolically and practically - that families can exist without fathers. Our review of the evidence in Chapter Three suggests that children can grow up normally without their biological fathers, although the memory of the biological father may never be totally erased; more importantly, as argued in Chapter Two, we believe that every child needs a “father figure” in its life to grow into a normal adult.

The growth of one parent families has also served to break the link, at least conceptually, between marriage and parenthood by showing that marriage is not a necessary condition of parenthood, even if many people enter marriage with a view to parenthood (Millar and Warman, 1996, p.48; Bjornberg, 1992). The severing of parenthood from marriage also serves to crystallise the definition of mother and father as involving a relationship with their child rather than with each other. The implications of this for fathers - particularly for separated and unmarried fathers - are still being worked out and, as the analysis in Chapter Six indicates, the legal implications have still not been addressed.

The fourth factor is less quantifiable but no less real and involves changes in expectations about what constitutes a “good father”. Parenting can be seen as
having two interrelated aspects: the provider or “investment” role and the caring or “involvement” role. Traditionally, the father’s role was defined by investment while the mother’s role was defined by involvement. However, involvement is increasingly perceived much more highly than investment, particularly by children but often by both fathers and mothers themselves (see, for example, O’Brien and Jones, 1996). The rising status of children within families - and the corresponding changes in norms about good parenting - have made it less easy for fathers to be exclusively preoccupied with investment at the expense of involvement (see Ferguson, 1996a). Indeed, the vast majority (87%) of Europeans - according to a 1993 European-wide survey of 13,000 men and women aged 15 and over - believe that fathers should take a hand in bringing up their children right from birth while three quarters (75%) believe that both parents should share all aspects of the childcare work (Eurobarometer 39.0, 1993, pp. 89 and 93; see also Social Europe, 1994, p.24). Other research suggests that Irish attitudes on these matters are “not consistently more traditional than those of the economically more advanced countries” (Whelan and Fahey, 1994, p.79).

These developments place fathers - particularly those who are sole breadwinners - in an awkward psychological position because investment without involvement no longer carries the esteem that it once did. Ironically, the father’s investment role may be esteemed by the mother but not the children and its effect, however unintentional, may be to strengthen the mother’s relationship with the children while weakening the father’s relationship with his children. Many fathers are experiencing the stress of having to combine both investment with involvement roles and, being unable to rely on the role model of their own father, are having to learn new ways of being a father. At the same time, there appears to be a growing receptivity to the idea that the breadwinner role should not be the sole defining characteristic of a man's worth as a man and a father (Marsiglio, 1995).
These changes have caused confusion about the role of fathers in a wide variety of situations. For men in employment, there is a growing expectation that they will become more involved with their children, even if the demands of work can make that difficult. For men who are unemployed, there is an enforced loss of the traditional provider role which challenges their self-image as both men and fathers. For men who are separated or divorced, there can be a loss of contact with children which threatens to undermine if not erase their role as fathers. For fathers who neither marry nor cohabit with the mother of their child, the practical role of father is often non-existent.

Men and fathers are responding to these changes in a variety of ways. The extent of change is examined in other chapters of the book, especially Chapters Three and Four which examine the involvement of fathers with their children. One of the changes worth noting in the present context is the growth of men’s groups which have been formed in Ireland in recent years to discuss and share experiences of being men and fathers. These developments are briefly detailed in the next section.

1.5 Men’s Groups

The emergence of men’s groups and men’s gatherings in Ireland in recent years is evidence that some men are responding to the changed circumstances in which men find themselves and this too is likely to have its impact on the practice of fathering. One of the first men’s gatherings in Ireland was held at the Marino Institute of Education in Dublin in September 1992; it was facilitated by Michael Meade and James Hillman and attended by around 100 men. A second gathering attended by a similar number of men - and facilitated by Michael Meade and Maladoma Somé - was held in Bellinter House in Navan, County Meath in October 1994. In February 1997, a major conference on the theme of Men and Intimacy was held in Carlow and attended by nearly 200 men and women (Saint Catherine’s Community Services Centre and Accord, 1997). Another men’s gathering was held in Marino Institute of
Education in Dublin in April 1997. These are just some of the one and two day events that have been happening in Ireland in recent years which, in turn, have had a ripple effect in terms of the formation of men’s groups throughout the country which meet weekly or fortnightly.

Parallel with these developments, the Second Commission on the Status of Women recommended in 1993 that funding, which had been made available through the Department of Social Welfare (which became the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs in June 1997) to women’s groups since 1990, should be extended to men’s groups. The rationale for the recommendation was that “there is a real problem for men at the bottom of the social and economic pyramid, because the positive incentives that have encouraged their wives to seek change, have in many cases passed them by. Yet their traditional role no longer exists. The automatic assumption that they controlled family finances and decision-making is gone. While children may benefit from seeing their mothers behaving more independently and confidently, men can feel threatened” (Second Commission on the Status of Women, 1993, pp.86-87). The recommendation was implemented in 1994 and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs now funds both men’s and women’s groups. As Table 1.4 reveals, women’s groups received IR£1.17 million in 1996 compared to IR£0.15 million for men’s groups. This reflects the fact that there are eight times more women’s groups than men’s groups throughout the country since the average grant to each group is broadly similar at IR£1,400 each. In both categories, only two thirds of the groups were successful in their applications. From these developments, networks of men’s groups have been established in disadvantaged areas, with the South East Men’s Network having the first full-time co-ordinator. An evaluation of the men’s groups funded by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs was carried out in 1997 and was found to be “a limited success” (Cousins, 1997, p. 45)
Table 1.4  Funding for Men’s and Women’s Groups by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs in 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Women’s Groups</th>
<th>Men’s Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Applications from Groups</td>
<td>1,177</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Groups Funded</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Applications Funded</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Amount Received by Each Group</td>
<td>IR£1,476</td>
<td>IR£1,438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Amount Received by All Groups</td>
<td>IR£1,168,930</td>
<td>IR£148,135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 1997.

There is some debate on the purpose of men’s groups and the merits of men meeting separately from women in this manner (for a heated review of perspectives on men’s groups, see Kimmel, 1995). Our experience is that men can find support and togetherness in these groups - a space where they can be open and vulnerable without feeling threatened - and can explore issues of concern to their lives such as fathering, loving, working, health, grief and celebration. In many ways, these groups offer men an opportunity to critically reflect on their lives and to explore the broader issues affecting the roles which men and women play in society. We explore the importance of these issues at greater length in Chapter Seven.

In 1993, Parental Equality: The Shared Parenting and Joint Custody Support Group was formed in response to the problems experienced by fathers of obtaining shared custody of their children. In essence, the problem is that many fathers are not given equal parenting rights to their children, usually in the wake of separation / divorce or where the fathers is not married to the mother of his children; in some instances, fathers are given virtually no parenting rights at all. The legal context which gives rise to these problems is explored in Chapter Six below.
1.6 Becoming a Father

“I became a father for the first time in 1978 when I was 36. In my case it became a decisive event in my life, and that includes my professional life. By then, I had acquired considerable experience as a specialist in gynaecology and childbirth. ... . It struck me that in my encounters with all those couples, I had spontaneously turned to the women, since they were clearly the most ‘important’ persons. I had only occasionally focused directly on the men, and this also applied to emotional questions, fear, expectations and anxiety or happiness prior to birth and parenthood. And yet I am a man myself. Why wasn’t it natural for me to also be able to ‘see’ men on their own terms?

Eventually, I began to understand that there were several aspects to these difficulties and inner obstacles. As a man - despite my profession - I did not have the words or language for men’s feelings and experiences in connection with childbirth and fatherhood”.


It is hard to state precisely where the process of becoming a father begins: at the moment of the child’s conception? at the birth of the child? or when the baby is first planned? The vagueness of the father’s relationship to the child - and of his rights to the child while in the womb - mirrors the vagueness of the father’s role in general. It is only in relatively recent times that a father could be said to have a desire and a right to be at the birth of his child.

By comparison with the process of becoming a mother - which is clearly signalled in the woman’s pregnancy and the physical changes in her body over nine months before giving birth - the process of becoming a father normally has no outward signs for a man. “Women do have the biological edge with infants”, according to some psychologists (Colman and Colman, 1988, p.xvii). “They have wombs, they create the milk, they have a great abundance of attachment hormones rushing through their bodies after birth” (Ibid). A woman’s motherhood is never in doubt once she has given birth whereas a man’s fatherhood is always a matter of presumption. The psychological consequences of this are explained by one Jungian analyst as follows: “The male’s lack of any physical experience, beyond copulation, in the bearing and delivering of the child, leaves his psychic relationship at a primitive, almost magical level. Fatherhood seems to be more about the acceptance of paternity than the impregnation of the female. The father’s acceptance of paternity demonstrates the emergence of the generations within history” (Ryce-Menuhin, 1996, p. 74).
Until recently, men did not attend the birth of their children. Pregnancy therefore is the period when women prepare and - through ante-natal visits and classes as well as reading books and leaflets - are prepared for motherhood. Moreover, while men cannot get pregnant, it has been assumed, at least until recently, that men do not need to be involved in the ante-natal process of preparing for fatherhood. Even books on pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing tend to directed at women rather than men. Indeed, as one researcher has pointed out: “Structural disincentives for male involvement in pregnancy are legion. .... . Antenatal classes are given by women, are overwhelmingly directed at women and, to accommodate hospital and tutors’ schedules, are generally held during the day, with, at the most, one ‘father’s evening’ and one hospital tour scheduled. Antenatal appointments are also held in the daytime, and there is no awareness among professionals of any need to improve upon a casual invitation to fathers. .... . The average expectant father is killed off through lack of interest, his concern tolerated at best (and discouraged at worst) by health professionals completely out of touch with paternal experience” (Burgess, 1997, pp.112-113).

The process of becoming a father both before and after the child’s birth is heavily laced with signals to indicate that the primary parent is the mother and the secondary parent is the father; many mothers and fathers subscribe to, and reinforce, this division of labour. The father’s main role is seen to support the mother whose views on how to look after the child are treated as paramount. Even the existence of maternity but not paternity leave from work reinforces the social image of the mother as the primary carer of the child; it is recognised, of course, that maternity leave is also important to allow the mother time to recover physically from the birth of the child. In addition, official statistics on births contain information on the characteristics of the mother but nothing on the father (see, for example, Department of Health, 1993). These observations - which are not intended to undermine the role of the mother - simply indicate that the journey to parenthood is quite different for
mothers and fathers and the process does little or nothing to prepare fathers for involvement with the child.

If, as we believe, that fathers are equal parents of the child and should be encouraged to be more actively involved in child-rearing, then some of the existing conventions surrounding pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing need re-examination. For example, are ante-natal classes sufficiently inclusive of and sympathetic to men? Does the information provided through text, pictures, and videos portray a full and positive role for fathers? Is it appropriate that there is no paternity leave for fathers which would facilitate bonding with their new-born child just as there is maternity leave for mothers in recognition of the physical demands of childbearing and breast-feeding? Much of the research evidence suggests that, with better preparation for fatherhood and parenthood, the attachment between father and child - as well as between father and mother - can be greatly strengthened; in addition, fathers become more involved with the child after its birth (Jackson, 1984; Nickel and Kocher, 1987; Cowan, 1988; Brazelton and Cramer, 1991).

1.7 What is a Good Father

Every generation blames the one before
And all of their frustrations come knocking on your door.
I know that I’m a prisoner to all my father held so dear.
I know that I’m a hostage to all his hopes and fears.
I just wish I could have told him in the living years.

I wasn’t sure there that morning when my father passed away.
I didn’t get to tell him all the things I had to say.
I think I caught his spirit later that same year.
I’m sure I heard his echo in my baby’s new born tears.
I just wish I could have told him in the living years.

Mike and the Mechanics, 1988, The Living Years, WEA Records.

All fathers are not the same. As one commentator has pointed out, “fathers are not a uniform group of people. They range from the few men who produce sperm but have no contact with their offspring through to another small minority who take sole charge of their children. Within those extremes, men perform such a variety of
familial roles that an analysis of them as a group is not easy” (Lewis, 1993, p.89). The way in which men play the role of father varies according to a wide range of variables including their own personal experience of being men and of being fathered, their marital and residential status, the number and ages of their children, their social class and employment status, and the relative importance which they attribute - consciously or unconsciously - to work and to fathering and to seeing fathering as valuable work. Inevitably, in view of such complexity, there are many ways to be a good father just as there are many ways to be a good mother. Conversely, as one commentator has pointed out, “there is nothing intrinsically good about family values or about the father as one of the embodiments of these values. A good father is a good thing, a bad father is a bad thing” (French, 1995, p.5).

The task of defining the good father must also address the apparent paradox that every father - indeed every parent - is destined to face: the child will be disappointed by their limitations, no matter how good they are. As one writer has observed: “we are always disappointed by our fathers. If we don’t learn that lesson we never grow up - we never mature or become our ‘own persons’” (Wilmer, 1990, p.177). If such disappointment is inevitable, is there any point in trying to be a good father?

A powerful explanation of the paradox has been put forward by Meade: “If children were simply satisfied with what the parents offered to them, they would remain children forever. It’s not simply that parents don’t try to give enough to the child, rather it’s that whatever the parents give is never enough for the child. The child has a destiny outside the imagination of the parents. The child has an origin that is not simply made of the understanding of its parents. There is a mysterious occurrence when the child is born. It’s stunning to the son to realise that his own father doesn’t feel the delicate uncertainty with which he walks into life. The father and son are both shocked by the great longing they feel for each other and the way that they clash when they come close to each other. Between fathers and sons, a long distance
grows easily, silences spread from something small to something wide and seemingly unending. Something mysterious connects them and something awkward and painful drives them apart” (Meade, 1993, p.67).

It is worth teasing out this explanation in a little more detail by looking at the expectations which both father and son - and parents and children generally - bring to this relationship. For fathers, the appeal of the call to be a “good father” rests not with the rewards which it brings in terms of the child’s gratitude or approval but with the intrinsic rewards of engaging with life as the father of a child. In this engagement, the father enters the archetypal world of fatherhood, as Jung termed it, and connects - sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously - to the common if highly diverse stream of experiences which all fathers have experienced. At its core, the fatherhood experience is grounded in taking responsibility for the child which one has created. Its appeal comes from within the father not the child. Indeed it could be said that the appeal to be a good father is essentially a derivative of the call to be a “good man”.

Each man is called, by virtue of his existence, to be a good man in a way that is unique to each and to take the journey of discovering his purpose in life that this entails (McKeown, 1997). A good man, in this sense, will always be a good father. The reverse process - of presenting fathering as the raison d’être of a man’s existence - carries the danger that a father’s purpose in life becomes substituted for his child’s purpose in life. As Hillman has pointed out: “I have learned, through years of work with patients and in men’s retreats, and from listening to what cautions me, that when a child substitutes for your daimon you will resent that child, even grow to hate it, despite good will and high ethics. .... . When your child becomes the reason for your life, you have abandoned the invisible reason you are here. .... . Any father who has abandoned the small voice of his unique genius, turning it over to the small child he has fathered, cannot bear reminders of what he has neglected. .... . Result:

For the child, the experience of disappointment seems to have a fundamental significance. There is a tendency to see disappointment in negative terms as if it were a sign of failure for which parents were to blame. That is only part of the picture however. Disappointment is also a normal experience associated with the growth of wisdom and the loss of innocence. No one can grow as a person without experiencing disappointment and shedding expectations or behaviours which are no longer appropriate. To learn about life is to listen to the promptings of disappointment and to be tutored by them. Disappointment therefore has two faces. One face we call “imposed disappointment”, the other we call “invited disappointment”. In life, disappointments are not always easy to classify in this way but retrospection and analysis can help to place it in its true context.

Many children, especially sons, have spoken about the imposed disappointment which they have with their fathers (see, for example, Hyde, 1995; Wilmer, 1990). This disappointment arises from two extremes: from fathers who have been too remote, silent, disinterested, and absent on the one hand and from fathers who have been too controlling, dominating, violent and devouring on the other. These imposed disappointments are typically experienced as avoidable suffering which children have to live with as best they can. Their extent is difficult to quantify but writers on men’s issues who have been involved in leading retreats for men over many years suggest that many men have been deeply wounded by their fathers ((Bly, 1990; Keen, 1991; Meade, 1993; Hillman, 1996). The experience of imposed disappointment seems to be felt most acutely by that generation of sons who, having become fathers, wish to respond to a different, more caring and respectful type of fathering; to become “earth fathers” rather than “sky fathers” as some writers have called it (Coleman and Coleman, 1988). The issue of what constitutes a good father
therefore is about avoiding the imposed disappointments of previous forms of fathering.

Invited disappointments, by contrast, are those experiences, stemming from a deep desire within the psyche, which are “invited” precisely because of the wisdom they can bring. The story of Adam and Eve is particularly instructive in this regard. Eve ate the forbidden fruit - and therefore invited disappointment - because, in the words of the story, “it was enticing for the wisdom it could give”. Still drawing upon biblical sources, the story of the prodigal son is also about disappointment because it was only by leaving home - and therefore disappointing his father - that the son was able to learn the full extent of his father’s love; indeed the story suggests that the alternative to disappointment is staying at “home” and becoming the resentful son. In both stories, the “father” takes no responsibility for the disappointment which his children invited upon themselves and this is an important signal as to the limits of the father and of parents in general. Indeed many ancient societies, in recognition of the limitations of fathers, had a system where the son - often before the teenage years - was handed over to another man in the community to initiate and mentor the young boy into the wider society (see Bly, 1990, p.17). In modern society, initiating and mentoring takes place in more informal and haphazard ways by other men and women and this needs to be recognised if only to avoid the parental fallacy (Hillman, 1995) which inflates the influence of the nuclear family at the expense of other forces in the child’s life.

These considerations suggest that the issue of being a “good father” not just about effective parenting, although hopefully that will be an outcome; it is also about the transformation which follows when a man grows in awareness of what fatherhood entails. It is precisely because fatherhood is irreversible - and therefore a rite of passage - that no man can ignore the invitation which the birth of his child brings. Men become good fathers by recognising the invitation and by responding to the needs of their child as best they can.
In our endeavours to define what is a “good enough” father, we have come to the somewhat minimalist conclusion that the good enough father must: (i) be physically present on a reasonably regular basis to his child and (ii) have a positive and not a negative influence on his child. A reasonably regular basis, even for a separated father, according to one psychologist, “probably means at least once a week” (Andrews, 1994). Resident fathers will normally see their children once a day.

A positive rather than a negative influence is less easy to define but it involves protecting the child from harm through a bond of attachment between the parents and the child. Beyond that, as one psychiatrist at the Tavistock Clinic in London has pointed, “we need to be careful not to be too certain about what we think is right for children. ... the truth is that there are no rules about child care but there are some principles that we can be fairly confident are universal” (Kraemer, 1995, p.14). The most important of these principles, according to the same psychiatrist, is attachment which is taken to mean protection from physical and emotional harm: “A secure attachment is like an invisible elastic which can stretch and contract depending on the need for protection. So when you are ill or in pain, tired or afraid, you move towards the person with whom you feel secure and when all is well you can move away to explore the world around. Clearly this applies to all of us, but most of all to small children” (Ibid).

The importance of attachment and the associated flexibility which allows both closeness and distance has been emphasised by other commentators: “A father who is too close or too remote will not be good enough. ... In contrast, the good father is able to successfully maintain the golden mean. Such a father is close but not too close, strong but not overwhelming, loving but not seductive, supportive but able to discipline, caring but encouraging autonomy” (Abramovitch, 1997, p.31).
The practical application of these principles has been used to inform a Government-backed publicity campaign in Southern Australia called “Six Ways to be a Better Dad!” The six ways are summarised in Table 1.5.

### Table 1.5  Six Ways to be a Better Dad

| 1. BEING A ROLE MODEL | As a dad, you are a role model whether you realise it or not. *How you act teaches your kids how to act when they grow up.* For example, if you talk problems through, your kids will probably grow up to do the same. If you lose your temper, get abusive or become violent, your kids will probably grow up to do the same.  
- Kids learn mainly from what you do, not what you say.  
- Treat your daughter with love and respect so she grows up expecting to be treated the same by boys and men.  
- Teach your son that a man is caring, fair, a mate to his kids and treats women with respect. |
|---|---|
| 2. SHOW THEM YOU CARE | Getting involved in your kids’ lives is a terrific way to show your kids you care.  
- Do things that they want you to do.  
- Give them a hug and tell them they’re great.  
- Help out with their homework.  
- Play footy or basketball.  
- Go to a school function, go to parent / teacher interviews, watch them play sport.  
- Learn their friends and teachers names. |
| 3. WORK AND FAMILY | Let’s face it, work can be tiring, stressful, and create worries. No doubt these worries are for real, but it isn’t fair or useful to pass them on to your kids.  
- Put aside some time just for you to recharge your batteries.  
- Look after your health through diet and exercise.  
- Try and leave your work hassles at work. |
| 4. WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR KID’S BEHAVIOUR IS NOT O.K. |  
- As hard as it is, try and *stay calm!*  
- When you feel stressed and feel that you might lash out - walk away.  
- Leave the room and do something to distract yourself.  
- Don’t act in anger or you will probably regret what you do.  
Kids need to learn right from wrong. Set rules and stick to them. Be clear about what will happen when the rules are broken. This could include not letting your kids watch their favourite TV program. If they break the rules, do what you said would happen. |
5. PARENTING AND PARTNERSHIPS
Being a parent is a partnership - whether you and your children’s mother are together or not.

- Respect your kid’s mother.
- Don’t argue in front of the kids.
- Do something about relationship problems.
- Get professional advice if you can’t sort out problems together.

Kids can’t cope with their parents putting each other down.

6. SPEND TIME WITH YOUR KIDS
The time you spend with your kids is a good investment in their future. Show your love by getting involved with their sports or hobbies or involving them in your interests. Kids grow up so quickly, so don’t miss out!

- Share a regular meal.
- Talk to your kids.
- Listen to their views without criticising.
- Praise their efforts.
- Encourage them and help them make decisions.

Source: The Office for Families and Children, Southern Australia.

1.8 Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

The analysis in this chapter revealed that the concept of father, in its most basic form, involves a relationship with a child that is both biological and psycho-social. Fatherhood, like motherhood, is a social construct which, in Western society, has traditionally been built around marriage. Traditionally, this social contract has involved a division of labour between fathers and mothers such that fathers worked as the bread-winner outside the home while mothers worked as carers inside the home. This arrangement, whose ideal is embodied in the Irish Constitution, gave fathers control over the family’s subsistence resources while distancing them physically and emotionally from their children. In this way, men expressed their masculinity and their love for wife and children by going out to work and providing. In this value system, “good fathers” were essentially "good providers" and they were esteemed accordingly; their role was more about “investment” than “involvement".
This traditional model of fatherhood - and the related model of motherhood - is still popular but is declining as new family forms are emerging. In 1996, only half of all families in Ireland fitted the traditional model of having two parents with one earner, typically the father. Two earner families constituted 30% of all families while no earner families comprised 20% of the total. These changes crystallise a number of other trends in society, including:

(1) the growth in the number of women, especially married women, working outside the home. In the 25 years between 1971 and 1996, the proportion of women in the Irish labour force more than doubled from 14% in 1971 to 39% in 1996. This development helped to break the mould which sustained the gendered division of labour in the work place and thereby reduced - perhaps more symbolically than practically - the role of the father as the sole breadwinner by showing that women could be both breadwinners and carer givers.

(2) the breadwinning role of many men is severely threatened by the persistence of high levels of unemployment in Ireland, particularly since the 1980s. For example, older established fathers have seen their breadwinning role wiped out through long-term unemployment while some younger men in very disadvantaged circumstances fail to make the transition to involved fatherhood.

(3) there has been a steady growth in the number of one parent families which now constitute more than a tenth of all families. This is due to both marital breakdown and births outside marriage and the role of the welfare state in financially supporting these “fatherless” families. Moreover, since most one parent families (87%) are headed by a mother this is sometimes taken to prove - both symbolically and practically - that families can exist without fathers.

(4) there is a shift in attitudes about what constitutes a “good father”. The shift involves a growing expectation, possibly associated with the rising status of children, that fathers should combine “involvement” with their children along with their more traditional “investment” role. In this sense, modern fathers are expected to give more than traditional fathers and it is becoming less easy for fathers to be exclusively preoccupied with investment at the expense of involvement. Ironically,
the father’s investment role may be esteemed by the mother but not the children and its effect, however unintentional, may be to strengthen the mother’s relationship with the children while weakening the father’s relationship with the children.

Many fathers are experiencing the stress of having to combine both investment with involvement roles and, being unable to rely on the role model of their own father, are having to learn new ways of being a father. At the same time, there appears to be a growing receptivity to the idea that the breadwinner role should not be the sole defining characteristic of a man’s worth as a man and a father. The emergence of men’s groups and men’s gatherings in Ireland in recent years is evidence that some men are responding to the changed circumstances in which men find themselves. For example, the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs offered funding to over 100 men’s groups in 1996. Our experience is that these groups offer men an opportunity to critically reflect on their lives and to explore the broader issues affecting the roles which men and women play in society.

Our analysis of the process by which men become fathers - both before and after the child’s birth - suggests that it is heavily laced with signals to indicate that the primary parent is the mother and the secondary parent is the father. Many mothers and fathers subscribe to, and reinforce, this division of labour. If, as we believe, that fathers are equal parents of the child and should be encouraged to be more actively involved in child-rearing, then some of the existing conventions surrounding pregnancy, childbirth and child rearing need re-examination. For example, are antenatal classes sufficiently inclusive of and sympathetic to men? Does the information provided through text, pictures, videos, et cetera, portray a full and positive role for fathers? How can men see themselves as equal parents if Irish society grants maternity leave to mothers but not paternity leave for fathers? Much of the research evidence suggests that, with better preparation for fatherhood through counselling, education and encouragement, the attachment between father and child - as well as
between father and mother - can be greatly strengthened; in addition, fathers become more involved with the child after its birth.

The way in which men play the role of father varies according to a wide range of variables including their own personal experience of being men and of being fathered, their marital and residential status, the number and ages of their children, their social class and employment status, and the relative importance which they attribute - consciously or unconsciously - to the investment and involvement aspects of fathering, et cetera. Inevitably, in view of such complexity, there are many ways to be a good father just as there are many ways to be a good mother.

In trying to define what constitutes a good father we first wish to state that being a good father is essentially a derivative of being a good man. A good man, as we understand it, endeavours to be true to his own purpose in life, with all that that entails. A good man, in this sense, will always be a good father. The reverse process - of presenting fathering as the raison d’etre of a man’s existence - carries the danger that a father’s purpose in life becomes substituted for his child’s purpose with all the resentment and frustration that this is likely to cause.

In our endeavours to define what is a “good father” or a “good enough father”, we have come to the somewhat minimalist conclusion that the good enough father must: (i) be physically present on a reasonably regular basis to his child and (ii) have a positive rather than a negative influence on his child. We do not wish to be too certain or too prescriptive about what constitutes good enough fathering because doctrinaire approaches can be dangerous and do more harm than good. However, in the course of our reading, we came across some very practical guidelines on how to become a good father which could be useful such as the six ways to be a good father that is being used by the government in Southern Australia to develop awareness of good fathering. This could be adapted to Irish circumstances as an aid to promoting discussion and debate about what constitutes a “good father”.

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We make four recommendations on foot of this analysis. First, we recommend that the ideal of “good fathering” and “good enough fathering” become matters of public and private debate and discussion. The objective of such debates should be (1) to help elevate the status and importance of fatherhood in society (2) to give men, women and children an opportunity to talk about their ideals of fatherhood (3) to allow fathers - and potential fathers - an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of fathering and the issues which arise for fathers in trying to meet the competing demands of work and family, of being a carer as well as a breadwinner. We see this objective being pursued in four ways: (1) through education, both second level and second-chance, in the form of fathering and relationship courses; appropriate resource materials would need to be prepared to service these courses (2) through the media, both electronic and print, where informed and constructive comment meets with the recorded experiences of fathering by men, women and children in different situations (3) through research on fathering ideals and practices in differing settings, taking into account differences in family types, stage in the family cycle, social class, employment, marital status, geographical location, et cetera.

The second recommendation is that support for men’s groups by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs should continue and be expanded. We see men’s groups as an important fora in which men and fathers can meet to discuss their experiences. It is our experience that men will only engage in discussion about their role as men and fathers if their vulnerabilities are respected and if they are given a safe space to have their voices heard without being automatically criticised for not being good enough. We agree with the existing concentration of support for men’s groups in disadvantaged areas. It should also include financial support for groups of men who are endeavoung to address specific issues such as parenting alone or separation from their children.
Third, we recommend that the process leading up to, and following, the birth of a child should be more inclusive of fathers. In order to achieve this objective, we recommend that an examination be carried out of the conventions and practices which take place before, during and after childbirth to identify areas where fathers could be more involved in the preparation for fatherhood. We recommend, subject to the outcome of detailed examination, that these conventions and practices should be modified where they do not promote the objective of joint parenting. This examination should be wide ranging and should include pregnancy, ante-natal classes, childbirth, child rearing, home visitation as well as information and publicity materials about these topics in the form of text, pictures, videos, et cetera.

Fourth, we recognise that young men and young fathers who are unemployed or otherwise disadvantaged have special needs which require urgent attention. We recommend that services be developed to help them overcome the obstacles which currently hinder their transition to adulthood and fatherhood. This will require increased investment in a range of services for disadvantaged adolescents and young people covering education, training, personal development, and parenting education. These services need to be delivered with skill and sensitivity in each local area so that young men can value the importance of being a role model in their child’s life.
Chapter Two

The Symbolic Father: A Psychoanalytic Perspective

Dermot Rooney

"In the majority of neuroses of our time we can designate the principal determinant in the personality of the father who is always lacking in some way or another, absent or humiliated, divided or sham." Jacques Lacan.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is a brief introduction to a psychoanalytic understanding of the role of the father in child development. We begin by highlighting how eclipsed the father-child relationship has been by the mother-child relationship in the social sciences, including psychoanalysis. Today many psychoanalysts are, once again, emphasising the destructive effects of ignoring the function of the father in the child's psychological and emotional development. The decline of the paternal image and the marginalisation of the father are cited sometimes cited as one of the possible bases for the huge increase in neurosis and pathologies in individuals, families and society (section 2.2). Some of these illnesses can be traced back to the relationship and separation process between mother and child, and the role of the father in this transition. By returning to earlier psychoanalytic writings we discover a very useful model for displaying the crucial role of the father in this necessary separation of the child from the mother (section 2.3). We document this model in detail, stressing the importance of the mother-child-father dynamic. This in turn displays the complex psychological drama that the child undergoes in order to individuate and separate from the mother, and the role of the father in this process (section 2.4). We recognise some of the key problems with this model and reframe it in light of the work that has subsequently been done in this area. Once again the father, albeit the symbolic father, is shown to be the key figure in the crucial separation process between the
mother and the child (section 2.5). It is this process that allows the child to take up his/her own unique position in the socio-symbolic culture, which as we argue the symbolic father represents. We conclude with a critique and a discussion of this material (section 2.6).

2.2 Psychoanalysis Today - The Absent Father

Contemporary psychoanalysis, like the majority of the human sciences, has primarily emphasised the importance of the mother-child relationship for the healthy development of the child. This has largely been to the virtual exclusion of any discussion or debate on the father-child relationship (Frosh, 1994). We are going to display how detrimental it is to ignore the father-child relationship. This is not to undervalue the importance of the research and findings regarding the mother-child relationship. John Bowlby's writings on 'Attachment Theory', have popularised, and effectively revolutionised, our understanding of the mother's relationship with the infant (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). The 'holding environment' that the mother provides for the helpless and dependent infant is crucial in allowing the infant to develop a bonding process, which in turn is the foundation of his/her future ability to trust and to relate (Winnicott, 1964; Bowlby, Ibid). These clinicians rightly argue that this early bonding process with the mother is of great significance to the child's psycho-social and emotional development, as it is at this stage that the child internalises a working model of safety, security, and trust - the bedrock of selfhood and independence. The model of the 'mother-child relationship' is the paradigm that dominates contemporary social science, child psychology and psychoanalysis.

While we fully agree with the crucial importance of the mother-child relationship, it is significant that the father is almost completely absent in this description of child development. The most obvious question and the one underlying this chapter is: how are fathers necessary for the emotional and psychological development of
children? Some writers seriously question whether fathers are necessary at all for the psychological development of the child (Belsey and Moore, 1989). At the same time as these questions are emerging, so too is a much greater awareness of the contemporary breakdown of family and community life, the growth of dependency (in children and adults) and neurosis, and the massive increases in all sorts of therapies and promises of cures. No doubt there are many possible explanations for these phenomena, but a number of social theorists are claiming that there is a connection between these massive problems and the definite decline of the paternal role and image (Lacan, 1977; Hillman, 1994; Frosh, 1994). It is important to observe that these theorists are not solely concerned with the contemporary debate on the mother-child relationship, but are also captivated by what was once a primary question for psychoanalysis - what is the role or function of the father in the psychosexual and emotional development of the child (Frosh, 1994).

In the five major case histories published by Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, all of the patients presented with illnesses that had their origins in how the patient perceived the role or position of the father in their lives. Jacques Lacan, the eminent French psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, states categorically that the present day failure of the father in his symbolic role in the family, is central to the increase in individual psychopathology (violence, addiction and neurotic behaviour), and the problems facing family life, particularly the personal identity of the child. Lacan goes so far as to suggest that it is this very failure that is perpetuating across generations a fundamental breakdown in meaning, which is having a destructive effect on individuals, families, communities and in turn on societies and cultures (Ecrits, 1977). In an Irish context, a considerable number of psychologists, sociologists and social researchers are expressing a similar viewpoint. Some examples of this can be found in the writings and teachings of Dr. Cormac Gallagher, the Director of the School of Psychotherapy, St Vincent's Hospital, and Dr. Paul Andrews SJ, author and founder of St. Declans School, both highly respected clinicians (Gallagher, 1986; 1995; Andrews, 1994; 1997).
Today many different disciplines (feminism, psychology, sociology, psychotherapy, theology et cetera), are turning to psychoanalysis and to re-reading Freud. All these schools of thought are particularly concerned with the contemporary issue of personal/sexual identity, how a child becomes a desiring man or woman and what it is that they desire. Psychoanalysis as we shall see, postulates that the formation of desire, of a person's fundamental identity, is primarily to do with the role and position of the father.

2.3 Psychoanalysis and Mythology - The Paternal Mystery

"Every new arrival on this planet is faced with the task of mastering the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls victim to neuroses."

Sigmund Freud.

In order to understand the position of the father from a psychoanalytic viewpoint it is necessary to quickly grasp some of the basic tenets of psychoanalysis. Freud revolutionised human psychology when he unearthed and named the two key tenets of psychoanalysis - the unconscious and the Oedipus complex.

Psychoanalytic ideas (like slips of the tongue, wishes in dreams, fantasies, sexual identity, father/mother complex et cetera) are now used readily by lay-people as well as psychologists. So too is the idea of the unconscious. Freud emphasised the notion of the 'unconscious' in order to display that there exists mental activity of which the person is unaware but nonetheless exerts a profound effect on his/her behaviour. The word 'unconscious' can be used metaphorically: an entity influencing a person unbeknownst to that person. Thus in psychoanalytic practice, and most psychotherapies, there is a particular emphasis upon the phenomena of the unconscious and in bringing out the unconscious meanings of the words, stories, actions, repetitions, and the products of the imagination of an individual person. As we shall see, in making the unconscious 'conscious', one picture that invariably emerges for a person is their family drama. This involves uncovering where your are
situated in relationship to your father and mother, and the influences that this has on your present relationships, including the one that you have with yourself.

One of the most valuable ways of working with the unconscious is through mythology. Mythology is the tool that Freud, a physician and scientist, was to place on the centre stage of his inquiry into the human 'psyche' (psyche is from the Greek meaning Soul). Myth, quite simply, is a way of telling a story that has a universal appeal. There is something in it that transcends race and culture and touches into what is essentially human in each of us (Deane, 1994). Myths are about life, the gods, morality, relationships, men, women, fathers, mothers and children. The famous mythologist Joseph Campbell contends that myths contain truths, truths that are disguised but express the unconscious desires, fears and tensions that underlie the conscious pattern of human behaviour. It is thus of great significance that the role of the father in psychoanalysis is typically understood through a Greek myth, as told by Sophocles in his play 'Oedipus Rex'.

The following is a brief summary of the myth based on Robert Graves' translation: "Laius, the King and ruler of Thebes, was married to Jocasta but they were childless. Laius, no doubt stung by the fact that this publicly called into question his virility, went to consult the Delphi oracle as to the cause. There he was told that this was a blessing as any son of his would murder him and marry his wife. In fear of being deposed Laius refuses to have a sexual relationship with Jocasta. Jocasta is angry with this situation, claiming that 'she would fly in the face of the gods to conceive'. Thus she connives to get her husband drunk and then manages to seduce him and conceives. She bears a son but Laius is terrified of the power of the prophecy and takes the baby and abandons him on the side of Mount Cithaeron. Before abandoning the baby Laius pierces his feet with a spike so that when he is found by a passing shepherd he is named Oedipus ('swollen feet'). The shepherd brings the child to the King and Queen of Corinth and as they are childless they see him as a blessing from the gods and raise him as their own. One day a close companion told Oedipus in a teasing way that he was not really King Polybus's son. This strikes a deep chord in Oedipus and not knowing what to believe, he becomes determined to consult the Delphi oracle in order to learn the truth. After completing his mission he is stunned when he discovers that he is destined to murder his father and marry his mother, and warned not to go to the land where he was born.

Oedipus decides to set out for Thebes, the opposite direction to Corinth. En route to Thebes he meets a chariot whose passenger unceremoniously forces him off the road. Oedipus retaliates to this indignity, and in violently attempting to stop the chariot, overturns it killing all. The passenger unbeknownst to Oedipus, is Laius, his father.

On arrival in Thebes, he finds the city terrorised by the sphinx, a lioness with a woman's head who kills everyone who fails to answer her riddle. Oedipus succeeds where those before him had failed and solves the riddle of the Sphinx. The Sphinx, in anger and hatred, kills herself. The inhabitants of Thebes are
metaphor for psychoanalysis, and the central tool to analyse the human psyche. This famous myth places both father and mother as key players, each holding positions and having desires, in the psychological and emotional drama of child development.

What the 'Oedipus Rex' myth promoted for Freud, and many others after him, is the crucial significance of the triangular relationship that every infant finds themselves in: father - child - mother. It was through Freud's self-analysis, significantly at the time of his father's death, and listening to his patients, that led him to the myth of Oedipus Rex and the momentous discovery of what he came to call the 'Oedipus complex'. In a letter to a very close friend he writes “I have found, in my own case too, falling in love with the mother and jealously of the father, and I now regard it as a universal event of early childhood....If that is so we can understand the riveting power of Oedipus Rex.....the Greek myth seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognises because he feels its existence within himself” (Laplanche and Pontalis, p. 283). In this one statement Freud changed the way many people, particularly psychoanalysts, understand childhood development and the role that both parents play in this development (Wolheim, 1971). Freud realised that the child is born into a pre-existing structure, namely a symbolic and historical culture with mores and laws which directly effect the child. The Oedipus myth is a wonderful example of this cultural inheritance. The child is also born into a very complex relationship (of hopes, fears, love and hate) where the child holds many different meanings for the mother and the father. The child also brings an added complexity to this

overjoyed at being at last free of the power of the Sphinx and welcome Oedipus as their new King. He marries the recently widowed Queen Jocasta, who is his mother.

The play Oedipus Rex opens with the city of Thebes ravaged by plague and King Oedipus sending his wife's brother Creon to the oracle to ascertain the cause of such devastation. Creon returns with the frightening news that the plague is the revenge of the gods on Thebes for harbouring King Laius' murderer. Oedipus sets up a public investigation and passionately seeks the truth. Even when the evidence is mounting and slowly the full story is becoming clearer, Oedipus insists that the truth be revealed. Despite pleas from Jocasta, lies from the shepherd and the wise advice of the seer, Oedipus continues to put the pieces into place. Finally Oedipus tragically discovers who he is but also what he has done, murdered his father and married his mother.
relationship; not only does the child take on a particular significance for both parents, but the father and the mother (be they absent or present, dead or alive) take on a very complex significance for the child. This rite of passage into the world, which every child must go through, is founded on the structure of mother-child-father. This is what Freud set out to explore and in doing so offered the first mapping of the Oedipus complex.

**Psychological Puberty - The Child's First Love Affair**

The Oedipus complex can be seen as referring to a group of largely unconscious ideas and feelings expressing both the loving and hostile wishes which the child experiences towards each of its parents. Freud discovered, through his own analysis and in listening to patients, that the child has a psychological puberty (a love and hate relationship, albeit unconscious) long before teenage physical puberty. Freud, and many others after him, saw the evidence of childhood sexuality in infant and child observation, and in the dreams and fantasies of adults. Freud also comments on the way men and women play and act out their child-like relationships with their mother and father, in their relationship with their present partner. Freud saw this psychological puberty as the interplay of emotions and desires that takes place for the child as s/he moves from loving and desiring one parent to a situation of rivalry and wanting rid of the other parent. Freud writes "in the very earliest years of childhood, approximately between the ages of two and five, a coming together of the sexual impulses occurs of which, in the case of boys, the object (a psychoanalytic term) is the mother. This choice of object, in conjunction with a corresponding attitude of rivalry and hostility towards the father provides the content of what is known as the Oedipus complex which in every human being is of the greatest importance in determining the final shape of his erotic life" (Freud, S.E. 18, 1923, p.

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Queen Jocasta hangs herself unable to live with the truth that she is mother, lover and wife to her son Oedipus, in a moment of moving passion and despair in the play, blinds himself and begs for exile.
Thus the child is both a desired and a desiring human being from a very early stage of life and despite the fact that this is happening unconsciously (although any parent will tell you about the tell-tale signs of these first 'love-affairs' with either parent) it has as we shall see profound importance on the child's personality development. One can already see the importance of the father emerging, in the interplay of the triangular relationship: mother-child-father.

2.4 Mother - Child - Father

"She never cared for fashion's style,  
Nor jewels and treasures  
She found them in her baby's eyes...."  
From the song: My Yiddish Mama.

Freud first described the Oedipus complex in 1897. Despite the fact that it was such a radical concept, Freud was naturally influenced in his findings and theories by the pervading ethos and social structures of the time which were both very patriarchal and conservative. Freud has been criticised at length particularly for his understanding of female development. Nonetheless, it is generally acknowledged, that not only did he open the gate to further questioning and debate on the whole area of gender development, but he also raised questions which continue to challenge and resonate today. Thus, it is important to try and suspend judgement while reading Freud's understanding of the Oedipus complex, keeping in mind that it is a description of largely unconscious processes, and that it was written nearly a

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2 This is what has become known as the positive or simple form of the Oedipus complex. Freud, no doubt prompted by this early clinical work, and his other case histories, soon became more aware of the manifold incestuous desires of the child and later postulated “that in the little boy the Oedipus complex has a double orientation, active and passive, in accordance with their bisexual constitution; a boy also wants to take his mother’s place as the love-object of his father” (Freud, PFL 7, 1925, p333) (see also 1924, p318). In displaying this ‘feminine attitude’ to his father there appears a corresponding jealousy and hostility towards his mother. This process radically shifted the concept of identification and became known as the negative form of the Oedipus complex. The description of the complex in its complete form allows Freud “to elucidate ambivalence towards the father, in the case of the boy child, in terms of the play of heterosexual and homosexual components, instead of making it simply the result of a situation of rivalry” (Laplanche and Pontalis; Freud, S.E.19, p31). This allows for the
hundred years ago. It is important to understand the original Oedipus complex (Freud's version) so as to grasp the way it has been used by later theorists. It is a central argument to show how the Oedipus complex offers a different understanding of the position and function of the mother and particularly the father in the development of the child.

The mother-child relationship is described by Freud, as the 'first relationship' and the prototype of all other relationships that the child will have. Nonetheless, he noted very early in his clinical work the importance of the child's need to separate from the mother. He emphasised how the child's independence and the development of his/her unique personality depends on this process. Freud discovered in his clinical work that failure to separate, or where this process becomes frustrated, can lead to serious personality and emotional problems later in life. Hence the key questions that emerged for Freud, and which he spent the next forty years trying to answer were: how, when and why does the child detach itself from the mother? what is the role of the father in this process? and in what ways is this process different for boys and girls?

In his clinical work Freud found that the Oedipus complex was a very different experience for boys and girls. The little boy, in order to enter the social world, must give up his unconscious desire and attachment to the mother. The boy does this as he realises that his father stands in that place. The boy, in his child-like imagination, sees the father as being much bigger and stronger. The father represents something different, that is at once frightening and exciting. In other words he sees the father as prohibiting his desire for the mother. Freud controversially called this prohibition the 'castration complex'. Put simply, the boy develops an unconscious narcissistic interest in his penis and feels that this may be taken away from him by the father as a punishment for his desires for the mother. This fantasy is confirmed for him by the many different sexual identities that a person can develop. It also de-pathologises homosexuality and allows this to be a normal, if different, consequence to the Oedipal drama.
fact that there are those without a penis, namely little girls. Thus the best course of action for the little boy is to repress his frustrated desire for the mother and his hostile wishes for the father. The boy then replaces these unsociable desires by an identification with the father, so that one day he too will be able to attract someone like his mother. This leads to the creation of the super-ego, similar to conscience, and initiates the processes that are designed to make the boy find his place, in the cultural community. Thus, the father’s role and position are crucial in this process of initiation into the social world, the world of inter-dependence rather than complete dependence.

Freud had much greater difficulty when it came to describing the Oedipus complex of the little girl. In fact Freud was never clear in his writings regarding female sexuality and he ultimately referred to this as 'the dark continent' from which he could gather little information. Nonetheless he attempted to document his clinical practice with women. For Freud the little girl has a much 'stranger' rite of passage than the little boy. While the boy must give up the first object of his desire - the mother - it is, generally speaking, for another woman, whereas the girl must manage the same renunciation for the sake of the opposite sex (Freud, 1931). The girl then, has to change her love/sexual object - from the woman (mother) to the man (father). How does this complex process take place?

We saw that for the boy the castration complex leads to the end or repression of the Oedipus complex (the love and hostile wishes the child harbours for the parents). By contrast the castration complex begins the Oedipus complex for the girl. Freud claimed that the castration complex for the girl child includes an unconscious feeling of deprivation in relation to the boy and a wish to possess a penis as he does. He saw this simply as an anatomical (bodily) difference between the sexes and one that leads the girl child into a series of new relationships with both the mother and the father. The girl sees the mother as wanting or loving something outside of herself; the father. The little girl may feel a resentment towards the mother who failed to
provide her with a penis. Thus the mother depreciates in the child's eyes and the incestuous tie to the mother may be loosened. In setting out to redress the balance the girl looks to her father and "her desire slips into a new position along the line of the symbolic equation 'penis-child'" (Freud, PFL 7, 1925, p. 40). Having a baby takes on the symbolic significance of having a penis. For the purpose of getting a child she now takes her father as love object and the mother becomes the object of jealously. The mother also becomes the object with which the girl identifies, so that she too may one day get a man like her father. 3 Again one observes the importance of the role of the father in allowing the separation process for the child from the mother to begin.

This was the first documenting of the Oedipus Complex, and numerous viewpoints have subsequently emerged. The reason we documented Freud's thesis is because it is the only systematic study of child development to date, that includes a detailed description of the role and place of the father in this complex process. Early feminist schools constantly debated Freud's understanding of child development, seeing it as patriarchal, 'penis-centred' and in some cases misogynistic. Other theorists tried to re-write Freud's thesis, placing the emphasis on various aspects of his work. But regardless of what stance people took, they keep finding themselves back reading and arguing with Freud; this interestingly includes contemporary feminism. This return to Freud was largely prompted by Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) who offers a very interesting and contemporary reading of Freud's Oedipal narrative - one that again places both father and mother at the forefront of family and individual development.

3 Freud emphasised the precariousness of the girl's Oedipal complex, and wrote that the girl never totally abandons her attachment to the mother (or woman) as love object, nor does she abandon her hostility towards her. At the same time the attachment to the father is equally problematic: "girls remain in the Oedipus complex for an indeterminate length of time; they demolish it late and even so, incompletely" (Freud, PFL 7, 1925, p340)
2.5 The Symbolic Father

“Do not swallow yourself up Mother,
Do not swallow me down in that which flows
from you to me.
I'd like it so much if we could be there,
Both of us,
So that one does not disappear into the other,
Or the other into the one”.
Luce Irigaray.

Freud had tried to understand femininity and masculinity by anatomical (bodily) differences. He claimed that the lack of a penis is what unconsciously separates the girl from the mother as she turns to the father so as to receive a baby from him or a representative of him. He saw the boy as repressing his attachment and desire for the mother due to the father's presence and the boy’s own attachment to his penis. Despite the obvious biological and cultural reductionism in these claims, one can see that for Freud sexuality and personal identity are founded in difference; this means separation from the mother and an identification with or movement towards the father. Nonetheless Freud's account of how this process occurs, particularly his viewpoint that women 'lack' a penis, has rightly been criticised. Lacan puts a very different slant on Freud's rather archaic model. For Lacan all human beings are 'lacking' - each of us is in a continual state of need and want. Nothing ever fully satisfies, and we passionately hold onto anything that satisfies for any length of time, but eventually this too is not enough. Lacan calls this constant state of need and want, characterised in our need to know, to advance, to believe and to addict, the human search for the 'phallus'. The phallus is not the penis, it is a signifier, a bearer of meaning, around which the child's identity is constituted. It ultimately represents desire and loss, separation and difference (or otherness). The child's entry to the symbolic order of language and culture is dependent on an awareness of this mystery. Lacan deliberately choose an image that conjures up strength, mystery and maleness. The present structure that underlies the family configuration places the father in a key position, as the one who initiates the child into the world of
difference, of otherness - represented by the phallus. But at the outset it is important to emphasise the phallus is something that every human being lacks.

Despite the obvious crudeness of some of Freud's writings, Lacan highlights the significance which Freud gave to all three parties in the family - father, mother, and child. For Lacan the child/infant is born in a premature and uncoordinated state and finds itself totally dependent on its given environment for survival. This has profound consequences for the infant and leaves the infant trying to adapt and conform to its surroundings in a way that will maximise survival. Now as we know the primary relationship at this time is the mother-child dyad (or two-some). Lacan calls this very important and necessary stage the 'Imaginary order', in which the infant sees or imagines itself as the focus of the mother's desire, and sees her as the all-enveloping object of his/her desire. "Lacan sees as the gateway to this world those moments in the first eighteen months of life when the child comes to delight in his own image as reflected in the mirror and in the loving gaze of those who care for him, especially the mother. A failure to enter this world of the captivating image would leave the child sunk in the miseries of motor incoordination characteristic of the infant in the early weeks and months after birth....as a 'fragmented body' vulnerable to dislocation and death" (Gallagher, 1986, p134). In order to maximise survival at this early stage, the infant/child unconsciously tries to imagine and identify himself with what he thinks the mother desires, so that the infant can become that object of desire, thus guaranteeing immediate survival and complete dependence. It is important to remember that the child also has unconscious desires for the mother herself (the Oedipus complex). So the child tries to become everything for the mother and sees the mother as having everything it needs.

For her part, the mother tries to provide the complex and necessary caring, feeding and satisfaction of the infant's needs. At the same time, because she was a child herself, there also remains within her the desire for something other than satisfying the infant's needs. All human beings are lacking and are constantly trying to fill
this lack. Unconsciously the mother may come to see the child as potentially filling this lack for her, and hence the child can take on a meaning for the mother which has nothing to do with the child itself. So the mother can get trapped into unconsciously trying to fulfil her 'lack', which echoes the painful separation from her own mother and the oftentimes frustrated relationship with her father (her Oedipus complex), and indeed the simple loneliness of being alive. This is what Lacan calls the human search and longing for 'the phallus' - “the mother lacks the phallus, and desires in the infant something other than himself - the phallus she lacks, the basis of the relationship with her parents, and of her own Oedipus complex.” (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 1986, p132). The infant and mother are thus caught in this imaginary relationship: the infant unconsciously trying to become everything for the mother while having desires for the mother herself, and the mother unconsciously seeing the infant as an extension of herself and something that will fulfil her desire. For many psychoanalysts this dual relationship does not provide the child with an appropriate structure, or healthy environment for the development of personality; rather "it opens up a number of potentially alienating and crippling identifications (mother - child - mother) situating the child in a line of fiction subjected to the mother's desire" (Ibid, p132). The child can become lost in its mother's (eyes) desire and risks constantly trying to be what she wants, hence negating its own personality. This obviously has major consequences for the child later in life, for example identity crises, separation issues, dependence, co-dependency and much more. In fact, for Lacan, complete failure to move beyond this imaginary identification, means to remain in a potentially psychotic state, and partial failure leaves the child more prone to a neurotic state of existence.4 In other words, unless this 'imaginary' relationship between mother and child is somewhat punctuated and a process of symbolic separation begins, the child will not be able to adequately develop his/her personality. This, as we shall see, is where the father becomes crucially important as the symbolic figure who ignites this separation process for both mother and child.

4 Psychosis is where there is a complete loss of connection with what we call reality, for example, hallucinations. Neuroses are psychological illnesses like obsessions, paranoia, phobias and
The unconscious desire of the mother has received little or no commentary outside of mythology, until very recently. "In one of his most illuminating case histories, 'Little Hans', Freud has shown how the desire of the mother for the child, which in its origin draws the child away from his early misery into a sense of life and joy, can, when excessive, become deathbearing and prevent the child from moving beyond this phase of imaginary captivation into the symbolic ordering of human affairs within which s/he must eventually find his/her place. So great was the need of the mother of Little Hans for the child that she imposed onto the fantasies of her son none of the limits normally set by a mother. She not only had him in her bed all the time - against the remonstrances of a physically present but totally ineffectual father - but also encouraged him as a spectator to all her most intimate physical activities, dressing and undressing, using the toilet and so on. So that without any of the traumas that are supposed to be necessary for the production of a neurosis, little Hans found himself at the age of five in the grip of an overwhelming set of phobias and anxieties that, without intervention, might well have perverted the whole subsequent course of his existence." (Gallagher, 1986, pp. 134-135). An Irish version of the Oedipus myth can be found in Frank O'Connor's 'My Oedipus Complex'. Gallagher offers a very interesting reading of this, highlighting the fact that the father must at some level intervene in the mother-child relationship "to allow the child a new access to his own originality, creativity and truth" (Ibid, p. 135).

Lacan building on Freud's insights, including the 'Little Hans' case history, saw the need for symbolic separation between mother and child as being paramount to the psychological survival and development of the child. In order to escape the all-powerful, imaginary relationship that the child and mother find themselves in, it is essential to have acquired what Lacan calls Le Nom or Le Non-du-Pere, The Name or No-of-the-Father. This is crucial if the child is to separate from the mother. This exists beyond the Imaginary order of the mother-child relationship, and it is what

addictions.
Lacan calls the 'Symbolic Order'. The father represents the Symbolic order, which is the order of Culture, Language and Law. This is the world of 'difference' beyond the Imaginary order. In representing the Symbolic order, the father is the one who metaphorically says 'no' to both the child’s desires and the mother’s desires. He says, as it were, to the child, ‘No you won’t sleep with your mother, and your survival is not dependent on conforming to what you think her desire is; and to the mother, ‘No, the child is not going to fulfil all your desires, it is not your phallus, that is elsewhere’ (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 1986). This symbolic 'no' of the father begins the separation process from the mother. The child realises that there is something ‘other’ to the mother (the father) and that the mother is not completely fixated on him/her. The mother's desire is elsewhere, this for the child means that the mother is somehow lacking (she does not have everything) and the child turns to see what it is that the mother desires.

The father's position in our present family structure represents the 'other' to the mother. The father introduces otherness or difference to the child. Simply, one can see it as a three stage separation process. Firstly, the mother's desire must be directed or focused outside of herself; something other than the child must be in her life. As we have seen this is to break a potential symbiotic and destructive dependency emerging between the mother and the child. Secondly, the father stands in the crucial position of this 'other', and he must be significant enough so as to capture the desire of the mother. The father must somehow represent the 'phallus'. Thirdly, the child follows the mother's desire outside of herself thus moving towards otherness. It is crucial that the mother desires outside of herself. Thus the father must be 'present', at the very least metaphorically, so as to symbolically engage both the child's and the mother's desire. Lacan, importantly building on Freud's insights, sees the father as exercising his function and role in a two-fold operation: prohibition and promise - “the purpose of prohibition is to complete the detachment begun with the weaning of the child from his mother, and, more specifically, to repress the desire for the mother which reaches a high point
during childhood.” (Ibid, p. 136) The promise allows the child to move beyond the
dual imaginary relationship with the mother, to a process of identification (with both
father and mother) that offers new possibilities of existence. Lacan remained
adamant that “for both sexes it is the imago, the unconscious image of the father, that
allows this identification and sublimation to take place” (Ibid, p. 137). The child thus
begins the painful process of separation from the cosy and insular relationship with
the mother. In turning to the father the child is turning to the world of difference,
the world of symbols and culture. Lacan is not as naive as Freud, and is quick to
point out that the child soon discovers that the father is ‘lacking’ and does not have
all the answers (the ‘phallus’) and that his desire is also elsewhere. This too is part of
the process of separation and individuation for the child, and painful as it may be,
initiates the child to the world of questioning and mystery outside of itself: a world
that is paradoxically frightening and wonderful. Ultimately and most importantly it
allows the child to begin the journey of discovering his/her own unique desire and
place in the world. 5

2.6 Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

“We are the sons of our father,
To whom only can we speak out
The strange, dark burden of our heart and spirit,
We are the sons of our father,
And we shall follow the print of his foot forever”.
  Thomas Wolfe.

5 Kristeva interestingly calls the separation of the child from the mother - 'Symbolic castration' - and writes that it is the debt to be paid if one is to take up one’s structured position as a desiring sexual subject and have access to the order of socio-symbolic culture and language. For Kristeva “the fear of castration is precisely symbolic - the fear of the loss of presence, totality, pleasure, which is consequent upon the acquisition of language, the paternal metaphor, as separation from nature (mother). This separation - the entry into the Symbolic order - a world of difference and so of power and meaning is the socio-symbolic contract which is the basis of identity and it is common to both men and women” (Kristeva, p34, Marks). To bring home the significance of the Oedipus complex Kristeva concludes “together with the organising role of the Oedipus complex, in relation to desire, the Symbolic castration, the separation of the child from the mother and the father, governs the position of each person in the triangle of the Father - Mother - Child, in the way it does this it embodies the law that founds the human order itself.”
This chapter explains the psychoanalytic understanding of the role of the father in child development. Psychoanalysis highlights how detrimental it is to ignore the symbolic function of the father in the development of the child's identity. The decline of the paternal image and the marginalisation of the father are cited as the bases of a number of neurotic dispositions that are common place today. These neurosis can often be traced back to the relationship and separation process between mother and child, and the role of the father in this transition. The mother's relationship with the child is seen as fundamental to the child's survival; it allows the child to internalise a model of safety and trust which is the basis of healthy development and of future relationships. This we argue, includes mother-child 'bonding' as a basic survival need. Despite the importance and intensity of this relationship, it needs to enter a process of separation. This is necessary for both the child and the mother, so that they can move away from the potentially destructive closeness of this relationship. One could say that it gives them both a new freedom. For the child it allows new identifications and new possibilities in the world. For the mother it gives her back her sense of self, separateness and independence. Failure to move beyond the mother-child dyad can leave the child and mother prone to severe neurotic dispositions.

The father, in the vast majority of cases, is the key player in this process of separation, acting as the 'other' or the third person to the mother. He moves the two person (mother-child) dependency based relationship into the complex inter-relational based triangulation of mother-child-father. This allows the child to move away from a potentially alienating imaginary world (mother-child) and to enter the social and cultural symbolic order (mother-child-father). The father is seen as fundamental to the child letting go of the mother: he symbolically prohibits the potentially incestuous closeness and attachment of the child to the mother; he also symbolically promises and represents new and more exciting ways of being in the world. The father is also fundamental to the mother letting go of the child: he is the person who sustains part of the mother's desire and meets this desire, not the child.
Psychoanalysis teaches that unless the father takes up his position representing the symbolic order for the child and the mother, the separation process can become frustrated resulting in various neuroses and disturbances for the child and indeed for the relationship, the family and society.

What is being described here is an extraordinary subtle process which takes place largely unconsciously for all human beings. The three key questions that are normally asked of this viewpoint are: (1) is the psychoanalytic understanding of the father, with its emphasis on the phallus, not still a patriarchal construct perpetuating an ideology that further undermines and marginalises women? (2) what about all the families that do not have fathers or traditional family structures? (3) can the father be shown how to take up his symbolic role in the family?

Is the psychoanalytic understanding of the father, with its emphasis on the phallus, not still a patriarchal construct perpetuating an ideology that further undermines and marginalises women?

“Is Lacan an arch phallocrat…. or is he the prick who dares to speak its name to reveal the self-deception behind the masculine aspiration to phallic status? Does his work affirm or undermine phallocentrism? Or does it do both?”.

E. Grosz.

Psychoanalysis is often criticised or even ignored due its presentation of women and gender development. This is largely due to Freud's chauvinistic and conservative representation of female sexual development. Criticisms of his work often make his entire writings synonymous with phrases like “penis envy” and “female castration”. While fully agreeing with the need to re-think and criticise some of Freud's concepts, as we have done in this Chapter, we have shown that his ideas are a lot more complex and important and cannot be reduced to one single idea in order to legitimate a position or reject his entire work. We have shown how contemporary psychoanalysis, in re-writing Freud's Oedipal narrative, offers a extremely useful model of the family dynamic and highlighting the significance of the father's symbolic position.
Despite the complex re-writing of Freud's chauvinistic Oedipal model by contemporary psychoanalysis, it might still be legitimately asked if it still remains a patriarchal and phallocentric paradigm? This is a major question and one to which there are no certain answers. However it is a question which calls for discussion and debate. It also calls for a dialogue which is open rather than dogmatic, which is poetic rather than literal, and which recognises the intrinsic limitations of this, as all, theoretical models.

Contemporary psychoanalysis, primarily the work of Lacan, reiterates that the central tenet of psychoanalysis is the Oedipus complex. It is largely founded on the question of how does a person - a child - become a desiring sexual being, what is it that (s)he desires, and what shapes this desire? It places a emphasis on the crucial role of the father in this complex formation of sexual identity. It argues that the separation of the mother-child dyad is crucial in order to break both the incestuous oedipal bond, and the mother's potentially unhealthy desire which can situate the child in an alienating identification in the imaginary order. It is essential to acquire this symbolic castration, that is, the separation of the child from the mother and their desire for each other. As noted above, this is called 'The-No-of-the-Father' and is crucial if the child is to take up its structured place as a sexed being and have access to the socio-symbolic order of language and culture. Within our contemporary social structures - and particularly our family structures - the father stands in the position of the third term that must break the asocial dyadic unity of mother and child.

In Lacan’s account, the father represents the phallus in ways that we do not fully understand. The phallus is the key symbol of lack and desire in the human condition. It is not the penis but stands for the lack which every child, regardless of their sex, experiences when they cannot be what they want to be in relation to the mother and indeed the father. In other words, “lack” is the structural lack in the
symbolic order around which every human being has to construct an answer since
this on-going answer is the basis of personal identity. In the context of the mother-
child relationship, the father represents the phallus and, in turn, the symbolic world
of interdependence and exchange. The status of the phallus therefore is ultimately
unknowable and remains a mystery around which human desire and the search for
its fulfilment is constituted. As one commentator has observed: "One wonders [why]
it has not yet become clear from Lacan's own texts that his concept of a phallus refers
to a signifier for the language imposed on any subject with the purpose of giving
that subject an identity? The resulting identity is paradoxically one of mental
alienation. And insofar as identity is gendered and erotic (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, transsexual) the effect of the phallic signifier does link up with
sexual organs......but the primary functions of the phallic signifier involves the
learning of separation where the demand links up to the drive to create limits and
boundaries: the acquisition of a place within the Symbolic (cultural) order." (David-
Menard, p. 77).

What Lacan recognised is that the cultural order itself contains the lack or malaise
that feminists have equated with patriarchy. In other words, to be human is to lack.
Thus psychoanalysis does shift the ground of our understanding of patriarchal
power relations and their social reproduction. The father's role in drawing attention
to the lack, both within the child and the mother and indeed within himself, is
clearly shaped by the fact that men are physically and sexually different to women.
Just how the physical gender differences between men and women shape the
symbolic order - and how men and women are socially constituted as different from
each other on the basis of these physical gender differences - is poorly understood
but is, and needs to be, debated. Thus what is needed, is a further consideration of
the relation between gender and representation, between the effect of gender on
symbolic expression and the effect of a pre-existing system of representation on the
emergence of gender. We believe that the psychoanalytic understanding of the role
of fathers contains insights about otherness, lack, desire and meaning which are
central to all human experience; it are not just a patriarchal construct offering only a male perspective. 7

What about all the families that do not have fathers or traditional family structures?

The answer to this question is in the psychoanalytic model we describe. Lacan clearly states that it must be someone 'other' than the mother who initiates the process of separation. Within the present structure of the nuclear family in the Western world the father generally, and psychoanalysis would claim importantly, takes up the position of the 'other'. But that is not to say that the 'other' has to be either the father or a man. "While there may be disagreements about the form that the symbolic father takes it has been affirmed that it must be someone other than the mother who introduces the symbolic law to the child, severing it from these alienating identifications and enabling it to take up a position outside of her desire" (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 1986, p. 123). The 'other' must be the person (or deity in some rare cases) who engages the mother's desire enough to create a sense of 'otherness' and difference for the child. So all sorts of triangulations are possible; for example gay or lesbian couples (as noted the primary care-giver does not have to be female), single parent families where there is either a real sense of the father or some other father figure. So what actually constitutes an 'other' to the mother is extremely open-ended, but the father is given a priority for a specific reason. The reason why the father is given such a prominent role is due to the socio-cultural structures that the child is presently born into. In order for the child to have a sense of identity, the child must in some way be initiated into these structures. In this culture, the present structures prioritise the nuclear family: mother-child-father, and there is an entire

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7 Nonetheless many feminists argue that, while taking this into consideration, the psychoanalytic discourse is still conservative in its virtual closure to women of a relation to the Symbolic and to themselves which is not mediated or dominated by the symbolic law of the father. In Lacans formulation of this structure as an inevitable law, patriarchal dominance with its inherent phallocentrism is not so much challenged as displaced from biology to the equally unchangeable socio-linguistic law of the father.
system of societal organisation set up around this structure. The family is seen as the most valuable unit that best protects and helps the child develop. Hence it is crucial that the child experiences, at the deepest level of its being, an awareness of these structures. It is argued that this will give the child a sense of identity and of belonging. The initiation process for the child into the nuclear family, the movement away from the safe world of sameness (mother-child) and into the world of difference (mother-child-father), is largely dependent on the desire of the mother and the symbolic position that the father takes up in the family.

Can fathers be shown how to take up their symbolic position in the family?

A symbol is not something that can be reduced to one literal meaning, or indeed to a blueprint. A symbol, like a metaphor, is a way of representing something else, something that often has more than one meaning. Thus the symbolic position that the father takes up in a family can have many different meanings. Fathers stand for very different things, and stand for them in very different ways.

In the majority of families in our society, the symbolic position of the father is largely dependent on the character and desire of the person, and the circumstances that prevail, including the circumstances of his own fathering and mothering. It is also, as we have seen, dependent on the character and desire of the mother. Overlapping both of these is the cultural status and standing of fatherhood and manhood. If a society places a high value on fatherhood, then individual fathers are more likely to respond positively to those values and to desire them. A man must first desire to be a good father - whether consciously or unconsciously - before he can be one. It may seem strange, but every father and aspirant father needs to ask: “do I want to be father?” This prompts a further question: “where can a man ask this question and hear his answer and the answers of other men?” If fatherhood is not valued - especially by men themselves - then it will not be desired and its symbolic importance is thereby undermined.
In the symbolic sphere there are no quick-fix solutions. Our understanding of the psychoanalytic process leads us to the view that a man cannot be shown or taught how to be a good father, any more than he can be taught how to be a good person; this can only be educated - in the sense of being brought or led our - out of the person. Likewise, no father can be shown how to take up his symbolic position in the family since no one fully understands the inscrutable processes of the unconscious. However he can be supported and encouraged in his desire to be a good father and in trying to understand the symbolic position which fatherhood confers on him within the family. We think this support and encouragement can happen in two ways. First, through increasing self-awareness among men and fathers and secondly through increasing the symbolic importance which society attaches to fatherhood.

Increasing self-awareness takes place over the course of a lifetime and is an integral part of the process by which men and women grow as persons. Understandably, psychoanalysis places a high value upon self-awareness because it helps people to understand why they are the way they are; in turn, this can empower people to embrace life and meet its challenges. Equally, self-awareness can help men understand the socially constructed roles which they play both inside and outside the family. This can throw light on the choices that are available to men - as fathers, partners, sons, workers, carers, et cetera - thus increasing their strength and independence. Self-awareness can help in breaking some of the more destructive patterns in which men are engaged; some of these have been internalised from their relationships with their parents, be it an over-dependency on mother (and continued with their partner), or working through their inevitably imperfect relationship with their father. A person unconsciously does this, because it is what they know best (its what's famil-y-ar). When a man becomes a father, he is very likely to act in a similar or an opposite way to his experience of being fathered. He either identifies with his father or else a process of 'reaction formation' occurs and he sets out to do things
differently (although they often turn out the same). Either way we saw the massive impact of the father on the father-son relationship, and how this repeats itself across the generations. In view of this, it can be very helpful for a man to look at these relationships to avoid the same patterns being played out again, and left for another generation to deal with.  

In our view, fathers can be supported and encouraged to take up the symbolic role within their families by becoming more self-aware of their relationships with significant others such as their own fathers and mothers, their partners and other men and how these shape their understanding of the fathering role. Self-awareness also includes awareness of one’s own character which is unique and cannot be reduced solely to the influence of parents and environment. We are not suggesting that every man should undergo psychoanalysis or therapy before becoming a father! However we do argue that men could benefit from participating in groups - such as men’s groups - which provide a safe environment for exploring matters, both vulnerable and intimate, which are extremely important in the journey towards self-awareness and understanding of what it is to be a man. As indicated in Chapter One, this is now an option for men which did not exist before and it is one which increasing numbers of men are availing of.

The symbolic importance of fatherhood in society generally is a matter which deserves widespread public debate. We are struck by the fact that many public debates - on matters such as childcare, one parent families, family friendly measures in the work place, et cetera - make no reference to fathers, presumably because fathers are seen as having no role to play. This is powerful testimony of the demise of the father figure in public life and in the symbolic sphere generally. In this

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6 This needs to be qualified; firstly it does not mean that a person only internalises destructive patterns in their childhood; and secondly it is not a blame game, the majority of parents genuinely do their very best (they too are dealing with their pasts); thirdly the child does not come into the world a blank sheet, they arrive with a character and this interacts with the environment, in other words they are not simply the products of their parents.
chapter we have noted the detrimental consequences which follow from undervaluing the symbolic role of the father in family life.

We believe that the demise of the symbolic father figure needs to be addressed in a number of ways. First, the imagery associated with fathers, as described in the Introduction, needs to be more supportive of an ideal which men can desire and towards which fathers can aspire. As recommended in Chapter Six below, our Constitution needs to make a clear statement regarding the value which Irish society places equally on fatherhood and motherhood. We also recommend public discussion and debate about gender roles and the importance of fathers in forming the identity of each child. This includes raising consciousness about what it means to be a man and a father in today’s society. Second, men need to be included and encouraged to participate in debates and discussions about families and children so that fathers are recognised as an integral part of our paradigm of family life in all its various forms. Third, the educational system, particularly at second level, has an important role to play for both boys and girls in promoting the value of manhood and fatherhood. Fourth, support groups for men can allow men to discover in other men the depth and meaning of manhood and the wisdom to be a good father.
Appendix to Chapter Two

Definitions of Psychology, Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is sometimes confused with either psychology or psychiatry. They are different as the following simple definitions show.

**PSYCHOLOGY**: is defined as the science of human behaviour. This is understood in various ways but broadly speaking Psychology studies the phenomena (or things) of conscious life in their beginnings, development and their manifestations (the way the appear). It employs various methods depending on the field of study which is wide-ranging: Child Psychology; Animal Psychology; Social Psychology; Educational Psychology etc.

**PSYCHIATRY**: is a branch of medicine which is concerned with people (patients) suffering from mental and nervous disorders in particular psychopathology, that is, abnormal and diseased conditions in organisms. Although often confused with Psychoanalysis (and Psychotherapy) it is in fact a specialised area of medicine treating various mental illness such as Schizophrenia, Manic-Depression, Senile Dementia. Although it may incorporate some Psychotherapy, depending on the severity of the illness, more often than not medication is administrated e.g. anti-depressants, tranquillisers, and electro-convulsive therapy.

**PSYCHOANALYSIS**: is the form of treatment of mental and nervous disorders invented by Sigmund Freud. It is characterised by a dynamic view (full of energy) of all mental life, both conscious and unconscious. Freud emphasised the notion of the Unconscious in order to display that there exists mental activity of which the person is unaware but none the less it exerts a profound effect on his/her behaviour. There is a particular emphasis upon the phenomena of the unconscious and in bringing out the unconscious meanings of the words, the actions, and the products of the
imagination of a individual person. (Some examples of the products of the imagination are our Dreams and our Fantasies).
Chapter Three

Fathers and Children

Kieran McKeown

“When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I survived at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood. People everywhere brag and whimper about the woes of early childhood, but nothing can compare with the Irish version: the poverty; the shiftless loquacious alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother moaning by the fire; the pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred long years”

Frank McCourt, Angela’s Ashes: Memoir of Childhood. Winner of the 1997 US Pulitzer Prize.

“It’s never too late to have a happy childhood”
Anonymous.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses two questions. The first concerns the amount of involvement which fathers have with children in the home. The second concerns the impact which fathers have on the development of their children. Clearly the two questions are related. Section 3.2 addresses the question of whether the division of labour within families - particularly regarding the care of children - has changed significantly from the traditional pattern where almost all of the care was undertaken by the mother. This question is raised again in Chapter Four with particular emphasis on the perspectives which inform research in this area. Section 3.3 then examines some of the impacts which fathers have - or can have - on their children. Finally, section 3.4 draws together our conclusions and recommendations.
3.2 What Fathers Do In The Home

“A man without an abiding interest in his children and their future is a straw blowing in the wind”. Colm O’Connor, 1997.

A number of studies have suggested that “there is almost no evidence” (Lewis, 1993, p.95) for the claim that “today’s fathers are caring for their children in radically different ways to their older counterparts” (Ibid; Lewis and O’Brien, 1978; Brannen and Moss, 1991; Kiernan, 1992; Kempeneers and Lelievre, 1992). The same finding has also emerged from a number of longitudinal studies (Coverman and Sheley, 1986; Lewis, 1986; Sanik, 1981). Even the social engineering efforts in Sweden at changing the division of labour between mothers and fathers in the home have had relatively little impact (Sandqvist, 1987; 1992). In English-speaking countries, especially the United States, attempts at social engineering by teaching fathers the skills of childcare - where these have been evaluated - have not demonstrated clear long-term increases in paternal involvement (Lewis, 1993; Hawkins and Roberts, 1992).

The main exception to this general picture occurs in families where both father and mother are employed and in families where the father is unemployed. One study of fathers in single and dual earner families found that fathers in dual earner families do 30 hours of domestic work per week compared to 15 hours by fathers in single earner families (Ackerman-Ross and Khana, 1989). A number of other studies have shown a similar pattern (Crouter, et al, 1987; Greenberger and O’Neill, 1990; Volling and Belsky, 1991). However in dual earner families, women still do considerably more domestic work and child care than men. One of the main reasons for this is that fathers work much longer hours: “for fathers, therefore, it appeared that heavy work commitments outside the home represented an obstacle to equal parenting and, as such, a source of conflicting pressures, particularly in families in which both parents were in full-time employment” (Ferri and Smith, 1996, p.48). Similarly, unemployed fathers have also been found, following an in-depth study, to be more
involved in both house-work and childcare (Wheelock, 1991) although other studies have not found this (McLoyd, 1989). One of the features which both these exceptions have in common - the employed father in dual earner families and the unemployed father - is that the involvement of fathers seems to be driven more by the structural characteristics of the situation rather than by any ideological commitment - for or against - equalising the domestic division of labour between men and women. In other words, the fathers’ involvement in housework and childcare seems to be negotiated with the mother, taking into account the work and other circumstances in which both find themselves.

3.3 Impact of Fathers

“This poem came into being thirty-three years after my father died ... when I was thirteen. ... .
I didn’t have your love
to teach me how to love
and came to love my children through letting them love me”

The impact of fathers on children is mediated by his parenting relationship with the child. This may appear obvious but for many years it had been thought that it was the father’s characteristics as a man rather than his characteristics as a parent which mediated his impact on child development, particularly among boys. However the research evidence suggests that it is the quality of the parent-child relationship rather than the gender of the parent that is most important in child development (see Lamb, 1997, p.9). At an unconscious level however, as the analysis in Chapter Two shows, the father’s role is fundamentally different to the mother’s because it symbolises and teaches the importance of a world outside the intimate relationship of the mother and child; at the unconscious level, therefore, broadly similar behaviours by mother and father have profoundly different meanings for the child’s psyche.
At a conscious and practical level, the fact that good fathering and good mothering involve broadly similar behaviours has important implications for fathers, as Burgess (1997, p.188) has pointed out: “The message emanating from this is that there is no free ride for fatherhood, no magical role for fathers just because they are fathers or just because they are men. It is what each man gives on a personal level that makes him a key player in his child’s development. And, in the wider world, it is what men as a group will give to children in respect of intimate care and attention that will enable males to play a key role in their development. Otherwise a father’s main value is limited to a pay-cheque and to a lesser extent a support system, and although these are valuable functions they in no way satisfy the aspirations of today’s fathers, or their children”.

Some children grow up with little or no contact with their fathers. However the research suggests that these children do not fare worse than children who have contact with their fathers, when all the other factors affecting the child’s development are taken into account. The most significant of these other factors is the process by which a child loses its father. Children who lose a father through divorce, possibly after a period of sustained parental conflict, will tend to be more adversely affected than children who have never had a father living with them. As Lamb (1996, p.11) has pointed out, “since many single-parent families are produced by divorce and since divorce is often preceded and accompanied by periods of overt and covert spousal hostility, parental conflict may play a major role in explaining the problems of fatherless children”.

Fathers - or mothers - who have no contact with their children seem to have little impact on them, good, bad or indifferent. At the same time, every child - almost without exception - will want to know its biological parents and, in this sense, it is hard to imagine any child remaining entirely unaffected by its biological parents. Moreover, even children who have no contact with their biological fathers still need fathers and male role models. This implies that even “fatherless” children can find
in other men - and in their imaginations - the fathering that might otherwise be supplied by the biological father. There is no hard determinism therefore that turns a biological father into a psychologically real father either for the child or the man. Being a father therefore involves choosing to become physically and psychologically connected with the child’s life and development in whatever way seems appropriate given the norms and circumstances of one’s life.

There appears to be virtual unanimity among researchers that the more extensive a father’s involvement with his children the more beneficial it is for them in terms of cognitive competence and performance at school as well as for empathy, self-esteem, self-control, life skills and social competence; these children also have less sex-stereotyped beliefs and a more internal locus of control (see Pleck, 1997; Pruett, 1983; 1985; Radin, 1982; 1994). Conversely, children are less likely to become involved in delinquent behaviour or substance behaviour if their fathers are sensitive and attentive to them; even the children of fathers who have a criminal record are less likely to become delinquent if the father spends a lot of time with them.

Of particular importance here is the style of fathering: “authoritative” fathering - which involves providing consistent values and boundaries and relating to the child with warmth and confidence - is beneficial to the child but “authoritarian” fathering - which involves excessive discipline, control and an aloofness from the child - is not. One commentator has suggested that involved fathering promotes positive child development in the following way: “the benefits obtained by children with highly involved fathers are largely attributable to the fact that high levels of paternal involvement created family contexts in which parents felt good about their marriages and the child care arrangements they had been able to work out” (Lamb, 1997, p.12).

In assessing the impact of father’s involvement with his children, some research distinguishes between two types of involvement: (i) involvement through primary
caretaking such as preparing food, changing nappies, cleaning and clearing up; and (ii) involvement through shared activities with the children. The research evidence suggests that fathers tend to be more involved in the second sense and that this is the type of involvement that has the most positive impact on the development of the child (Drago Piechowski, 1992; Owen and Cox, 1988). Indeed it has been suggested that the first type of involvement may be inversely related to the second, particularly in very busy families where both parents work and time is scarce (Morgan, 1996, pp.100-101).

Researchers have also tried to assess the impact of families on the likelihood of children becoming involved in crime; however the independent effect of fathers is not always assessed in these studies. One of the key findings to emerge from three major longitudinal studies of delinquency in Britain suggests that the roots of crime lie within families, particularly inadequate or inappropriate parental supervision (Wadsworth, 1979; Kolvin, et al, 1990; West and Farrington, 1973; West, 1982). It is true that most of those involved in crime and delinquency are boys or men from poor backgrounds - which is why girls and women feature less frequently in this type of research - but the association between crime and poverty tends to diminish when poor parental supervision is taken into account. Poor parental supervision can, in turn, facilitate peer influences which may draw the young person into delinquency. As one team of researchers have pointed out, following a review of the research evidence: “Those who have been least well-supervised by their parents when young and who have achieved least in primary school are more likely to mix with ‘the wrong crowd’ of other anti-social children. In other words, the power of parents in a crime prevention context is at its greatest before their children reach the age of 10” (Utting, Bright and Henricson, 1993, pp.14-15; see O’Mahony, 1997 for a recent review of the Irish evidence).

A further implication of this research is that involvement in crime and other anti-social behaviour is one of the ways in which boys who are poorly fathered express
themselves as men. Their involvement in crime is a way of participating in the outside world where they may enjoy the support of other boys and men who have had similar experiences of poor fathering. In this respect, girls seem to respond very differently - though not necessarily any more positively - to the experience of poor fathering.

Other studies have also highlighted the impact of family management practices on delinquency. In effect, delinquency is less likely in homes where the parents have a good relationship with both each other and with the children; it is more likely where these relationships are unhappy or neglectful. This is consistent with the findings noted above on the impact of divorce and lone parenthood: both British and American research demonstrates that where children are nurtured and loved - irrespective of whether the parents are divorced or whether the children are raised by a lone parent - they are much less likely to fall into delinquency (see Utting, Bright and Henricson, 1993, Chapter Two).

Specific research on the impact of fathers on crime is much less extensive than research on families and crime but the results nevertheless bear out the importance of the relationship between father and child. One study compared the families of 500 delinquent boys with 500 non-delinquent boys and found that fewer than half the former had sympathetic, affectionate fathers compared to eight out of ten of the latter (Gleuck and Gleuck, 1950). Moreover this study found that the relationship with fathers was more significant than the relationship with mothers in predicting delinquency. Another American study found that children who grew into anti-social adults also had anti-social fathers in the sense that they drank excessively, were chronically unemployed and lost contact with their families after separation (Robins, 1966).

The reality is that most children - boys and girls - do not become delinquent or involved in crime. Many however suffer in less aggressive and destructive ways
because of the absence of effective and affective fathering. It is difficult to know if poor fathering affects sons more than daughters although the experiences of sons may be better documented, at least in Ireland (see for example, Hyde, 1996). The following poem - My Father’s Footsteps by Colm O’Connor (1997) - and may speak to the experience of many sons and daughters:

My feelings toward my father were ones I never knew because I knew only his shadow
Or the footprints of where he had been
the after-images hanging after his departure -
the smell of his after-shave
his shoes on the landing after night-duty
the sound of a car in the driveway
his 'Be Quiet' voice after lights went out
Or frozen moments held like rare coins:
Dad kicking a ball so high
A race on the beach at 10
His praise for a pencil sketch
The broad of his back swimming off the rocks
His reassuring voice over late-night algebra
His worry about the car on summer holidays
His unglamorous kindnesses
His letters
His unapplauded sacrifices
His absence.
Fathers linger
Like the echo of a long gone presence
in an empty room.

So in later years we men are left searching for memories
for incidents around which we can make some purchase
in search of reassurances that we were fathered -
pictured moments that would allow us to feel that we were blessed,
that we were substantial in our fathers eyes.

And in your search a wave of anxiousness
surges through you
as you flick through your catalogue of childhood memories
like some photo-album,
unable to find the Polaroids that would prove it all,
the evidence to yourself that your self-doubt
and fear and loneliness in this world
are all just temporary aberrations.

But can you find it?
Can you find the stained glass picture
that would look out at you
in clear blood,
that would mark your presence
that would allow you to say
"Yes that is me,
that is me and my dad.
Yes look,
that's my father’s arm around my shoulder
and my father’s smile
and my father’s pride*
this picture that would show that you were chosen,
that your father blessed you,
and dipped you in the great river of his life
and baptised you into the world of men
and said
"You are my son, a man-to-be, in whom I am well pleased."

And you search for this memory among the scattered
photos at your feet and end up
like an unannounced Jesus at the waters edge
unannointed and unseen
searching out your father,
the look, the recognition,
but cannot find his eye
or hold his gaze.

And as men we go unseen and unblessed
as if unwelcomed into the intimacies of life
and we turn then -
we all turn then and walk into the desert
with a deep Hunger.

Researching the impact of fathers on children is clearly important. Of equal interest
is the impact which children have on fathers. There is considerably less research on
this aspect of the relationship although some researchers have suggested that its
impact on the development of fathers could be just as significant as the impact on the
This is an area which would repay further investigation and is explored further in
Chapter Seven.

3.4 Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter has reviewed the evidence on the impact of fathers on children. The
results reveal that fathers who have warm, close and nurturing relationships with
their children can have an enormously positive influence on their development. In
this respect, the behaviours by which fathers impact on the development of their
children are no different to those of the mother. The converse of this also applies and children develop less well where their fathers are distant or uninvolved; these children may also become involved in crime where the parent-child relationship is weak. Thus, the quality of the parent-child relationship is what is crucial to the child’s development. At the same time, in line with our psychoanalytic understanding of how mothers and fathers influence the unconscious development of the child, we wish to emphasise that similar behaviours by mother and father have profoundly different meanings for the child’s psyche. In other words, at an unconscious level, the role of the father is not just to be a good mother, or vice versa.

Weak parent-child relationships can occur in a variety of settings and are influenced by a variety of factors. Where children become involved in crime these settings tend to be characterised by poverty and other stresses such as unemployment, poor environment, et cetera. The development of parent-child relationships in this context involves supporting families who lack the knowledge, skills and self-confidence to make them more effective parents, particularly when their children are young. This type of support would involve a range of measures to reduce poverty, increase childcare, establish family centres and neighbourhood projects, provide intensive support and education to vulnerable parents with pre-adolescent children as well as specific measures to ensure that fathers are involved. The involvement of fathers in this type of work would probably require outreach work, particularly in disadvantaged areas, and a sensitive approach which addresses the obstacles constraining fathers - including obstacles such as skills, attitudes, time, relationships with partner, relationship with child, et cetera - from being more involved with their children. Beyond the family and its immediate environment, it is also necessary to consider how the education of young people prepares them for their future role as parents and to do this by raising their awareness, understanding and skills for living in satisfying, intimate and respectful relationships.
Our analysis suggests that two broad recommendations are required to maximise the beneficial impact which fathers can have on their children. The first is to promote the ideal of good fathering among all fathers and potential fathers through the education system and through public education. This should be done in a variety of fora - family resource centres, parenting programmes, media awareness programmes - according to the needs of different categories of father and should elicit the active participation of fathers in discussing their own experiences of fathering and being fathered. We believe that being a father is not just a skill; it is a way of being a man and requires engagement with one’s own life. Education about fathering needs to be sensitive to vulnerabilities and strengths need to be supported and affirmed. We suggest that any initiatives in the area of education should be piloted beforehand.

Our second recommendation concerns the specific needs of fathers and potential fathers in disadvantaged areas. We suggest that measures to facilitate fathers in these areas need to be accompanied by a general improvement in the infrastructure of services in those areas; this could include employment and environmental improvements, increased childcare, family centres, neighbourhood projects, youth services for pre-adolescent and adolescent children. The involvement of fathers will require sensitive out-reach work and a forum for participation. We are not in a position to prescribe how this intervention should be designed and developed but we are aware that it is highly skilled work and will required substantial resources and skills, if it is to be effective. We are also aware that it is extremely necessary and urgent.
Chapter Four

Fathers and Home

Harry Ferguson

“Fathers should be neither seen nor heard. That is the only proper basis for family life”.
Oscar Wilde, The Ideal Husband.

“My child arrived just the other day. He came into the world in the usual way.
But there were planes to catch and bills to pay. He learned to walk while I was away.
And he was walking, before I knew it, and as he grew he’d say,
I’m gonna be like you dad.
You know I’m gonna be like you”
Harry Chapin, The Cat in the Cradle.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter tries to answer the question: “what do fathers actually do in families?”. The focus is on fathers “at home”, as opposed to fathers at work, however much the two are inextricably linked. What fathers actually do at home and in families is an empirical question. Researchers have examined the 'domestic' and ‘caring’ tasks that fathers and mothers carry out with children, the sexual division of domestic labour and responsibility for child caring and the amount of time each partner spends involved in such activity; all of this research is reviewed in this chapter. We shall show however that these are not just empirical questions which involve weighing who does what and when in the home. A number of philosophical and theoretical issues arise concerning not only what fathers do but: why do fathers do what they do? and the related question of what they do not do and why? This takes us to the core of what is “good enough” fathering and how such matters are determined, which has already been raised in Chapter One. It brings us to consider the nature of fairness, how to measure “domestic democracy” and the fundamental question of where men and women differ in their orientations to care and nurturing their children, what determines this and how might it be changed? We identify two key approaches to
fatherhood which we set out and discuss in terms of the fairness perspective (section 4.2) and the developmental perspective (section 4.3). We detect a key shift in debates on fatherhood that has arisen in the 1990s and attempt to elucidate the key features of the fatherhood paradigm that should govern public policy in the new millennium. This constitutes a perspective that integrates key aspects of the fairness and developmental perspectives and holds that, as well as promoting accountable fathering, the aim should be to support fathers in making the developmental transition to parenthood in ways that sustain paternal commitment to the benefit of children, women and men themselves (section 4.4).

4.2 The Fairness Perspective

“He was, without question, the paterfamilias, governing and dispensing. As young children we often felt no more than mere appendages to the marriage, our mother his real concern, the one to be turned to and fondled. In the evenings, we had to respect his weariness, were schooled to become sensitive to his moods, gauging when to ask a favour of him. Secretly, he wished, I am certain, to be seen as a patriarch - that was his ideal - an unwavering provider. ... . This dedication to our upbringing becomes all the more poignantly abundant when set against the background of his childhood impoverishment and ensuing unease about money”

Derek Shiel, 1995.

Traditionally, research into what fathers do in families has examined three main areas: the amount of time fathers spend with their children; the kinds of activities undertaken; and men’s parenting styles (Burgess, 1997, p.63). More recent work has begun to deconstruct the nature of domestic labour and child care to render visible not only the sexual division of the tasks that get done, but the kinds of ‘mental’ labour and emotional work that men and women do. Analysis of gendered ways of ‘thinking about the baby’ reveals crucial issues about responsibility and accountability for children and family life (Walzer, 1996).

Just as more and more men can be seen pushing prams in public, research in the 1980s confirmed that - from a very low starting-point - more men wanted to become actively involved with children and some were making efforts to do so. Nevertheless, the same studies suggested that men in general had a very long way to
go before anything like equality of child care and shared responsibility with women could become a reality. Studies in the 1970s and 1980s showed that while men had begun to do more than they used to, women still tended do the bulk of domestic work. Surveys showed that many men supported more equal arrangements. However, a gap was apparent between what men *said* and what they actually *did* in relation to child care; between attitudes and behaviour. Longitudinal studies of fathering from the 1960s through to the early 1990s showed little or no changes in fathers participation in domestic tasks or caring for their children (Lewis, 1993, p.87).

There is a striking consistency in research findings of paternal under-involvement in different countries. One study of fatherhood in 10 countries suggested that the average daily time that fathers spent alone with their children ranged from 6 minutes in Hong Kong, 12 minutes in Thailand, 54 minutes in China, 48 minutes in Finland, 1 hour 36 minutes in the USA, to 3 hours 42 minutes in Belgium (Boyden, 1994). These findings are broadly in keeping with Hochschild's celebrated American study in the 1980s. They found that, in families where both parents were working, men avoided most of the "second-shift" labour, leaving the responsibility for child care and housework to their wives (Hochschild, 1989). American research on the nature of fathers' actual one-on-one interaction with the child - feeding, helping with homework, or playing catch - suggests that American fathers with pre-school children participate in, on average, about 26% of the total hours spent by mothers and fathers in direct child care activities (Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane, 1992). The same research found that men's participation in housework encouraged them to share child-rearing activities with their wives. The level of paternal participation is substantially higher in two-parent families where the mothers who are employed outside the home. Some American researchers have been at pains to point out, however, that this does not necessarily mean that fathers are doing proportionately more when mothers are employed, but that mothers are doing less. While proportionately more involved when mothers are employed outside the home, in
absolute terms fathers level of involvement may not have changed significantly (Ishii-Kuntz, 1995).

So it appears that while there have probably been some increases over time in average degrees of paternal involvement, mothers spend more time than men in caring for children and continue to take day-to-day responsibility. The accumulated evidence suggests that “increased participation of mothers in the labour force outside the home has not brought a corresponding participation of men in household tasks and child care within the family” (Kiely, 1996, p.147). When men have got involved, the apparent trend has been for them to do “the more enjoyable bits” - as researchers have tended to perceive them - like playing with the children and reading them bedtime stories. Segal (1990, p.37) summarising the evidence, concluded that “in the great majority of cases, men’s participation is far removed from genuine sharing of responsibilities”.

Until the mid-1990s, much of this evidence was produced within a dominant paradigm on fatherhood, gender relations and child care which was founded on feminist scholarship with the emphasis on issues of men's power, social justice and fairness. This perspective is based largely on a critique of patriarchy and power relations and on empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that men and male-dominated institutions in the public domain and the private world of the family systematically exploit women as carers. Men are seen as benefiting from being in a structurally powerful position where they can revert to traditional expectations and get out of housework and child care. Women have no such option, being tied institutionally as well as personally to child care responsibility by virtue of ideologies of motherhood, femininity and their ascribed identity as women.

In one way or another, domestic and caring/love labour is seen as ending up being done by women. In more affluent, middle-class households a further gender dynamic arises in that this can be the paid help/au pair as well as the child’s mother.
Similar issues arise in the gendered nature of the public provision of child care services which is almost all done by women, in creches, family centres, and so on, a theme we return to below when discussing state services and supports in Chapters Five and Seven. Some have argued that the popular image of the so-called “New Father” has enabled many middle-class men to have it both ways. It gives them the license to choose to enjoy the emotional fruits of parenting while their position of class and gender privilege allows them the resources with which to buy or negotiate their way out of child care (Segal, 1990). An illusion of equality was created where “new fathers” could bask in the reflected glory of their heroic commitment when in reality it was their partners - supported by under-paid women house-workers - who were having to be “superwomen” and carry the major responsibility, for which they got little acknowledgement. The juxtaposition of these apparent realities with all those carefully constructed marketing images of scantily clad men cradling babies and driving off in posh motor cars that arose in the 1980s has thrown into question whether, in reality, the “new fatherhood” is more a matter of commercialism and post-modern style than of substance; of surface appearances rather than real changes in behaviour. The idea of the “new father” is consequently thrown into doubt, having more to do with changing cultural expectations than behaviour. An important gap is revealed between *culture* and the *conduct* of fatherhood (Ishii-Kuntz, 1995). As we shall show below - in our discussion of the developmental perspective - research in the 1990s has started to examine the constraints on fathers as well on mothers which impact on men’s ability to negotiate their fatherhood role and identity.

Thus in order to address the gap in gender equality, co-parenting has been framed within this fairness perspective is an issue of “domestic democracy”. The development of anti-discriminatory policies and practices is viewed as essential to work against the traditional assumption that a woman is destined to do the child care/domestic labour simply because of her gender. The key issue is *fairness*. When family work and responsibility are not shared equitably, unfair arrangements need
to be changed. Public policy should actively seek to promote equal opportunities. It is notable that the focus of the fairness perspective has largely been on creating structures - child care provision, reform of employment laws/practices - which can enable women to enter the workforce and compete with men on equal terms in the public domain. Men have been challenged to change by taking a more active nurturing role and being responsible co-parents. If (or, more to the point, when) men are found to be opting out, the fairness perspective holds that they must be made to feel their responsibility. We should stress that we are not endorsing this position uncritically, but seeking to set out its key dimensions here as the basis for a critique which, by the end of the chapter, will help to clarify an integrated perspective on fatherhood that we believe could usefully inform public policy. As we shall discuss below, fatherhood scholarship in the 1990s - particularly from the developmental perspective - has challenged the fairness perspective by emphasising the complexity of judgements of fairness in domestic relations (see section 4.3). Before proceeding to outline the developmental perspective, we first review some further empirical studies within this perspective, including the only Irish study which has addressed this issue.

Lynn Segal's influential book *Slow Motion: Changing masculinities, Changing Men* (1990), captured a key aspect of the fairness perspective by arguing that anything which threatens to draw men out of the public world of work constituted a threat to their identity. She argues that men's apparent attitudinal changes towards fatherhood were not translating into widespread behavioural changes in terms of devoting more time to children and domestic work because of men's fears that increased parental involvement translates into a loss of power (Segal, 1990). Giddens has also argued that the "basic question here is not so much whether men will be able to hold on indefinitely to their economic privileges, as whether they will be able to break with the ideals of masculinity pinned on performance in the public sphere, in the domain of work or in other activities" (Giddens, 1994). However, as we show below (section 4.3), some research in the 1990s has begun to paint a rather
less exploitative picture of contemporary ‘masculinity’ to suggest that men, as well as women, can be caught in a structural trap which limits their choices to define their gender and parenting identities more equally and openly. For instance, the relatively simple fact that men are paid more than women, on average, influences decisions on the sexual division of labour that households make.

Recent research from within the fairness perspective has argued that the measuring of ultimate responsibility, or accountability, has a crucial bearing on such issues and needs to be taken fully into account. Again, our aim is simply to set out the findings which we shall then subject to a critique. Susan Walzer’s qualitative study of 50 mothers and fathers (25 couples) who were the first-time parents of babies demonstrates in particular the importance of the invisible, mental labour that is involved in taking care of a baby and the gender imbalances that are apparent in such care. The focus on ‘mental labour’ is intended to move on our understanding of parenting from the emphasis on simply evaluating physical tasks to take account of the “thinking, feeling, and inter-personal work that accompanies the care of babies” (Walzer, 1996). Walzer identifies three particular areas of gender imbalance where the mental labour associated with child care is predominantly women’s work: in worrying; processing information; and managing the division of labour.

The fathers in her study quite clearly loved their children and showed great devotion to them, but it was mothers who did a disproportionate amount of worrying about them and how to care. Walzer locates the reasons for this in the interactional dynamics between mothers and fathers, arguing that mothers worry about babies, in part, because fathers do not. The impact of the ideology of motherhood which held that mothers should worry was so strong that some mothers worried that they would be judged bad mothers because they did not worry! In many of the couples, the fathers saw it as their role to try and get the mothers to stop worrying, telling them to relax. Considerable marital tension was evident, many of the mothers expressing dissatisfaction that their husbands did not
share more in the responsibility of caring. Walzer concludes that if the father offered to *share* the worrying rather than telling the mother to stop, the outcome might be quite different and happier.

The researcher also found that it is mothers who perform much of the mental labour around processing information about the child. It is they who consult child care books, magazines and experts and, because they are better informed, both parents assume that the mother will orchestrate and implement the care. Moreover, the ideologies of parenting presented in these expert discourses further reinforce expectations that it is the mother’s role to be primary parent. Mothers who already felt that they had primary responsibility for their children did not find any disagreement from the advice literature. The role of fathers is invariably presented as a secondary - a “helping” - one. Advice directs women to contain their responses to their husband’s lack of participation, to keep a lid on their feelings, avoiding conflict, trying to entice the man into participation and not even to expect equitable arrangements. Such a suggestion reinforces the tendency for mother’s to have the responsibility for getting the advice in the first place which, Walzer concludes, may also be a factor in the decreases in marital satisfaction that some couples experience.

The responsibility and practice of managing the division of labour between the couple was also carried disproportionately by the mothers. Even in situations where fathers reported that they split tasks equally, mothers often had the extra role of delegating the work. One such father who perceived that he split tasks equally with his partner said: “Then at night either one of us will give him a bath. She’ll always give him a bath, or if she can’t, she’ll tell me to do it because I won’t do it unless she tells me, but if she asks me to do it I’ll do it”.

Clearly some fathers who perceive themselves as sharing tasks with their wives do so when their wives tell them to. The division of labour is one where mothers are the ultimate managers. They also make decisions about what not to delegate [“I do
diapers. Joel can’t handle it”]. On one level this appears to support the view that mothers are “in charge” and may not want to relinquish control to their male partners because motherhood is a source of power for women. Walzer argues, however, that men are in charge because it is only with their permission and cooperation that mothers can relinquish their ties. The men had more freedom to come and go, some using it without even consulting their partners - who were left holding the baby - while the mothers had no such entitlement to do the same. Thus, while mothers may instruct their husbands, this data supports other studies in suggesting that husbands responses to, and compliance with, orders are not compulsory (DeVault, 1991). In addition, Walzer concludes that while women may be the “bosses” in the sense that they carry the organisational plan and delegate tasks to their partners, they have to manage without the privilege of paid managers. Men, on the other hand, tend to have significant economic power, which is not affected or threatened in the same way by the onset of parenthood. Being a manager involves expending huge amounts of physical and mental labour, not just in providing meals, for instance, but planning them, getting people to the table on time and managing relationships, doing “emotional work”.

Walzer’s research suggests that mental labour in child and family care is an important aspect in how women and men recreate motherhood and fatherhood as differentiated gender experiences. As a good provider and husband, a man, it is argued, can be perceived as a ‘good’ accountable father without thinking about his baby. Indeed, the baby may be perceived as a distraction to his doing what he is expected to do. Mothers, whether still employed or not, are expected to think about the baby simply in order to be seen as ‘good’ mothers. Marital dissatisfaction and struggles around fairness and equity in parenting will not be resolved simply by trading off who changes nappies. “Only when the work of thinking about the baby is shared can new fathers claim to be truly equal participants” (Walzer, 1996).
In turning to a critique of the fairness perspective, it is striking how little research has been carried out on the sexual division of domestic labour and parenting in Ireland - although some important analysis and commentary on the broad social policy issues of balancing work and family life has begun to emerge (Drew, et al, 1995; McCarthy, 1996). Just one study, carried out in the Family Studies Unit, University College Dublin (UCD) in the late-1980s, has partially explored what fathers do in Irish families. The study is partial in that it is based only on mothers’ accounts of what fathers - their partners - do (Kiely, 1996). Father's own accounts of what they do and the meaning they give to fatherhood - and, indeed, motherhood and childhood - is an essential aspect of a methodologically sound appraisal of who does what and why in family life. Research of this kind urgently needs to be done in Ireland. Nevertheless, while keeping its limitations fully in mind, the UCD study offers some interesting glimpses of fathers in families as seen from the perspective of women's perceptions and a feminist/fairness perspective.

The study surveyed “the attitudes and behaviour” of a sample of 513 urban mothers with regard to work and family roles. The research included an in-depth interview with mothers, all of whom had at least one child of school-going age. Almost 70% of the women said that their partners did participate in households as much as they (the mothers) would like. When this was explored in greater depth, however, by seeking information on specific behaviours, Kiely suggests that a very different picture emerged - although we are not convinced that the data as he presents it actually bears this out. According to Kiely, the evidence presented in Table 4.1 shows that, with the exception of household repairs, fathers took responsibility for very few household tasks.
Table 4.1 Who is Responsible for Household Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishes</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ironing</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoovering</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairs</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kiely, 1996, p.149.

With regard to actual child care tasks, Table 4.2 shows that fathers did quite a lot, and in some activities - such as playing and going on outings - took more responsibility than women. This, according to the mothers themselves. The latter, however, carried considerable responsibility for tasks such as discipline, putting children to bed, supervising homework. Mothers saw themselves as carrying most responsibility for child care and household chores. Where men do get more involved than women, the researcher concludes that this usually involves tasks such as playing with the children, and taking them on outings. Mothers - Kiely concludes - are said to carry the weight of responsibility with respect to the less ‘glamorous’ tasks of disciplining children, helping with homework, getting them ready for bed, attending parents meetings at school.

Kiely suggests that employed fathers participated slightly more in preparing breakfast, washing the dishes and ironing than unemployed fathers, while significantly more unemployed fathers were involved in household repairs than employed fathers. In relation to child care there was no difference between the employed and unemployed groups, although slightly more unemployed fathers were involved in discipline and helping the children with homework (Kiely, 1996, p. 153). Of the 284 mothers who said that they were either presently working or had
worked outside the home since marriage, some 68% considered that their involvement in domestic work had not been affected by their outside work. The mothers whose husbands did not participate in child care/housework as much as the women would like were asked why this was so: some 4.5% said he was “too set in his ways”; 11% said husbands believed it to be the “wife's job”; 6.5% of the women saw it as her, the wife’s, job and that her husband was not good at it; 12.9% felt it was “the way husband was reared”; in 9% the “wife just does it, let's him away”; 28.4% felt that their husband was “lazy/not interested”; 25.2% put it down to their husband having “a demanding job”; while 2.6% gave “other” reasons (Kiely, 1996, p.150).

Table 4.2 Who is Mostly Responsible for Childcare Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Father Only</th>
<th>Mother Only</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Putting to Bed</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Work</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outings</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Meetings</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kiely, 1996, p.149.

According to Kiely, the research demonstrates that “the overall participation rates for fathers in household tasks and child care are low ... The highest rates of participation, even though these are low, are found with young educated, employed middle-class fathers whose wives are also employed and who have fewer children and are in marriages of less than 16 years” (Kiely, 1996, p.154). He suggests that the findings show that “the mothers are clearly the managers. They manage the internal affairs of the family. They take care of the children, do the household tasks and make
most of the decisions. The father, on the other hand, appears to do very little around the house except household repairs, play with the children, decide on what TV programme to watch, and are unlikely to change this low level of participation unless their wives become sick or go to hospital” (Kiely, 1996, p. 154).

On the basis of the findings presented, we find the certainty and judgement contained in this interpretation to be questionable. The data that Kiely presents (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2) could just as easily be read to suggest that fathers are doing more - or at least more than he is prepared to say. The moral reasoning which appears to underlie his perspective - that fathers should be doing more and because they are not it is unfair - is not made explicit. This is despite the mothers’ own moral reasoning which suggested a relatively high satisfaction level (70%) with the sexual division of labour that they themselves disclosed in the research. Kiely goes on to link the findings to what he refers to as the cultural uncertainty currently surrounding father’s roles and the considerable ‘role strain’ for men “caught between attempts to respond to an old role that no longer fits new families, and attempts to respond to confusing societal expectations” (1996, p. 157). Whether the research actually reveals any evidence of such ‘strain’ is questionable. This is because Kiely makes little or nothing of the fact that the research is based solely on mother’s accounts. This is important, not least because it is characteristic for fathers and mothers to give different and - often quite literally - conflicting accounts of their involvement in family life. Where differences occur, men invariably report that they do more than their wives say they do and men complain that what they do does not get enough notice (Marsiglio, 1995). The point here is not to cast doubt on the veracity of mothers’ accounts. Nor is it a simplistic demand for men to be given an opportunity to present the ‘case for the defence’. Interviewing fathers in no way guarantees that they emerge as ‘innocent’. Mens’ own accounts of what they do at home invariably reveal important gendered assumptions about parenting. Men, like women - for better or for worse - reveal realities about how both genders ‘do’ gender (Coltrane, 1989).
Returning to the fairness perspective, we wish to make two points. Firstly, it is important to lay bare the moral reasoning which underpins different perspectives on fatherhood and gender relations so that the assumptions which determine debates and public policy can be made visible and their own fairness and legitimacy critically examined and debated. Secondly, it is important that men’s voices are also heard if fatherhood is to be properly understood, as it should be, in terms of gender relations. Irish fathers’ own accounts of their participation in child care and domestic life remain to be documented. It bears emphasising too that children’s voices are almost completely absent from research, whether it is in terms of their perceptions of their mother’s and father’s roles, or of their own role as children and house-workers in the family.

What can be said, drawing on other empirical research and conceptual work, is that questions of fairness in domestic life are complex. To some extent the UCD study already bears this out since 70% of the mothers reported that their husbands did participate as much as they would like. Clearly, however, the impact of the social construction of motherhood and fatherhood is important as well as the actual choices which fathers and mothers have open to them.

4.3 The Developmental Perspective

“He didn’t speak to us much. It was that typical Irish thing, a father and son not really speaking to each other, not really knowing each other. ... . But was I close to him? No. I loved him and I admired him, but I didn’t really know him. He didn’t have that much to say. ... . Irish family life has many virtues, but emotional openness is not among them. It is, I believe, a curse of our culture that we find ourselves unable to tell those closest to us how much we care; expressions of love, gratitude and admiration, which should flow naturally between us, rather than make us squirm. My father was as much a victim of this syndrome as any other of his generation: he was content to show rather than to express. But expression is important too, as I know too well, having failed miserably and repeatedly to put it into practice down through the years. In the case of my father, though, I did find that kind of maturity which overcame my foolish fears. He did not die in doubt. I am glad of that”.

David Hanley, 1995.
In the 1990s, a new perspective is emerging which acknowledges the complexity of notions of fairness and accountability in child and family care from the perspective of both genders. It considers parenting not just as an issue of justice but of human growth and the management of developmental transitions. The implications of the developmental perspective are contradictory. On the one hand, it suggests that the social construction of gender, accountability and child care norms are such that there has been relatively little change in actual behaviour and there is a very long way to go before anything like equity in parenting becomes a reality. On the other hand, the assumption that men do not want to care and are exploiting their partners, and indeed children, at every opportunity has begun to be challenged. Some research is beginning to suggest that some men are caring much more actively than the paradigm of the 1980s and early 1990s suggested and that in many respects men want to care, if only a re-organisation of work and social life could mean that they have the chance. Put another way, it is argued that men will not change until the institutional and social barriers to active fatherhood are removed.

The evidence on which the developmental perspective is based appears to reflect changes in actual levels of paternal participation over the past decade, but it may also be a different way of reading and interpreting the available evidence. The developmental perspective looks behind the averages on which so much data on fatherhood is based to recognise variations in paternal behaviour. Thus, while one recent survey found that one in three fathers were “minimally involved”, it also found fathers who were spending 40-50 hours a week interacting with their children, and these were men who were in paid employment (Cohen, 1993; Burgess, 1997, p.65).

As Burgess observes, studies based on father’s self-reports about their involvement can be misleading because the men can even mislead themselves by greatly overestimating the amount of direct time they spend with children. One father she interviewed described himself as having a “close and passionate” relationship with
his three young children, yet he subsequently revealed that on weekdays he only saw them for a short time in the morning, never in the evenings, and also spent at least half of Saturday in the office. As she concludes, ‘no one could doubt that this father had intense and passionate feelings for his children, but whether he had close and passionate relationships with them seemed unlikely, and it was clear that no one had challenged his perceptions. Because average levels of father involvement are so low, any father who does more than a very little can be rated ‘highly involved’ by himself, his partner - and even by researchers’ (Burgess, 1997, p. 66, original emphasis). At the other extreme, it has also been found that father’s commitment to the non-provider aspects of their role may even be hidden in their public management of self so as to portray themselves as abiding by workplace norms that emphasise career commitment and honouring the provider role (Pleck, 1993). These forms of ‘impression management’ by men around conventional corporate and masculine norms require careful consideration in any evaluation which seeks to excavate the reality of what fathers do in families.

It is perhaps understandable that minimally involved fathers get relatively large amounts of attention in public discourse given that child welfare, gender justice and social order itself is reported to be so adversely affected by their lack of contribution. Yet it is crucial also to focus on those actively involved fathers who do exist, to acknowledge their presence, and attempt to learn from them and produce knowledge that can benefit other men and families as well as child care professionals and society at large. It appears that involved fathers are not inversely related to committed workers as has sometimes been thought. Marsiglio (1995, p. 17) points out that having a strong commitment to work identity does not preclude men from having a similar commitment to non-provider father roles too. Burgess (1997) found that the fathers who were most successful at work were those who were most involved and had quality relationships with their children. They were better time-managers and communicators at work. This speaks to another crucial theme of the developmental perspective: the positive effects that nurturing has on father’s
personal development as well as on their children and the quality of marital relationships.

The developmental perspective on fatherhood is also being generated by a qualitatively different outlook and set of research questions. Closer attention is being paid to the fact that judgements on issues of fairness are complex and researchers judgements of equity may be quite different from the actual judgements of mothers and fathers (Hawkins, et al, 1995). Moreover, if men are judged to be not caring or doing enough, the reasons for this are being explored in terms not simply of justice and fairness, but what men need, psychologically and socially, if they are to be helped to become good fathers. Caring has begun to be framed more positively as a personal development issue for men who have something to gain from active involvement with children and who need support in managing the developmental transition into fatherhood. The picture is being revised that fathers are resistant to taking on an active child care role in the family and that they are exploiting mothers. Burgess's work exemplifies this shift in orientation; one strand of her analysis goes so far as to argue that men's under-involvement can arise from women's reluctance to "give men room" and let go of the caring role because it gives women whatever meaning or status they have (Burgess, 1997). Others argue that increased paternal involvement can create its own problems because "women fear losing not only their traditional power and domination in the home if they allow men to assume even some of their former responsibilities, but their exclusive importance to children as well" (Pleck, cited in Segal, 1990, p. 48).

At the core of this perspective is recent theoretical work (see, especially, Hawkins, etal, 1995; Marsiglio, 1995) which has begun to rethink the debate on fathering by attempting to move beyond a singular concern with justice and domestic democracy. A developmental perspective relates to the notion that development proceeds through the entire life-course, and is not just a matter for childhood and adolescence. Like childhood, adulthood contains key periods of qualitative change - critical times
of developmental transitions. A developmental transition involves a "qualitative shift in perceptions of oneself and the world" and behavioural shifts that can be observed by others (Hawkins, et al, 1995, p.43). Parenthood represents just such a developmental transition for men and women. Following Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, it is argued that the primary developmental task of adulthood is learning to care for others (Erikson, 1963). This process Erikson labelled generativity. Generativity, or care, is defined as an interest in establishing and guiding the next generation. For Erikson, nurturing one's off-spring is the primary focus of this energy, although generativity can also be achieved by investing in other productive, creative or altruistic endeavours that make the world a better place for the next generation to live in (Hawkins et al, 1995, p.44). The challenge of achieving generativity is the main developmental stage in the adult phase of the life-course identified by Erickson. The tension at the core of the developmental stage of childhood is to emerge with a sense of basic trust and hope, while in adolescence the struggle surrounds developing a sense of faith in oneself and fidelity to an identity.

How successfully generativity is developed is influenced by how the individual has negotiated the earlier developmental stages. For Erikson, problems in the developmental life-course which lead to difficulties in developing generativity result in “self-indulgence and an obsessive need for pseudo intimacy ... often with a prevailing sense of stagnation and interpersonal impoverishment” (Hawkins, et al, 1995, p. 45).

Like all developmental transitions, parenthood is characterised by periods of uncertainty, confusion and significant disequilibrium for individuals as their inner, psychological worlds are reorganised and their behaviour patterns altered accordingly. Thus transitions can be more or less successful, depending on how the chaos and dis/reorientation that characterises them is managed. Exponents of this perspective acknowledge that women have a certain 'biological advantage', so to speak, over men in that they have an opportunity to form some kind of emotional relationship with the baby as it develops inside her during pregnancy. Women are
also better prepared psychologically and socially to make the transition because - for better or worse - girls are socialised for care-giving and boys for providing. Once the baby arrives, mothers tend to have numerous social supports to help them adjust to their roles, whereas society provides few supports for fathers (Hawkins, et al, 1995, p.51).

Thus concerted, conscious efforts have to be made if men are to make successful transitions into more active daily child care/family work. The reason many men do not make a successful transition into being active fathers is not simply because they choose to exploit their wives, but because their generative energy gets focused outside of their direct intimate relationships and they end up caring for the next generation through paid work and forms of altruistic endeavour. The suggestion is that if these processes are properly understood and developmental transitions carefully managed, men and women can eventually have similar developmental pathways as carers and become true co-parents. For instance, men's capacity to nurture and their motivation to become involved with their children increases dramatically around the time of birth. This emotional energy needs to be capitalised on by health care professionals and other potential support networks for men. The more that secure bonding and attachment occurs between father and child at this formative time, the greater the likelihood that the man will focus his generativity within the family through active involvement with his children through the life-cycle.

Like all parenting, fatherhood involves a form of “univocal reciprocity”, a “type of moral norm that encourages individuals to engage in social exchanges with others without expecting to receive direct or immediate reciprocation” (Marsiglio, 1995, p.83). Yet such investment is recognised to have huge rewards in enhancing the self and intimate relationships. Within this paradigm, it is recognised, and indeed encouraged, that women - who know the struggles involved in making the developmental transition to parenthood well - can be mentors for men. Men can be
helped to become more actively involved with children and develop generativity; the process of nurturing itself develops men’s and women's nurturing capacities. Thus not only does father’s involvement in child care benefit his off-spring, but children can, in turn, be a potent developmental force in men's lives, helping to promote their ability to nurture and care. Above all, according to this perspective, men need to get the message that "greater paternal participation need not be a personal sacrifice of patriarchal privilege for the sake of social justice; instead, it can be viewed as an important step in one's personal growth" (Hawkins, et al, 1995, p.52).

Once again, we need to acknowledge the plurality of men's responses to becoming fathers. Some men are still retreating from active fathering and no end of appeals to social justice and encouragement will alter that. Others are evidently struggling to (re)define themselves more directly in terms of their nurturing role and experiencing mixed results in terms of how they manage the tensions between their public role, self-definition and private worlds and commitments. Still others have successfully made the developmental transition to become “new fathers” in the most active sense possible of caring for children. If a fairness perspective sensitises us to the scope for injustice and men's avoidance of responsibility, the developmental perspective takes us into considering the evidence concerning how men genuinely struggle to become “good fathers” and in some cases actually achieve it. As one such father expressed it to a researcher: “You feel like you’re gifted by having a child, taking care of somebody and being responsible for their growth and development. It was just something I looked forward to ... someone being dependent on me, someone to share my life with, to take care of - that was my need, too” (Gerson, 1993, pp176-177).

Daly’s study of a small sample of 32 relatively new fathers with young children from “intact families” is an exemplar of such qualitative research which aims “to provide insight into the interactional and interpretive meanings of fatherhood
identity as they emerge from the experiences of fathers themselves” (Daly, 1995, p. 23). The study confirms that an important reason why fathers and men in general have struggled with change is lack of exposure to appropriate paternal role models. In other words, whereas women have invariably grown-up watching their mothers doing the child care and identifying with that in terms of their role, men are disadvantaged by a lack of preparatory experiences. The absence of early identification experiences with their own fathers handicaps men in their effort to become committed fathers. They have not seen men - their fathers in particular - engaged in emotionally involved parenting behaviour. As one researcher has observed, "men are attempting to meet heightened cultural expectations for fatherhood with a set of preparations that are rooted in the 1950s. The result of this lack of preparation appears to be an increased level of stress for fathers" (Daly, 1995, p.22).

Traditional fathers were invariably presented as negative role models and the new generation fathers generally reported feeling that they were making it up as they went along, without clear guidelines for good-enough fathering (Daly, 1995, p.33). The men drew from diverse sources and role models in fashioning their identities and parenting styles. They culled desired skills or techniques from the quiet observance of other fathers, with a tendency to search for specific instances of good fathering behaviour among their peers (Daly, 1995, p.35). Thus, “the process of role modelling appears to be characterised by a quiet absorption rather than deliberate and interactive pursuit” (Daly, 1995, p.36). The men’s mothers and wives were viewed as a further source of practical and tangible guidance on how to parent well.

Thus, without a “good father” mentor and having to creatively forge new rules for themselves, new generation fathers tend to have disparate reference points. As Daly concludes: “Without a readily available set of fatherhood models, these men have tended to focus on being a model to their own children to create for them a new set of standards for who father is. They seek to fill the space left by their own fathers with
a fuller and more committed presence that they hope will be experienced and remembered by their own children. In the resonant silence of their own father’s voices, they seek to proclaim a new expression of fatherhood” (Daly, 1995, p. 40).

### 4.4 Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter has reviewed the evidence concerning what fathers do in families and why they do - or do not do- what they do. In our analysis we have had to draw heavily on international research because no actual research involving fathers has ever been done in Ireland. Accordingly, a huge gap exists in our direct knowledge about fathering in the Irish context. The evidence we have reviewed suggests that there has broadly been an increase over time in fathers’ level of active involvement in child care and domestic tasks. There appears to be broad agreement, however, that paternal behaviour has not kept pace with changing attitudes and cultural expectations that fathers should become more involved. The reasons why this is the case depends very much on how one reads the evidence and this, in turn, depends on the theoretical perspective and moral reasoning that is brought to bear on the evidence. We have therefore given considerable attention to deconstructing this moral reasoning and critically analysing the dominant perspectives on fatherhood.

We have identified two perspectives which have sought to account for fathers’ roles in the home. The fairness perspective - which developed out of a feminist paradigm in the 1970s - suggests that fathers tend to be under-involved at home, leaving the bulk of responsibility with their partners. This perspective emphasises the promotion of equality and “domestic democracy”. The developmental perspective - which emerged in the 1990s - emphasises that adulthood is a stage in the human life-cycle that is characterised by change, growth and development; generativity, or ‘care’ for the next generation, is viewed as central to the lives of adult men and women. As we have shown, the developmental perspective raises challenging questions about the complex nature of fairness in gender relations and domestic life.
It does not deny the significance of issues of justice and democracy at home, but places the emphasis on what fathers - no less than mothers - need in order to make a successful developmental transition into parenthood and achieve generativity through an active commitment to care for their children. Unless adequate personal, institutional and cultural supports are in place for fathers as well as mothers, the chances are that men and women will continue to have differing ways of expressing care: women through active engagement in child care and the domain of the intimate; men through investment in work, and forms of altruistic endeavour which extend beyond the home. The primary meaning that ends up being conferred on fatherhood is one that broadly defines it outside of the domain of the intimate and the direct nurturing of children.

The chapter has considered crucial questions which, in many ways, are at the heart of this book: “just what is a good father?” “what criteria should be used to make such judgements and determine public policy?” The answers lie in an integration of the fairness and developmental perspectives. A good father is one who is open to developing his capacity for emotional communication and is active in nurturing, care work and being fully present for his partner and children within the parameters of what they have negotiated as constituting fairness and domestic democracy in this family. This must be go beyond common-sense reasoning to take account of the impact of the social construction of motherhood and fatherhood so that fairness is based on meaningful practices of accountability in parenting.

The overall implication of this analysis is that public policy should seek to create family friendly measures, especially in the workplace, which maximise the choices men and women have to negotiate roles and responsibilities and will allow fathers as well as mothers the time and space for child care. Increased involvement of men in child care will not become a widespread reality until and unless there is real economic equality for women which makes it possible for couples to make affordable choices about which partner should stay at home. This will also require
that greater value is placed on child care. Quite simply, fathering must be institutionally rewarded in the public domain. Relatedly, care work needs to be valued and rewarded so that it will be seen as a positive choice for men as well as women, whether that work is done in the private domain of the family or in the public provision of child care. Social intervention needs to be strategically focused on promoting men's caring capacities in the successful “developmental transitions” into fatherhood. As ever, achieving this will rest heavily on individual men’s motivation and their capacities for intimacy and open negotiation with women. It will also rest heavily on the provision of adequate supports for fathers and on the willingness and ability of the State’s family support services to include fathers in its work.
Chapter Five

Fathers and Work

Kieran McKeown

“Within the last decade someone upped the ante on the tokens required for manhood. A generation ago providing for one’s family was the only economic requirement. Nowadays, supplying the necessities entitles a man only to marginal respect. If your work allows you only to survive you are judged to be not much of a man. To be poor in a consumerist society is to have failed the manhood test”.

Sam Keen, 1991, p.53.

5.1 Introduction

Working outside the home is a central part of the way in which men have been fathers and continue to be fathers. Paid work is how fathers traditionally played their breadwinning role within families while mothers did the unpaid work of caring for the children at home. In the traditional arrangement, men were the exclusive breadwinners and women were the exclusive carers. However, as the analysis in Chapter One has shown, these arrangements are changing and fathers were the exclusive breadwinners in only half of all families in Ireland in 1996. As the proportion of women working outside the home has grown, fathers and mothers increasingly share the breadwinning role with the result that three out of ten families in Ireland in 1996 were dual earners. The traditional arrangements have also been changed by the persistence of long-term unemployment among certain classes of men which has effectively erased their breadwinning role. In addition, the emergence of one parent families, the majority of which have no earners, has resulted in two out of ten Irish families having no earners. Thus the relationship between work and family, and between work and fathers, is in the process of change. This, in turn, is impacting on relationships within the family and, as
Chapter Four suggests, this is likely to have longer-term impacts on the domestic division of labour between fathers and mothers.

Work outside the home is also one of the greatest determinants of a father’s involvement with his children since it determines, inter alia, the amount of time he can spend with them. The traditional breadwinning role required little or no involvement by fathers in the physical or emotional care of children. This pattern too is changing, not just for economic reasons but also because expectations about what constitutes a good father are changing. As the analysis in Chapter One revealed, the physical and emotional absences of fathers are less acceptable to both their children and their partners and this is obliging some men to reflect on their respective commitments to work and family or, as Freud might put it, to work and to love.

It is against this background that a special analysis of the 1996 Labour Force Survey was undertaken in order to find out about the characteristics of men and fathers at work, as well as women and mothers at work. The chapter examines this data in the context of policies designed to reconcile the competing demands of work and home and teases out the implications for parenting. The chapter is divided into five main sections. Our analysis begins by looking at some of the characteristics of fathers, particularly those which impact on his relationship to work: housing status, employment status and hours worked, including unsocial hours (section 5.2). This section compares fathers to other men and mothers to other women as well as a cross-comparison between fathers and mothers. The policy implications of this analysis, particularly from the point of view of reconciling the competing demands of work and home, are discussed in section 5.3. Specific attention is paid to child care provision since this is one of the main ways of helping parents to meet their work and family obligations (section 5.4). Finally, our main conclusions and recommendations are presented in section 5.5.
5.2 Some Characteristics of Fathers

“The differences between the sexes is being eroded as both sexes become defined by work. It is often said that the public world of work is a man’s place and that as women enter it they will become increasingly ‘masculine’ and lose their ‘femininity’. To think this way is to miss the most important factor of the economic world. Economic man, the creature who defines itself within the horizons of work and consumption, is not man in any full sense of the word, but a being who has been neutralised, degendered, rendered subservient to the laws of the market. The danger of economics is not that it turns women into men but that it destroys the fullness of both manhood and womanhood”

Sam Keen, 1991, p. 65.

Our analysis distinguishes two types of father: younger fathers, at least one of whose children is under the age of 15 and older fathers, all of whose children are over the age of 15. Both categories of father, as the data in Table A5.1a reveals, are older than non-fathers; half of non-fathers are under the age of 35. The majority of younger fathers (62%) are aged 35-49 compared to the majority of older fathers (57%) who are in the age group 50-64. In general, as Table A5.1b reveals, fathers tend to be a little older than mothers and this suggests that women tend to enter motherhood at a slightly younger age than men enter fatherhood. This is influenced by the age at marriage, even if marriage and parenthood are not as closely tied as formerly: in 1990, the average age at marriage for men (28.6 years) was two years older than for women (26.6 years) (Department of Health, 1993, p.11).

Housing Status

Around four fifths of the dwellings in Ireland are owner-occupied. In view of this, it is not surprising that the majority of men and women - irrespective of whether they are parents or not - live in a house which they are buying or have bought. Nevertheless it is worth noting that fathers and mothers are more likely to be in the owner-occupied sector than non-fathers and non-mothers (Tables A5.2a and A5.2b). This reflects the fact that buying a house is usually part of the process of preparing for parenthood and, as will be seen, the ensuing financial responsibility seems to affect their overall participation in the world of work. As might be expected,
younger fathers and mothers are more likely to be buying than to have bought their house. A minority of both younger fathers (8%) and older fathers (5%) live in local authority houses. Due to the higher incidence of lone parenting among women, a higher proportion of both younger mothers (11%) and older mothers (6%) also live in local authority houses.

**Employment Status**

Parenthood brings with it financial as well as other responsibilities. In practice, this means that work outside the home is an extremely important aspect of being a responsible parent. This is particularly the case for fathers whose breadwinning role is important to the family finances as well as to their own self-image as a father. As indicated in Chapter One, the father is the sole earner in about half of all households in Ireland (see Table 1.2 above). The data in Table A5.3 reveals that younger fathers are more likely to be in full-time employment than any other category of men: 81% of them are in full-time employment compared to 60% of older fathers and 55% of non-fathers. This clearly suggests a connection between the financial responsibilities of younger fathers and their participation in employment.

The employment status of mothers differ from fathers in two important respects. First, the proportion of mothers in full-time employment is much lower than for fathers, as Table A5.3b reveals. However it is significant that the proportion of younger mothers in full-time employment (28%) is nearly twice as high as the corresponding proportion for older mothers (15%). Second, the proportion of mothers in part-time employment is much higher than for fathers. Younger mothers are more than four times as likely to be in part-time employment as younger fathers (14% compared to 3%) but are also nearly twice as likely to be in part-time employment as older mothers (14% compared to 9%). It is clear from this that the financial pressure on younger parents - both mothers and fathers - is making itself felt in their higher employment rates.
**Hours Worked**

The level of contact between parents and children is affected less by employment rates per se and more by the number of hours which they spend at work outside the home each week. In general, there is a tendency for fathers to work slightly longer hours than non-fathers even if the overall average, as Table A5.4a reveals, is around 46 hours per week; a third of fathers (33%) work 50 hours per week or more compared to only a quarter of non-fathers (27%). This is significant in view of the fact that, under The Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997, the maximum working week is 48 hours.

Mothers, where they are employed, work an average of 31-32 hours per week outside the home, as Table A5.4b reveals. This is exactly 15 hours less than the number of hours worked outside the home by fathers. By contrast with men, non-mothers work longer hours than mothers.

It is particularly interesting to note that fathers whose partners are working outside the home spend less hours at work than fathers whose partners are not working (see Table A5.4a). This suggests that the hours worked by fathers are influenced by the employment status, and therefore the earnings, of their partners. The reverse however is the case with mothers: mothers whose partners are employed work longer hours than mothers whose partners are unemployed or inactive (see Table A5.4b). This suggests that mothers and fathers may have different ways of looking at work outside the home but this would require further investigation.

Irish men work the same average number of hours as British men - about 45 hours per week - but both categories work significantly longer than the average for the 15 EU Member States which stood at 42 hours in 1995 (Eurostat, 1996, p.164). The usual working hours of Irish women, by contrast, is much closer to the EU norm (Ibid). Data on the hours worked by fathers and mothers is not available at EU level. However, selected studies indicate that Irish fathers work longer hours than some of their EU counterparts. In Denmark - where the maximum working week is 37 hours
- fathers of young children work an average of 41 hours per week, five hours less than Irish fathers. However Danish mothers worked longer hours than Irish mothers at 34 hours per week (Pruzan, 1993, pp.168-170; Council of Europe, p.104). Irish fathers also work longer hours than British fathers: 27% of fathers in Britain but 33% of fathers in Ireland work 50 hours a week or more (Ferri and Smith, 1996, p.18). Irish mothers also work longer hours than British mothers: 23% of mothers in Britain but 51% of mothers in Ireland work 35 hours a week or more (Ibid). The tendency for Irish fathers to work longer hours than non-fathers is also replicated in the Norwegian experience (Jensen, 1993, p.160).

The hours which parents spend in work outside the home are a useful indicator of how they meet their financial responsibilities. However they do not capture the distribution of those hours over the week, particularly where the parents may be involved in shift work, evening work, night work, Saturday work or Sunday work. The data in Table A5.5a reveals that a small proportion of fathers do shift work, nearly half do evening work, a quarter do night work, two thirds do Saturday work and two fifths do Sunday work. In this respect, there is almost no difference between younger and older fathers or between fathers and non-fathers. However there are significant differences between fathers and mothers, as Table A5.5b reveals, with fathers being much more likely to work unsocial hours than mothers. British fathers do more evening and night work than Irish fathers but less Saturday work and similar Sunday work (Ferri and Smith, 1996, p.19). British working mothers are more similar to Irish working mothers except that they do more evening work than Irish mothers (Ibid).

One way of overcoming the enforced absences of work outside the home - and one that is increasingly feasible in sectors which utilise modern telecommunications - is to work from home. In view of this, it is worth noting that a significant minority (15%) of younger fathers usually or sometimes work at home; this rises to 19% for older fathers (see Table A5.6a). However this trend does not seem to be influenced by fathering per se since the proportion of non-fathers who work at home is very
similar to young fathers. However it is noteworthy, as Table A5.5b reveals, that men are twice as likely as women to work from home, irrespective of whether they are parents or not. This however needs to be seen in the context that a much higher proportion of women “work” in the home, albeit without pay.

The data analysed in this section was based on a distinction between fathers and non-fathers and between mothers and non-mothers. Beneath this distinction lies an assumption that parenting makes a difference to the way in which men and women participate in the world of work. Our analysis effectively confirms this while also bringing out significant differences between fathers and mothers. Fathers are much more involved in the world of work outside the home than mothers and work much longer and more unsocial hours. This clearly reflects the gendered division of labour both inside and outside the home, even if that division is becoming much less clear-cut. From the perspective of fathers, the analysis raises the question as to why some of them - particularly the 33% who work 50 hours a week or more - work such long hours. Are they constrained to do it by financial commitments, job insecurity and the pressures of the job? Do they want to do it because their employment role is central to their aspirations, ambitions and satisfactions? Do they experience any tension between their role as worker and their role as father? Is it even conceivable that some men prefer to stay at work in order to avoid the responsibilities of fathering and family life? The answers to these questions are unknown and require further research if we are to understand how men live out their role as fathers. The attitudes of mothers to the long hours worked by fathers and their role in negotiating and deciding on those hours would also have to be considered to understand how families share their parenting roles and responsibilities.

5.3 Reconciling Work and Home

“Merely breaking down the barriers faced by women on the labour market and in public life is not enough. The next breakthrough is a change in men”.
Ingvar Carlsson, Prime Minister of Sweden, 1995.
There is a growing recognition in policy circles that many parents have difficulty in reconciling the competing demands of work and family to the satisfaction of their employers, their children and their partners. At the same time, these difficulties are not insurmountable and some research evidence suggests how parents - both mothers and fathers - manage to reconcile the conflict. According to Burgess: “When we began our interviews with fathers for this book, one surprising finding was how often our most involved fathers also turned out to be successful in career terms and conversely how often our least involved fathers seemed to be struggling” (1997, pp.160-161). Among the reasons suggested for this are good time-management, communication and people skills; in addition, “not one [father] had a consuming hobby or played much sport or was very involved in the community. These working fathers, like so many working mothers, seemed to focus on just two main areas; their work and their children” (Ibid, p.163).

In recognition of the need to reconcile the competing demands of work and family, a number of EU countries have introduced - or are introducing - measures designed to make the workplace more family-friendly and flexible so that parents can become more involved in the care of their children. Family-friendly initiatives cover a wide range of measures, as Table 5.1 illustrates.

**Table 5.1  Summary of Family-Friendly Initiatives**

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<th>Category of Family-Friendly Initiative</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Flexible Working</strong></td>
<td><strong>Leave Arrangements</strong></td>
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<td>- job-sharing</td>
<td>- maternity leave</td>
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<td>- flexitime</td>
<td>- paternity leave</td>
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<tr>
<td>- flexiplace (working from home)</td>
<td>- adoption leave</td>
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<td>- part-time working</td>
<td>- parental leave</td>
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<td>- term-time working</td>
<td>- compassionate / bereavement leave</td>
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<td>- care for people with disabilities</td>
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The introduction of family friendly measures in the workplace was - and to a large extent still is - seen as a way of helping women to reconcile the competing demands of home and work. This however is slowly changing as men are doing more domestic work (though still significantly less than women) and women are doing more paid work (though still significantly more than women). This finding and its implications were written up in a multinational study of housework covering seven countries and three decades: “Women (wives) with jobs do substantially less unpaid work now than equivalently placed women did one or two decades ago. And men (presumably their husbands) do significantly more domestic work. ... . And the consequence is, jobs can no longer be organised in ways that conflict with domestic responsibilities. Increasingly (if the trends we have described continue) the husbands of those women seeking the jobs will themselves need jobs which are organised in ways that allow them to fulfil their domestic responsibilities” (Gershuny and Robinson, 1991, p. 180).

In 1996, the Irish Government and the social partners agreed - in Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness - to support the growth of “family friendly policies in employment, in line with the recommendations contained in the policy document issued by the Employment Equality Agency in 1996” (Government of Ireland, 1996, p.30). One of these family-friendly measures is parental leave and the Government committed itself to implementing the EU Directive on Parental Leave by June 1998 (Government of Ireland, 1996, p.30). The main provision of this directive is to give “men and women workers an individual right to parental leave.
on grounds of the birth or adoption of a child to enable them to take care of that child, for at least three months” (EU Directive on Parental Leave, 1996). The Directive also obliges Member States to take the necessary measures to entitle workers time off from work for “urgent family reasons” (Ibid).

The experience of parental leave in Sweden and Denmark is that the fathers who avail of it are typically men who are well-educated in well-paid, permanent jobs and married to women who are also well-educated and in well-paid jobs (Carlsen, 1993, p.199). However the uptake of parental leave by fathers in Denmark (3%) is much lower than in Sweden (50%). The reasons for this, according to one Danish commentator, are that “the scheme is designed in such a way that not many fathers are likely to make use of it. It is available after 14 weeks of maternity leave, during which period mothers have learnt the caring role and - many at any rate - are still breast feeding. ... At this point, established routines have to be changed and new ones established, which are changed once more at the end of the parental leave period after the first six months” (Pruzan, 1993, p.174). One of the possibilities being considered in Denmark is that parental leave could be made part-time for fathers as a way of reducing their fears about losing contact with work while also facilitating the return of women to work (Ibid). The implications of this for Ireland should be carefully studied before the Government implements the EU Directive on Parental Leave by June 1998.

Another factor contributing to the low uptake of parental leave by fathers is the culture of the workplace. Many workplaces do not expect men who are fathers to behave any differently to men who are not fathers. As a result, the provision of more flexible working arrangements for fathers may not lead to greater involvement by fathers in the care of their children unless it is seen as “normal” for a father to wish to spend more time with his children (see Carlsen, 1993, pp. 204-205). Deeper still perhaps is the belief - possibly shared by both mothers and fathers - that the child needs the mother much more than the father and this can blunt the incentive to
make adjustments at work which would allow fathers to spend more time with their children.

Experience in a number of countries suggests that the uptake of parental leave and other family friendly measures by men is inhibited by considerations such as loss of earnings, increased workload resulting from taking time off and the overall impact on their career. One researcher has argued that “the reasons for low take-up by fathers [of parental leave] are simple. Unless parental leave is paid at full salary, the family loses because the father is usually higher paid. Employers don’t usually hire replacement labour for the short time the men are away, so a backlog develops at work, and in addition the men fear a negative impact on their careers. At home there are so few other stay-at-home dads that fathers often feel out of place, and spend most of the time on their own with their children” (Burgess, 1997, p.166; see also Carlsen, 1993, p.200). It should also be remembered that decisions about parental leave are rarely taken by the father alone but are negotiated by both parents in the light of their overall circumstances and priorities (Carlsen, 1993, p. 206). The key issue here is that fathers and mothers should be aware of the choices which they are making - insofar as their circumstances allow them to make choices - between their roles as workers and their roles as parents.

Paternity leave is different from parental leave which may be taken over a much longer period following the birth of the child by either or both parents. Paternity leave - at least as practiced in Sweden and Denmark - usually involves two weeks leave by the father around the birth of his child; in Sweden, virtually all fathers take paternity leave and in Denmark, about half of all fathers take paternity leave (Carlsen, 1993). However in both cases, it is rare for the full allowable period to be taken. Although there is no statutory provision for paternal leave in Ireland, a sample of fathers studied in one Irish maternity hospital reported that “51% of fathers took holiday leave, 3% had official paternity leave and a further 12% obtained compassionate leave. The average duration of time off was 1.4 weeks”
(Council of Europe, 1995, p.233). Provision of maternity leave is governed by the Maternity (Protection of Employees) Act, 1981 which provides for 14 weeks paid leave and a further 4 weeks unpaid leave.

The family-friendly measures proposed by the Government in Partnership 2000 have the potential to facilitate greater involvement by fathers in the care of their children and families. However the realisation of this potential will not be easy because fathers - and men generally - are less likely to avail of these measures than women and mothers. This was amply confirmed in a recent study of flexible working in Ireland which showed that “job sharing, career breaks and extended parental leave encourage more women than men to trade full-time continuous jobs and careers for extra time off” (Fynes, Morrissey, Roche, Whelan and Williams, 1996, p.227). As a result, flexible working arrangements can leave men’s working lives almost untouched and can reinforce existing gender differences between men and women both at work and at home, as fathers work full-time and mothers work part-time.

The response of men and fathers to flexible working arrangements may itself be influenced by the way in which those measures are presented and promoted. As indicated above (see Introduction), it is possible to advance four different reasons or perspectives for introducing family-friendly measures in the workplace, particularly from the perspective of employees: (i) benefits to women in the form of greater equality in the labour market and in the domestic division of labour (ii) benefits to men in the form of greater involvement as fathers with their children which can lead to their own personal development and growth (iii) benefits to children’s development as a result of being emotionally close to both parents and (iv) benefits to families in supporting the interdependent relationships - economic, social and emotional - which holds its members together, including members of the extended family. In Ireland, most of the arguments in favour of family-friendly measures in the workplace are advanced from the perspective of women’s equality in the labour market (see for example, Second Commission on the Status of Women, 1993, Chapter
Three; Employment Equality Agency, 1996). The same also appears to be the case in other countries. There are inherent dangers in this, as the Danish experience has shown.

In Denmark, measures which are presented as “equality measures” are seen as “women’s issues” and tend to elicit little involvement from men (Carlsen, 1993, p.203). One researcher with the Danish Equal Status Council made the following observations about the equality perspective after reading 1,500 pages of transcribed interviews with Danish fathers on their low uptake of parental leave: “the work towards equality is not accustomed to dealing with men, not accustomed to speaking men’s language and perhaps does not even understand men’s language. .... . It suddenly occurred to me that only one of the interviewees had used the word ‘equality’ - and this was in spite of the fact that they knew that I was from the Equal Status Council. It suddenly occurred to me that equality is not a word men normally use. Similarly, ‘care’. Men do not nurture their children; they are together with their children. They do things with their children - whether it be sport, gardening or hoovering. ... . Men have many opinions about equality and not least about men’s relationship with children but they use other words that we - the professional equality worker - are not accustomed to” (Carlsen, 1993, p.203).

One of the lessons to emerge from this is that the agenda behind the introduction and implementation of family-friendly measures in the workplace needs to broadened. This agenda needs to include men and children as well as women and the benefits that can accrue, over the course of a life, of sharing work and caring responsibilities more equitably. It should not be assumed that men and women will see the benefits of family-friendly measures in the workplace in exactly the same way.

We also wish to draw attention to the use of gender-neutral language in discussions of family-friendly measures. There is very little usage of the terms “father” or
“mother” in this literature even though it is precisely by virtue of being fathers and mothers that the need for family-friendly measures in the workplace arises. For example, a recent report on family-friendly initiatives in the workplace refers mainly to “employees” and “workers”, occasionally to “men” and “women”, but seldom to “fathers” and “mothers” (Employment Equality Agency, 1996). A similar gender-neutral language is used by the government and the social partners: for example, in Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness, their commitment to childcare and family-friendly policies in the workplace are cited without making any reference to “fathers” and “mothers” (Government of Ireland, 1996, p.30). The issue here is not just pedantic; if it is an objective of government policy to promote greater involvement of fathers in the care of their children while also promoting the involvement of mothers in the world of paid work, then the inherent value of those roles needs to be explicitly named. The absence of any references to fathers and mothers in matters designed specifically to support those roles is a little contradictory and may even undermine the potential of those measures to achieve their objectives. Both Government and the social partners have a shared responsibility in ensuring that joint parenting is perceived as the ideal for both fathers and mothers and that the workplace must change to accommodate this ideal.

Finally, it needs to be emphasised that family friendly measures, as the term is normally used, do not cover the issue of the number of hours worked by fathers even though this is one of the most important factors determining employed fathers’ involvement with children (see Ferri and Smith, 1996). In essence, family-friendly measures will only be effective in improving the balance between work and family life - and promoting joint parenting - if their net effect is to create real choices for couples, including reducing the excessive hours worked by some fathers.
5.4 Childcare Facilities and Fathers

Childcare is the bridge between work and family which helps to resolve the tensions which arise in meeting the competing obligations of both. In many countries, including Ireland, childcare tends to be seen as a women’s issue being designed to help women enter or re-enter the labour force. For example, the Second Commission on the Status of Women states that childcare is an equality issue because women’s responsibilities for childcare in the home means that, in the absence of childcare, they are not able to compete equally with men in the labour market: “Childcare is an equality issue because the unequal distribution of responsibility presents barriers to participation by women with children in employment, education and training” (Second Commission on the Status of Women, 1993, p.137). Reflecting this, the Pilot Childcare Initiative (introduced in 1994 and ongoing in 1997) was introduced by the Minister for Equality and Law Reform with the following rationale: “to enable women undertake education, training, re-training and employment opportunities which they would be unable to do, in the absence of a childcare facility” (see McKeown and Fitzgerald, 1997, p.4). More recently, the government and the social partners - in Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness - affirmed their commitment to childcare in the following terms: “childcare is clearly an important issue in promoting equality for women, and especially in promoting equal opportunities in employment” (Government of Ireland, 1996, p.30; see also National Economic and Social Council, 1996, pp. 209-210; Government of Ireland, 1997, pp. 16-17).

It is true that childcare tends to be of most direct and immediate benefit to mothers in view of the private division of labour within many families between the father as breadwinner and the mother as carer of the children. Some fathers who are separated and have primary responsibility for the care of the children also benefit but these are relatively few in number compared to the number of women. However childcare can be of indirect benefit to fathers because it helps the mother
share in the breadwinning role for the family and, other things being equal, creates the option for both parents to share the “investment” and the “involvement” roles of parenting with the possibilities for enrichment which that can bring. This applies as much to two earner families as to families where the father is unemployed or families where the parents are divorced.

In Ireland, there is no overall coherent policy driving and shaping the development of childcare facilities for working parents. One recent report found that seven different departments of government have an involvement in childcare but no one department has overall responsibility for the childcare sector as a whole (McKeown and Fitzgerald, 1997, pp.7-8). Moreover, most state expenditure on childcare facilities tends to have a predominantly “child protection” function rather than a “gender equality” function. From the beginning of 1997, the government and the social partners - in Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness - have committed themselves to “develop a strategy which integrates the different strands of the current arrangements for the development and delivery of childcare and early educational services” (Government of Ireland, 1996, p.30). This, in conjunction with the development of family-friendly policies and practices in the workplace, could have a significant impact depending on the scale of resources applied and the commitment to promoting childcare as a measure of benefit to both fathers as well as mothers.

One aspect of childcare which has not received adequate public attention is the virtual absence of men from this type of work. As growing numbers of women have entered the labour force, parents have handed the care of their children over to other women - since men are virtually absent from the childcare sector in the broadest sense - thereby retaining children in the sphere of women. One commentator has described this process as “the feminization of childhood” (Jensen, 1993, p.151). Viewed from this perspective, it is possible that the involvement of men with children may actually be diminishing as more children are being placed in childcare.
This trend may also be compounded by the fact that the children of separated and unmarried parents may be brought up entirely by the mother in a process that is strongly re-enforced by the law and the legal system (see Chapter Six below).

The reasons for the absence of men from childcare and related work are many and inter-related. They involve pay since caring work is normally poorly paid. They involve attitudes since caring is often seen as inappropriate work for men; some men may see it as “sissy” work rather than “macho” work. In a mutually reinforcing cycle, the predominance of women in childcare and related work may itself be a disincentive to some men entering this work because it involves entering a “woman’s world” without the support of other men. It is also worth noting that men are often perceived as dangerous in the context of childcare and this has probably even further alienated them from involvement in this sector. There can be little doubt that the perception of men and fathers as “dangerous” is attributable to the widespread - and wholly appropriate - reporting of child physical and sexual abuse cases and statistics, even if only a tiny minority of men are known to be involved (see Chapter Six below). Any strategy to involve more men in childcare would need to address the issue of low pay - which needs to be addressed irrespective of men - and the attitudes and values of men about care work.

The consequences of gender imbalances in the childcare sector seem likely to have long-term consequences in terms of perpetuating, in the minds of children, the image that women, but not men, are the “natural” carers of children. As a result, the gender imbalance in the delivery of childcare may itself undermine the objective which it is trying to promote, namely, reducing the gendered division of labour between home and work. As a result, the potential of these services to promote radical cultural changes in attitudes about men’s potential role in childcare are being missed. In addition, children are missing the benefit of having men within these services. In our view, any long-term strategy for childcare would need to address
the issue of gender imbalance in the staffing of these services, possibly by setting targets and taking appropriate action to achieve them.

5.5 Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

“When I was growing up to become a man in a society which was more patriarchal than today, the attitude which I acquired was that work was, to a great extent, a chance for me to be something. What I could become myself was actually more important than the results of my work. The most essential thing about an occupation was that it was a means of acquiring power (mainly, but not solely, because it could lead to wealth). If I worked, I could acquire a position which would give me a value in other people’s eyes. This attitude made work a strain. Life became a struggle, in which I had to fight in order to progress as far as possible on the career ladder.

Nowadays, I have another view of work and its meaning. This view affects me as a man, since working-life is such an important part of a man’s life. Work is not a means by which I must prove my worth or acquire ascendancy, but a means by which I can create. It is the results of my work which are of importance, not what it can make me. I exist to serve life. I am to create together with other people. My work is not a context in which I struggle against others to win influence. It is a context in which I have the best chances of achieving something if I open myself up to a spirit of community with others. I do not need to compete with women or with other men. After all, we are all essentially equal. But we all have different abilities when it comes to handling problems. And we are best able to make progress when we combine our different abilities”


This chapter has examined the different ways in which fathers have been involved in the world of work. Drawing upon the results of a special analysis of the 1996 Labour Force Survey, the chapter has shown that younger fathers, defined as fathers with any child under the age of 15, are more likely to be in full-time employment than any other category of men: 81% of them are in full-time employment compared to 60% of older fathers and 55% of non-fathers. The proportion of mothers in full-time employment is much lower than for fathers although the proportion in part-time employment is much higher. In general, there is a tendency for fathers to work slightly longer hours than non-fathers even if the overall average for both is around 46 hours per week; a third of fathers (33%) work 50 hours per week or more. Mothers typically work an average of 15 hours per week less than fathers. Fathers are also more likely to work unsocial hours than mothers: two thirds of fathers do Saturday work, nearly half do evening work, and two fifths do Sunday work, and a quarter do night work. In this respect, there is almost no difference between younger and older fathers or between fathers and non-fathers. In general, Irish
fathers and mothers seem to work longer hours outside the home than some of their EU counterparts.

Many countries are introducing family-friendly measures in order to help parents cope with the competing demands of work and family. These measures include flexible working, breaks, leave arrangements, and other initiatives, notably childcare. In Ireland, the Government and the social partners committed themselves in 1996 to introducing more family friendly measures in the workplace, including the EU Directive on Parental Leave by June 1998. Our review of the literature suggested that the introduction of family friendly measures in the workplace does not automatically imply that those measures will be taken up by fathers. The reasons for this are many but include loss of earnings which can have a negative effect on the entire family, increased workload resulting from taking time off and the fear that taking leave for family reasons may have a negative impact on one’s career. In addition, the culture of the workplace can discourage men from availing of family friendly measures because it does not expect men who are fathers to behave any differently to men who are not fathers.

In Ireland, as elsewhere, there is a danger that family friendly measures in the workplace may be perceived solely as measures to promote the equality of women. This is a danger because the net effect of these measures, however unintended, could be to reinforce rather than reduce the existing gendered division of labour both at home and in work. In other words, the manner in which family-friendly measures are implemented and promoted could be just as important as the measures themselves. Accordingly, we recommend that the Government and the social partners give serious consideration to ensuring that family-friendly measures in the workplace are promoted as measures designed to facilitate both fathers and mothers in meeting their parenting responsibilities. It should not be assumed that men and women will see the benefits of family-friendly measures in the workplace in exactly the same way. To date, almost all of the arguments in favour of family friendly
measures in the workplace are presented as having benefits for mothers; unless the corresponding benefit for fathers are also highlighted, these measures are likely to be taken up disproportionately by mothers. In this regard, we would also recommend that the language used to promote family-friendly measures is less gender-neutral and neutered and uses terms like “father” and “mother” to indicate that it is precisely for them and their children that the measures are being introduced.

It also needs to be emphasised that family friendly measures, as the term is normally used, do not cover the number of hours worked by fathers even though this is one of the most important factors determining employed fathers’ involvement with children. In essence, family-friendly measures will only be effective in improving the balance between work and family life - and promoting joint parenting - if their net effect is to create real choices for couples, including reducing the excessive hours worked by some fathers.

Childcare is an extremely important initiative within the overall context of family friendly measures in the workplace. From the beginning of 1997, the Irish government and the social partners have committed themselves to “develop a strategy which integrates the different strands of the current arrangements for the development and delivery of childcare and early educational services” (Government of Ireland, 1996, p.30). As with other family friendly measures in the workplace, our analysis revealed that childcare tends to be seen as a women’s issue and this can reduce its overall effectiveness from the point of view of breaking down the gendered division of labour in the home and at work. We acknowledge that change in this area appears to be slow and complex but it would be helped if the arguments in favour of childcare addressed themselves specifically to the needs and benefits of fathers rather than assuming that what is of benefit to mothers is automatically of benefit to fathers. In other words, we recommend that more attention be give to the way in which childcare is presented and delivered with a view to ensuring that it is
seen as relevant and of benefit not only to children and mothers but to fathers as well.

Our analysis drew attention to the virtual absence of men from childcare work. The reasons for this are many and inter-related. They involve low pay, the attitude which sees it as inappropriate work for men and the fears of some men about entering a world that is presently the almost exclusive domain of women. However we also suspect that many men have become alienated from childcare because the wholly justified reporting of child abuse cases involving men has created a more generalised perception that all men are dangerous in the context of childcare. Whatever the reasons, we believe that the consequences of gender imbalance in the childcare sector are likely to have long-term consequences in terms of perpetuating, in the minds of children, the image that women, but not men, are the “natural” carers of children. As a result, the gender imbalance in the delivery of childcare may itself undermine the objective which it is trying to promote, namely, reducing the gendered division of labour between home and work. In our opinion, this gender imbalance is also a loss for the children who miss the benefit of having caring men in these services. Accordingly, we recommend that a discussion document should be prepared on gender imbalances in the childcare sector with a view to developing a strategy for addressing the barriers inhibiting men’s involvement in this sector and the measures required to overcome them, consistent with maintaining the highest level of service for children.
Appendix to Chapter Five

Table A5.1a  Ages of Fathers Compared to All Men in Ireland, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Younger Fathers (1) %</th>
<th>Older Fathers (2) %</th>
<th>Non-Fathers (3) %</th>
<th>All Men (4) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) For the purpose of this analysis, a younger father is defined as a man over the age of 20 who has any child under the age of 15 years and lives with that child. Using this definition, there were approximately 373,000 younger fathers in Ireland in 1996, equivalent to 69% of all fathers.
(2) For the purpose of this analysis, an older father is defined as a man over the age of 20 all of whose children are over the age of 15 years and who lives with these children. Using this definition, there were approximately 166,000 older fathers in Ireland in 1996, equivalent to 31% of all fathers.
(3) Non-fathers are men over the age of 20 who do not have, or do not live with, their children.
(4) All men refer to men over the age of 20, both fathers and non-fathers, and amount to 1,156,000 men.

Table A5.1b  Ages of Mothers Compared to All Women in Ireland, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Younger Mothers (1) %</th>
<th>Older Mothers (2) %</th>
<th>Non-Mothers (3) %</th>
<th>All Women (4) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-34</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) For the purpose of this analysis, a younger mother is defined as a woman over the age of 20 who has any child under the age of 15 years and lives with that child. Using this definition, there were approximately 412,000 younger mothers in Ireland in 1996, equivalent to 67% of all mothers.
(2) For the purpose of this analysis, an older mother is defined as a woman over the age of 20 all of whose children are over the age of 15 years and who lives with these children. Using this definition, there were approximately 203,000 younger mothers in Ireland in 1996, equivalent to 33% of all mothers.
(3) Non-mothers are women over the age of 20 who do not have, or do not live with, their children.
(4) All women refer to women over the age of 20, both mothers and non-mothers, and amount to 1,199,000 women.
## Table A5.2a Housing Tenure of Fathers Compared to All Men in Ireland, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Tenure</th>
<th>Younger Fathers (1) %</th>
<th>Older Fathers (2) %</th>
<th>Non-Fathers (3) %</th>
<th>All Men (4) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority Rented</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Rented</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying House</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Bought</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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3. Non-fathers are men over the age of 20 who do not have, or do not live with, their children.
4. All men refer to men over the age of 20, both fathers and non-fathers, and amount to 1,156,000 men.

## Table A5.2b Housing Tenure of Mothers and All Women in Ireland, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Tenure</th>
<th>Younger Mothers (1) %</th>
<th>Older Mothers (2) %</th>
<th>Non-Mothers (3) %</th>
<th>All Women (4) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority Rented</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Rented</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying House</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Bought</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1. For the purpose of this analysis, a younger mother is defined as a woman over the age of 20 who has any child under the age of 15 years and lives with that child. Using this definition, there were approximately 412,000 younger mothers in Ireland in 1996, equivalent to 67% of all mothers.
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3. Non-mothers are women over the age of 20 who do not have, or do not live with, their children.
4. All women refer to women over the age of 20, both mothers and non-mothers, and amount to 1,199,000 women.
Table A5.3a Employment Status of Fathers Compared to All Men in Ireland, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Younger Fathers (1) %</th>
<th>Older Fathers (2) %</th>
<th>Non-Fathers (3) %</th>
<th>All Men (4) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time employed</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time employed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not looking for work</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table A5.3b Employment Status of Mothers and All Women in Ireland, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Younger Mothers (1) %</th>
<th>Older Mothers (2) %</th>
<th>Non-Mothers (3) %</th>
<th>All Women (4) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time employed</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time employed</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not looking for work</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) For the purpose of this analysis, a younger mother is defined as a woman over the age of 20 who has any child under the age of 15 years and lives with that child. Using this definition, there were approximately 412,000 younger mothers in Ireland in 1996, equivalent to 67% of all mothers.
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(4) All women refer to women over the age of 20, both mothers and non-mothers, and amount to 1,199,000 women.
### Table A5.4a Usual Hours Worked by Fathers and Men in Ireland, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usual Hours</th>
<th>Younger Fathers (1) %</th>
<th>Older Fathers (2) %</th>
<th>Non-Fathers (3) %</th>
<th>All Men (4) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 35 hours</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49 hours</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+ hours</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hours</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hours (partner working)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hours (partner not working)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1. For the purpose of this analysis, a younger father is defined as a man over the age of 20 who has any child under the age of 15 years and lives with that child. Using this definition, there were approximately 373,000 younger fathers in Ireland in 1996, equivalent to 69% of all fathers.
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### Table A5.4b Usual Hours Worked by Mothers and Women in Ireland, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usual Hours</th>
<th>Younger Mothers (1) %</th>
<th>Older Mothers (2) %</th>
<th>Non-Mothers (3) %</th>
<th>All Women (4) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 35 hours</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49 hours</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+ hours</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hours</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hours (partner working)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hours (partner not working)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1. For the purpose of this analysis, a younger mother is defined as a woman over the age of 20 who has any child under the age of 15 years and lives with that child. Using this definition, there were approximately 412,000 younger mothers in Ireland in 1996, equivalent to 67% of all mothers.
2. For the purpose of this analysis, an older mother is defined as a woman over the age of 20 all of whose children are over the age of 15 years and who lives with these children. Using this definition, there were approximately 203,000 older mothers in Ireland in 1996, equivalent to 33% of all mothers.
3. Non-mothers are women over the age of 20 who do not have, or do not live with, their children.
4. All women refer to women over the age of 20, both mothers and non-mothers, and amount to 1,199,000 women.
Table A5.5a  Unsocial Hours Worked Usually or Sometimes by Fathers and Men in Ireland, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Unsocial Hours</th>
<th>Younger Fathers (1) %</th>
<th>Older Fathers (2) %</th>
<th>Non-Fathers (3) %</th>
<th>All Men (4) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shift Work</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening Work</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night Work</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday Work</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Work</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work at Home</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) For the purpose of this analysis, a younger father is defined as a man over the age of 20 who has any child under the age of 15 years and lives with that child. Using this definition, there were approximately 373,000 younger fathers in Ireland in 1996, equivalent to 69% of all fathers.
(2) For the purpose of this analysis, an older father is defined as a man over the age of 20 all of whose children are over the age of 15 years and who lives with these children. Using this definition, there were approximately 166,000 older fathers in Ireland in 1996, equivalent to 31% of all fathers.
(3) Non-fathers are men over the age of 20 who do not have, or do not live with, their children.
(4) All men refer to men over the age of 20, both fathers and non-fathers, and amount to 1,156,000 men.

Table A5.5b  Unsocial Hours Worked Usually or Sometimes by Mothers and Women in Ireland, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Unsocial Hours</th>
<th>Younger Mothers (1) %</th>
<th>Older Mothers (2) %</th>
<th>Non-Mothers (3) %</th>
<th>All Women (4) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shift Work</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening Work</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night Work</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday Work</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Work</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work at Home</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) For the purpose of this analysis, a younger mother is defined as a woman over the age of 20 who has any child under the age of 15 years and lives with that child. Using this definition, there were approximately 412,000 younger mothers in Ireland in 1996, equivalent to 67% of all mothers.
(2) For the purpose of this analysis, an older mother is defined as a woman over the age of 20 all of whose children are over the age of 15 years and who lives with these children. Using this definition, there were approximately 203,000 younger mothers in Ireland in 1996, equivalent to 33% of all mothers.
(3) Non-mothers are women over the age of 20 who do not have, or do not live with, their children.
(4) All women refer to women over the age of 20, both mothers and non-mothers, and amount to 1,199,000 women.
Chapter Six

Fathers and the Law

Kieran McKeown and harry Ferguson

“Honour your father and your mother so that you may live long”.
The Bible, Book of Exodus, Ch 20.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the salient features of the law as it relates to fatherhood in Ireland. We begin by considering the Constitution and comment on the absence of any constitutional recognition for the rights of unmarried fathers (section 6.2). The chapter then analyses the law of guardianship and the rights of married and unmarried fathers in this regard (section 6.3). The throughput of family law cases in Ireland in 1993 / 1994 is analysed in order to throw some light on the uses which men and women, fathers and mothers, make of the family law system in Ireland (section 6.4). The way in which the law is implemented through the courts is as important as the law itself and this seems to be particularly true in the case of fathers (section 6.5). This provides a context for highlighting the legal and other difficulties facing separated and unmarried fathers and the impact which this can have on contact with their children (section 6.6). As with other themes addressed in this book, issues affecting fathers cannot be considered in isolation from children's rights, motherhood and gender relations generally. We review joint custody in the context of the emergence of fathers' rights groups and argue in favour of joint custody where this is shown to be in the best interests of the child (Section 6.7). Some fathers also come in contact with the law - both civil and criminal - as a result of the abuse of children and their wives/partners and some of the social as well as legal implications of this are discussed (section 6.8). Finally, the main conclusions are drawn together (section 6.9).
6.2 Fathers and the Constitution

The family which is recognised and protected in Articles 41 and 42 of the Irish Constitution is the family based on marriage. By implication, the rights and responsibilities of fathers are those which come through marriage. Unmarried or “natural” fathers do not exist in the Constitution.

The Constitution makes no explicit reference to fathers, married or otherwise. Mothers are explicitly mentioned - if not to the delight of all women - in the context of their contribution to the common good by working at home (Article 41.2.1) and the need to ensure that they do not neglect their home duties by having to engage in outside work (Article 41.2.2). Married fathers, unlike married mothers, do not have a constitutionally-protected right to their children. All of this is symptomatic of giving a greater social value to the ideology of motherhood than fatherhood and of symbolically strengthening motherhood while weakening fatherhood. We are emphasising the ideological context of parenting here because, as many feminist critics have pointed out, actual supports for mothers - such as childcare services - fall far short of the ideal suggested in the valuation of mothers. Mothers are too often expected to get on with parenting and are left, quite literally, holding the baby. Yet both men and women are diminished by a system which over-identifies women with motherhood and under-identifies men with fatherhood.

In 1966, the Supreme Court decided in the case of The State (Nicolaou) v an Bord Uchtála that, under the Irish Constitution: (i) a natural or biological father is not a member of a family within Article 41; (ii) a natural or biological father is not a parent within Article 42; and (iii) a natural or biological father has no personal right in relation to his child which the State is bound to protect under Article 40.3.

The Constitution Review Group pointed out, “there has been much criticism of the continued constitutional ostracism of natural fathers” (Constitution Review Group,
1996, pp.325). To redress this, it proposed the following: “The Review Group considers that the solution [to giving constitutional rights to natural fathers] appears to lie in following the approach of Article 8 of the ECHR [European Convention on Human Rights] in guaranteeing to every person respect for ‘family life’ which has been interpreted to include non-marital family life but yet requiring the existence of family ties between the mother and the father. This may be a way of granting constitutional rights to those fathers who have, or had, a stable relationship with the mother prior to birth, or subsequent to birth with the child, while excluding persons from having such rights who are only biological fathers without any such relationship. In the context of the Irish constitution it would have to be made clear that the reference to family life included family life not based on marriage” (Constitution Review Group, 1996, p.326).

The reference to Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights - involving the right to respect for family life - is particularly significant in the Irish context since this was the basis of a successful legal action taken by an Irish unmarried father to the European Commission of Human Rights in 1991. The case was taken by Joseph Keegan who complained that his right to respect to family life had been violated because his child had been placed for adoption by its mother without his knowledge or consent; in addition, he complained that Irish law did not afford him even a defeasible right to be appointed guardian.

The facts of the case are that Joseph Keegan had a stable relationship with the mother of his child over a period of two years, during one of which they co-habited. The conception of their child was a deliberate decision by both of them and they had also planned to get married. In order to establish that Keegan’s “right to respect for his family life” had been violated - which the European Court of Human Rights established - the Court first established that he had a family life in the following way: “The Court recalled that the notion of the “family” in this provision is not confined solely to marriage-based relationships and may encompass other de facto
“family” ties where the parties are living together outside marriage. A child born out of such a relationship is *ipso iure* part of that “family” unit from the moment of his birth and by the very fact of it. There thus exists between the child and his parents a bond amounting to family life even if at the time of his or her birth the parents are no longer co-habiting or if their relationship has then ended” (European Court of Human Rights, 1994, p.3).

This judgement is significant in showing that one of the rocks upon which family and fatherhood rests is the social relations between the parents rather than their physical or biological relationship alone. A stable relationship between the parents - either before or since the birth of the child, or both - is thus seen as a minimal prerequisite to becoming a father. By the same token, the definition excludes those exceptional cases - such as rape or incest - where a normal relationship between the parents does not exist and any claims to fatherhood based on such a relationship would not be regarded as socially acceptable. However the definition fails to clarify those more nebulous cases where the parents did not have a steady relationship before or since the birth of the child but each may wish to develop a bond with their child.

The Commission on the Family, in its submission to the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution in March 1997, indicated guarded support for the view of the Constitution Review Group: “The Commission agrees with the Review Group that providing in the constitution for a guarantee of respect for family life, to include non-marital family life, may be a way, inter alia, of granting natural parents rights in relation to access and / or custody of their children or consent to their adoption. Such rights would be subject to what is in the best interests of the child” (Commission on the Family, 1997, p. 18).

An alternative approach, and one which we would favour, would involve drafting a constitutional provision which guarantees that a mother and father has equal rights
to a child where the child is conceived through their mutual consent. The right of each child to know and be cared for by both its parents, whether living together or not, should also be enshrined in the Constitution. The exercise of these rights would be regulated by law and always in the best interests of the child.

The reasoning behind our views is that every child needs to have the opportunity to know its mother and its father. Children who are brought up without knowing their biological parent(s) usually retain an undying need to know where they came from - to know their lineage and kinship - as the adult reminiscences and experiences of adopted children testifies (Milotte, 1997). The Irish writer, Hugh Leonard, described his experience of not knowing his biological father as follows: “On my birth certificate, in the space designated ‘Name of Father’, there is a single pen-stroke. Blaise Pascal said that if Cleopatra’s nose had been shorter, the whole face of the earth would have changed; well, if my mother had thought to invent a name for my father, my own life would certainly have been different. ... . I have a deep-rooted belief that what I would describe as my maverick qualities must come from my father, who is forever lost to me in time and space. I have always been a cuckoo in any and every Irish nest. ... . I am by nature a loner who has never found his natural home. ... . I say this as a simple reality, not to boast or strike an attitude, and my father, whoever or of what race he was, simply must be the culprit” (Leonard, 1995, p.36).

A biological father is more likely to play the symbolic role which is entrusted to him - see Chapter Two above - if he is appointed to that role by having his name on the child’s birth certificate; and there is a greater likelihood that he will actually perform that role in an active sense if he is included from the outset through having rights of guardianship, (joint) custody and access to the child. The failure of the Irish Constitution to recognise the existence of unmarried fathers undermines the fathering role by failing to state the universal symbolic importance of the father to each child. In turn, the father’s role, as seen from the perspective of the child, does
not depend on the relationship between the parents and some abstract ideal of ‘family life’, as seems to be suggested in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. We fully recognise that there are situations where - primarily for reasons of safety - it is not in the child’s best interests, or indeed the mother’s, for fathers to have access/custody rights. In this sense, father's rights should not be 'gained' in any simple sense at the expense of full recognition of mother's rights and interests. Yet, it is barely credible to build entire social policies on issues of dangerousness as, in most respects, a positive statement of fathers’ rights can also be a positive statement about children’s rights.

6.3 Guardianship

Guardianship is a common law concept and essentially defines a relationship between an adult and a child such that the adult who is designated a guardian has the right to make all decisions affecting the welfare of the child; for example, where the child may live, who may have access to the child, how the child is brought up, what type of education it receives, the type of health care which the child may receive (such as an operation), et cetera. Guardianship also means that a child cannot be placed for adoption without the consent of the guardian, unless a court makes an order dispensing with that consent.

Married parents typically share guardianship rights to their children. However when married parents separate their guardianship rights can become the subject of dispute, particularly their guardianship rights of access or custody to a child. In these instances, a District Court is empowered to decide under section 11 of the Guardianship of Infants Act, 1964 as to how the guardianship rights should be divided between the parents.

All married parents are automatically guardians of their children. However unmarried fathers do not have automatic guardianship rights to their children.
Under the Status of Children Act 1987, non-marital fathers have the right to apply to the District Court for guardianship. The Children Act, 1997 provides that application to the court for guardianship is only necessary when the unmarried father fails to reach agreement with the child’s mother.

Some of the key differences between married and unmarried fathers, as seen from the perspective of guardianship and related rights, are summarised in Table 6.1. Three features are particularly worthy of note.

### Table 6.1 Differences in Guardianship Rights of Unmarried and Married Fathers in Ireland, 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unmarried Fathers</th>
<th>Married Fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paternity is presumed if:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Paternity is presumed if:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. both father and mother sign their names on the birth certificate.</td>
<td>1. the father is married to the mother of the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. there is a Maintenance Order citing the man’s name as father of the child.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paternity is not presumed if:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Paternity is not presumed if:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. the father refuses to put his name on the birth certificate.</td>
<td>1. both parents agree that the man is not the father of the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. the mother refuses to allow his name on the birth certificate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paternity is proven if:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Paternity is proven if:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. a DNA test proves that the man is father of the child.</td>
<td>1. a DNA test proves that the man is father of the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The unmarried father has the right to apply to the courts for joint guardianship of his child where paternity is presumed.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The married father has automatic joint guardianship rights to his child.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The unmarried father with joint guardianship rights can apply to the courts for custody of, and access to, his child.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The married father has automatic rights to joint custody and access to his children.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The rights of an unmarried father to custody of, and access to, his child may be restricted by the courts if it is deemed to be in the best interests of the child.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The rights of a married father - as well as fathers who are separated or divorced - to custody of, and access to, his child may be restricted by the courts if it is deemed to be in the best interests of the child.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First, a man’s paternity is usually presumed rather than proven. In the case of a married father it is automatically presumed that he is the biological father if he is married to the child’s mother; the mother’s maternity, in turn, is presumed by the fact that she gave birth to the child. In the case of unmarried fathers, the presumption that a man is the biological father of his child depends on the mother’s consent through, for example, agreeing to have his name placed on the birth certificate. We understand that there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some mothers refuse this consent for fear that the father may claim guardianship rights to the child, something they do not wish to happen.

An important implication of this is that a child’s paternity may not be established if the parents are unmarried and the man’s paternity is denied by either the father or the mother. In effect this means that, under Irish law, a child born outside marriage does not have a right to have paternity legally established. This, in turn, would appear to be contrary to the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, Article 7, Paragraph 1 of which states: “The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents”.

Second, the establishment of paternity does not confer any guardianship rights on unmarried fathers. Married parents have automatic guardianship rights as do unmarried mothers. Following the Status of Children Act 1987, unmarried fathers were given the right to apply to the District Court for guardianship rights. However, in the light of the Keegan case, it is doubtful if the father’s right to his child - and the mutual enjoyment of each other’s company - are adequately protected under the Status of Children Act 1987. This is clear from the court’s interpretation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights: “According to the principles developed by the court in its case-law, where the existence of a family tie with a child has been established, the State must act in a manner calculated to enable that tie to be developed and legal safeguards must be established that render it
possible as from the moment of birth the child’s integration in his family. The mutual enjoyment by parent and child of each other’s company constitutes a fundamental element of family life even when the relationship between the parents has broken down” (European Court of Human Rights, 1994, p.4).

In our view, the right to apply for guardianship falls short of a father’s right to respect for his identity as a parent in the meaningful sense of the opportunity for him to have a relationship with his child and for his child to know and relate to him as a father. The Children Act 1997 provides, inter alia, that an unmarried father does not have to apply to court for his guardianship rights if the child’s mother acceded to his claim. This however also falls short of redressing the unequal status of unmarried fathers vis à vis every other category of parent. Our view is that unmarried fathers should have automatic guardianship rights, as proposed by the Law Reform Commission (Law Reform Commission, 1982).

Third, the rights of all fathers - married, separated, divorced, unmarried - to custody and access of the children can be restricted by the courts under the Guardianship of Infants Act, 1964. These proceedings are held in camera and accordingly, it is impossible to know how judges apportion these rights between parents. Some anecdotal evidence suggests that the Irish courts tend to weigh custody and access decisions in favour of mothers. In 1995, the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, replying to a Council of Europe questionnaire on the rights of fathers stated that: “In cases where parents separate, custody can be awarded to either parent. In practice, it is far more common to be awarded to the mother than the father” (Council of Europe, 1995, p.230). The same practice applies in the English courts (Richards, 1982).

The law as it stands allows District Courts to award joint custody but, while there is no systematic research evidence available in Ireland, it seems that the joint custody provision is not widely used in practice. Nor is it known just how many fathers
actually apply for such custody arrangements and what the outcomes are for both mothers and fathers in cases where men do apply; this information is not collected by the courts or the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. In Canada, for instance, while mothers get sole custody of children in 86% of cases, this represents the mutual decision of both parents to award sole custody to the mother; when fathers apply for custody it is either almost equally distributed to mothers and fathers, or the majority of decisions are made in favour of fathers (Bertoia and Drakich, 1995, p. 237). Thus any assessment of outcomes in custody and access cases needs to take account of factors such as who applies to the courts, whether the case is contested or not, and the possibly differential impact of fathers and mothers as petitioners. We return to the issues of joint custody and fathers' rights in sections 6.6 and 6.7 below.

6.4 Fathers and the Family Law System

The practical application of the family law system in Ireland has been analysed by Fahey and Lyons (1995) and provides some useful insights into the relationship between fathers and the law, particularly in the area of family break-up. Before examining this data, it is worth pointing out that a large proportion of family breakdowns in Ireland - possibly as high as two thirds, depending on how one interprets the data in the 1991 Census of Population - occur without being processed through the courts. As such, the image of family breakdown as presented through the court system represents only a subset of this reality and probably the more conflictual and acrimonious subset. Moreover since family cases are heard in camera, it is impossible to know precisely how decisions are made, on what basis and in whose favour.

Table 6.2 gives the breakdown of married and separated persons in Ireland in 1996. This reveals that in 1996, around 6% of the ever-married population described themselves as separated or divorced. However only two fifths (41%) of these appear
to be legally separated or divorced thus indicating that the majority of ever-married men and women involved in family breakup do not have recourse to the court system in Ireland.

Table 6.2 Marital Status of Ever-Married Men and Women in Ireland in 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Ever Married (1)</td>
<td>710,616</td>
<td>733,789</td>
<td>1,444,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Separated / Divorced</td>
<td>35,661</td>
<td>52,131</td>
<td>87,792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deserted</td>
<td>6,363</td>
<td>16,785</td>
<td>23,148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage annulled</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>1,287</td>
<td>2,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legally separated</td>
<td>11,863</td>
<td>14,616</td>
<td>26,479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other separated</td>
<td>11,741</td>
<td>14,430</td>
<td>26,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>4,774</td>
<td>5,013</td>
<td>9,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated/divorced as % of ever married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legally separated/divorced as separated</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Total ever-married includes all married, re-married and separated persons and excludes widows.

Source: Census of Population, 1996.

The family law system is implemented through the District Courts and the Circuit Courts. The analysis by Fahey and Lyons covered family law cases in 1993/1994 and found that the District Court handled about two thirds of all family law cases in that year; by comparison with the Circuit Court, the District Court is “the more important locus of family law proceedings in Ireland” (Fahey and Lyons, 1995, p.20).

Table 6.3 below is based on an extrapolation of data presented by Fahey and Lyons (1995, Chapter Two) and is presented with a view to highlighting the uses made by fathers and mothers - both married and unmarried - of the District Courts in the resolution of family disputes. A number of features are particularly worth noting.
Table 6.3 Size and Composition of Family Law Cases in the District Courts in Ireland in 1993/1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Gender Status</th>
<th>Parental Status</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Application</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barring / Protection Order</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Mothers (75%)*</td>
<td>All married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Mothers (25%)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance Order</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Mothers (100%)</td>
<td>Married (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unmarried (25%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardianship</td>
<td>1,750</td>
<td>Men (66%)</td>
<td>Fathers (66%)</td>
<td>Married (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Women (33%)</td>
<td>Mothers (33%)</td>
<td>Unmarried (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>Women (85%)</td>
<td>Mothers (71%)*</td>
<td>Married (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Men (15%)</td>
<td>Not Mothers (14%)</td>
<td>Unmarried (14%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Estimated according to the proportion of married women who have children (75%) and who have not children (25%), using the 1994 Labour Force Survey (Table 43).

Main Source: Derived from Fahey and Lyons, 1995, Chapter Two.

First, the family law system in Ireland, as Fahey and Lyons (1995, pp. 39-41) observe, performs two main functions: a protection function and a separation function. The protection function, involving barring and protection orders, accounts for more than half (56%) of the family law cases coming before the District Court. It should be noted that since the sampling period covered in Fahey and Lyons' work, the 1996 Domestic Violence Act has extended the right to apply for barring and protection orders to non-married spouses and other relatives of abusers and the early indicators are that use of the protection function of the court has correspondingly increased (for 1996 figures, see Task Force on Violence Against Women, 1997, p. 51). The marital separation function involving maintenance and guardianship - as well as judicial separations in the Circuit Courts - is more diffuse and involves two court levels. Commenting on these two functions, Fahey and Lyons point out that “the protection of women and children against violence at the hands of husbands / fathers is as
important a function of the family law system as the regulation of separation in the more usual sense” (Ibid, p.22).

Some recent research has shed light on the prevalence of domestic violence in Ireland and women's accounts of the dynamics of abuse and role of the law in protecting abused women and children (Kelleher and Associates and O'Connor, 1995; Task Force on Violence Against Women, 1997, pp. 49-61). However virtually nothing is known about the precise content of the protection function as implemented through barring and protection orders. As Fahey and Lyons point out, the statistics on barring and protection orders “tell us nothing about the nature of the violence (how often it is psychological rather than physical, how repetitive it is, how severe it is), about the victims and the perpetrators (we do not know, for example, how often children as well as women are victims), about the kind of responses the courts give (we do not know, for example, why more than half the barring applications made in 1993-94 were not granted), about the pattern of enforcement of orders issues, about rates of recidivism, or about any other practical outcome as far as families are concerned” (Ibid, p.2). Thus, a more systematic understanding of the precise role and functions of the courts in promoting the protection function remains to be established.

Second, most of the family law cases are initiated by women (85%). In turn, most of these are mothers. Men and fathers (15%) are a distinct minority in terms of using the District Court to resolve family disputes. In effect this means that the family law system, as applied in practice in Ireland, is “a woman’s resource rather than a man’s resource” (Ibid, p.136).

Third, guardianship is effectively the only area where fathers use the family law system to redress family 'disputes'. Moreover, this is the only area of the family law system where the applicant is more likely to be a man than a woman. In 1993, for example, there were 3,665 applications to the District Court for guardianship of
which 531 (14%) were from unmarried fathers; on the basis of the data presented in Table 6.3, this clearly implies that most of the applications for guardianship by men came from married fathers. In their study Fahey and Lyons found that the most common issue in guardianship cases coming before the Dublin Metropolitan District court was access followed by custody (Ibid, p. 29).

The traditional stereotype of the unmarried father - and to a lesser extent, the separated father - is that he is not interested in having custody of, or access to, his children. Stereotypes sometimes have a grain of truth. However, the apparent growth in numbers of separated and unmarried fathers who apply for joint custody of their children seems to reflect, at least in part, a desire by these fathers to remain involved with their children. It may also reflect a fear that this involvement could be cut off unless protected by law. Commenting on the significance of joint custody cases in England - where the mother is reputedly awarded sole custody in the vast majority of cases - Richards (1982, p.137) writes: “In legal terms, it might not seem that a joint custody order makes very much difference. .... However, psychologically, a joint custody order affirms the continuing role of both parents in the lives of their children. I will suggest that this is something that may have great significance for the children. A further advantage of such [joint custody] orders is that they can avoid the implication that the disposal of custody is a winner-take-all situation”.

In Ireland, there has been a steady increase in the number of unmarried fathers applying for guardianship over the past few years, as Table 6.4 illustrates. The table reveals that the number of applications has risen by over 800% in the period 1989-1996; this is a much faster rate of growth than applications for barring or maintenance (see Fahey and Lyons, Chapter Two). In part, this reflects the introduction of the Status of Children Act 1987 but, at a deeper level, it may reflect a greater interest in active fathering by unmarried fathers through having their rights to guardianship, custody and access acknowledged by the court. It is true that the
number of applications for guardianship by unmarried fathers in 1996 (700) amounted to little more than one twentieth (6%) of all registered births outside marriage (12,484) in that year; equally however it is known from one Irish study that up to half of fathers remain in relationship with the unmarried mother of their child (Richardson, 1991, p.177), thus suggesting that legal remedies are only resorted to in a minority of cases.

Table 6.4 Applications for Guardianship by Unmarried Fathers, 1989-1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Applications for Guardianship N</th>
<th>Applications for Guardianship Granted N</th>
<th>Applications for Guardianship Granted %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>90</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>90</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>556</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change 89-96</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

In some instances, applications for guardianship by unmarried fathers may trigger applications for maintenance by mothers, and vice versa. However it is not necessary for the two to be connected in each particular case for one to draw the inference that both guardianship and maintenance are part of the legal ground on which the rights and responsibilities of unmarried fathers and mothers are worked out. To some extent it reflects the traditional division of labour between fathers and mothers where fathers are seen to control the money and mothers are seen to control the children and each can be used as resources in granting or denying the rights of the other.
6.5 Fathers and the Legal System

In assessing the impact of the law on fathers, it is important to remember that “the way the law is implemented is as important as the content of the law in shaping its practical effect” (Fahey and Lyons, 1985, p.137). This is probably as true of family law as other types of law but is more than ordinarily difficult to prove in the case of family law because cases are heard in camera and complete records of proceedings are not kept, much less published. As a result, there is almost no public information on how the system actually works. In their study of the family law system, Fahey and Lyons were extremely critical of the official monitoring statistics which are available: “These statistics provide little information on the elementary facts of the system - how many family law cases arise each year, how many go to court and how many are resolved by agreement outside the court, how many have a history of repeated recourse to the law, how many involve children, what the social and family circumstances of the litigants are, what kinds of decisions the courts offer, how far these decisions are put into effect, and so on” (Ibid, p. 2).

It is known that quite a large number of fathers who have come in contact with the family law courts are extremely dissatisfied with the operation of the system. These fathers form the core membership of Parental Equality: The Joint Custody and Shared Parenting Support Group, which was set up in 1993 to promote equality between mothers and fathers in the custody and parenting of their children, particularly in the wake in marital breakdown. Table 6.5 summarises some of the common experiences of its members.
Table 6.5 Summary of Experiences of Members of Parental Equality:  
The Joint Custody and Shared Parenting Support Group, 1993-1997

(i) A total lack of appreciation of the value of fathers and fatherhood among the judiciary.
(ii) A failure by the courts to justify the removal of a father’s custody rights and obligations.
(iii) A failure to even ask a sole custody applicant to give reasons or justification for seeking to remove custody rights and obligations from the respondent.
(iv) A prevailing view among solicitors that mothers always get custody and resultant lack of willingness on their part to vigorously defend a father’s custodial rights and obligations.
(v) A failure by the courts to impose any conditions on sole custody awards other than granting very limited access to non-custodial parents.
(vi) A failure and unwillingness by the courts to deal effectively with breaches of access orders.
(vii) A general perception that non-custodial parents have no rights other than access which the courts may not / will not enforce.
(viii) Little understanding among the judiciary of the concept of joint custody and a general unwillingness to even consider it.
(ix) An amazing tolerance by the courts of perjury which, even when proven, incurs no sanctions.


Studies of England and Wales also report similar representations of experiences of the court system to that reported by Irish fathers (see for example, Richards, 1982; Lowe, 1982; Eekelaar and Clive, 1977).

Our view is that a radical alternative to the court system should be considered for dealing with family disputes in Ireland. It is not possible to form an entirely rounded view regarding the impact of the court system on fathers - or mothers and children - given the lack of systematic evidence. While it is outside our remit to make specific proposals in this regard, we see considerable merit in the idea contained in one of the submissions to the Commission on the Family (1996, p.104) - that a family commission should be set up covering five core functions: (1) a national counselling service (2) a national mediation service (3) family tribunals (4) a commissioner for children (5) a research and information office.
6.6 Contact Between Non-Resident Fathers and Their Children

The term “non-resident father” is used here to denote fathers who do not live full-time with their children. The State is obliged to promote and facilitate contact between non-resident fathers and their children. This is clearly part of the concept of “family life” enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, discussed above. It is also enshrined in UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Ireland in 1992. This convention legally obliges the State to uphold the right of every child “to know and be cared for by his or her parents ... as far as possible” (Article 7, paragraph 1, in Council for Social Welfare, 1991, p.97). The convention also obliges the State to “respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the best interests of the child” (Article 9, paragraph 3 in Council for Social Welfare, 1991, p.98). This clearly implies a reciprocal right and obligation on the part of non-resident fathers.

No studies have been carried out across a representative sample of non-resident fathers in Ireland to determine their level of contact with their children or the factors affecting it. As such, it is difficult to form a view of their experiences. However it is known that many non-resident fathers in Ireland want to be involved in the care and upbringing of their children but have difficulty in affirming their rights as an equal parent of their child. This has been articulated in the work of Treoir: Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children (Dromey and Doherty, 1992) and more recently in the work of Parental Equality: The Shared Parenting and Joint Custody Support Group.

The work of Treoir has revealed three areas where the non-resident father’s rights to a relationship with his child can be undermined or denied. First, the child may be given no information about the father, and his name may not even be registered on
his child’s birth certificate. This practice was, and to some extent still is, informed by the stereotype - often shared by mothers and professionals alike - that unmarried fathers would not be interested in their children. The practice is further cemented by the attitudes of some mothers that the child “belongs” to them and not to both the parents. As a result, mothers have been known to block the registration of the father’s name on the birth certificate for fear that it may give him any guardianship rights to the child (which it does not).

Second, the child may be given only negative information about the father. All children have an image of their father, even those who have never seen their father. In the case of non-resident fathers who are not in contact with their children, this effectively means that the image of the father will be formed from the mother. Treoir presents evidence which suggests that “too often the messages about absent fathers to their offspring are negative. Comments such as ‘your dad was a rotter’; ‘you’re turning out just like your dad’; and ‘I wish I’d never had you’ can be all too common” (Dromey and Doherty, 1992, p.6).

Third, fathers can be excluded from the opportunity to share with the mother in the parenting of their children. In recent years, Treoir has become aware of an increase in the number of calls to its information centre from fathers who have problems in having access to their children - either any access at all or an amount of access that they regard as fair - mostly because of the mothers refusal to grant access. Typically mothers refuse access because: (i) her relationship with the father breaks down (ii) she enters a new relationship with another man (iii) she wishes to place the child for adoption against the father’s consent. In some instances, fathers are refused access after being involved with their child for a number of years.

Parental Equality was set up in 1993 and, in the four years to 1997, has received calls from over 5,000 people, many of them from unmarried or separated fathers who are experiencing difficulties in obtaining shared custody and access to their children.
One such father made a submission to the Commission on the Family and painted the following scenario facing working class and lower middle class parents as a result of their legal separation (see Table 6.6).

**Table 6.6 One View of the Scenario Facing Working Class and Lower Middle Class Parents as a Result of their Legal Separation**

- Mother gets custody of children.
- Mother gets home.
- Father removed from home.
- Father cannot afford a second home.
- Father lives in a bed-sitter / small flat.
- Father continues to work and pay maintenance and mortgage to enable wife and children to continue living in comparative comfort in family home.
- Father has access to children but cannot have them overnight and must meet them in public places due to unsuitable accommodation.
- Father becomes a “MacDonald’s Dad”.
- Father loses all self-esteem.
- Father effectively destroyed.
- Father eventually becomes dysfunctional (may opt for suicide).
- Children effectively lose their father.
- Children see father’s life disintegrating.
- Children psychologically damaged for life.

Source: Based on a submission to the Commission on the Family, March 1997.

Outside Ireland, there has been extensive research on the factors which facilitate or hinder contact between non-resident fathers and their children. These include the judgements of the courts which have tended to see the mother as the primary caretaker and have awarded her custody of the children; the closeness of father-child relations before the separation; the physical distance between the father and child after separation; the strained relations between father and mother which makes contact with the children difficult and unpleasant; the entry of a new man into the mother’s life; mother’s hostility towards the father particularly where she controls access to the children and uses it to reap revenge on the father; the views of fathers themselves who sometimes see their role vis a vis the children as secondary, even insignificant and replaceable. No doubt, there are always two sides to such
invariably acrimonious stories and the perspectives of mothers, and indeed children, need to be heard as well as fathers. However, some research evidence and the experience of professionals in this area suggests that the traditional stereotype of the non-resident father - who loses contact with his children simply because he does not care - is too simplistic. As one practitioner has pointed: “Contact with fathers is broken not because they don’t care, but because they cannot deal with the pain, or they have nowhere to take the children, there is hostility from the mother, or the child is angry and doesn’t want to see them, or through lack of money” (Robinson, 1995).

A number of studies show that, when parents separate, contact between non-resident fathers and their children tends to diminish with time and distance (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Seltzer, 1991; Furstenberg and Nord, 1987). In Britain, for example, a 1991 study showed that up to 40% of non-resident fathers lose contact with their children after five years (Bradshaw and Miller, 1991). However preliminary results from a more recent British study - and involving a more representative national sample - suggest that “even five to 10 years after the break-up, three out of four fathers are still in contact with their children and one out of three sees them at least fortnightly” (Burgess, 1997, p.192). Research evidence from Australia indicates that two thirds of non-resident fathers see their children at least fortnightly (Gibson, 1992) while in California nine tenths of children had contact with their children four years after divorce (Maccoby and Mnookin, 1992).

A key factor affecting the level of contact between non-resident fathers and their children is the level of contact established in the years immediately following separation; if a pattern of regular contact is established and reinforced by shared physical custody and children staying overnight, then the level of contact is likely to be much higher (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Leupnitz, 1986; Maccoby, Depner and Mnookin, 1990; Albiston, Maccoby, and Mnookin, 1990; Ottosen, 1996). One implication of this is that contact between non-resident fathers and their children
may not be simply a matter of the father’s interest or disinterest in his children but may be more affected by the access to his children which is afforded to him. In this regard, a mediated process of separation - particularly in situations of intense conflict - could help to ensure that the children’s need for regular contact with their father is maintained and could be much less damaging for the children (see Law Reform Commission, 1996). Where possible and appropriate, father-children contact needs to be promoted separately as a relationship in its own right which is distinct from the dynamics of the post-separation spousal relationship.

A further implication, though not one that has been fully tested in the research, is the relationship between the father and his children prior to separation: it would seem likely that fathers who have a close and positive relationship with their children prior to separation - notwithstanding their marital difficulties - are likely, other things being equal, to maintain this after the separation. This is an area which would merit further investigation. The introduction of step-fathers - who may physically but not psychologically replace the father - has also been shown to reduce contact between non-resident fathers and their children (Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Kock-Nielsen, 1987).

One aspect of contact between non-residential fathers and their children is the payment by fathers of “maintenance” or “child support” as it is variously called. One study found that contact and maintenance are linked in that those fathers who have most contact with their children pay the most maintenance (Maccoby and Mnookin, 1992). Also, richer fathers are, understandably, better payers (Bradshaw and Miller, 1991). In Britain, the Child Support Agency was set up in April 1993 to determine and collect maintenance from all non-resident parents, irrespective of their previous marital status. There is no such agency in Ireland. The relevant social welfare legislation refers to non-resident fathers as the “liable relative” and contributions from the non-resident father are sought by the department on a case-by-case basis. The experience of Treoir is that the enforcement of maintenance by the
Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs can hinder rather than help the objective of joint parenting - particularly in the case of poorer people - as both parents effectively become worse off if they are “officially” joint parents. As things stand therefore, the social welfare system may act as a disincentive to some joint parents where the parents do not live together; moreover it is precisely in these situations where the objective of joint parenting should receive all the support which it can get in the interests of both children and parents.

Other measures which impact on families - such as income support payments from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs - would need to be re-adjusted to make joint parenting/custody a viable option. For example, Child Benefit (Children’s Allowance) and the One Parent Family Payment can be paid to one parent only, typically the mother, even in those cases - which are admittedly small in number - where both parents have joint and equal custody and access. In these cases there are grounds - both practical and symbolic - for making separate payments to each parent to reflect and support the parenting role which each plays. The level of these payments would also need to be considered in the context of the costs of running two separate households.

6.7 Fathers’ Rights and Joint Custody

In this section we focus in more detail on the issue of joint custody and fathers’ rights. The Children Act, 1997 gives the court power to grant joint custody - a power which it already has - as set out in Section 9: “For the avoidance of doubt, it is hereby declared that the court, in making an order under section 11, may, if it thinks it appropriate, grant custody of a child to the child’s father and mother jointly”. The wording clearly stops short of giving full weight to joint custody as the preferred option. In light of what we have argued above, there is a strong case for joint custody being established as the norm for all parents who are legally separating - with the presumption that both parents have equal rights of custody and access -
and that the onus should be on the courts to prove why joint custody would not be in the best interests of the child.

In discussing joint custody, it is useful to distinguish between “joint legal custody” and “joint physical custody” since this distinction helps to throw light on the factors which promote or hinder contact between fathers and children. The experience in California, for example, suggests that joint legal custody may not be enough to ensure contact between the father and his children nor give fathers a say in their upbringing; joint physical custody is much more effective in this regard (Maccoby and Mnookin, 1992).

In many countries, the issue of joint custody is almost inseparable from the emergence of fathers’ rights groups (see Coltrane and Hickman, 1992). Over the past decade, fathers’ rights groups across the western world have actively promoted the ideal of joint-custody and equality in parenting. We have already referred to the work of Parental Equality in Ireland whose emergence and agenda appears very similar to groups formed in other countries. These organisations began to emerge in the US in the 1970s and expanded rapidly until, by the 1980s, there were over 200 such groups in almost every state. Some examples include: Husbands Against Dirty Divorce (Seattle, WA), Fathers for Equal Rights (Jackson, MI), the Coalition of Paternal Rights Attorneys (Phoenix, AZ), and the Joint Custody Association (Los Angeles, CA). The 1990s have seen the rise of new and larger American fathers' advocacy groups. Fathers United, for instance, seeks to restructure divorce and custody laws, including calling for mandatory joint custody, unless one parent is unable or unwilling to parent. According to one commentator, joint custody seems to be a guiding principle for all fathers' rights organisations (Clatterbaugh, 1997, p.70).

Notwithstanding the emergence of fathers’ rights groups and their advocacy of joint parenting, the North American research suggests that many separated fathers do not
actually apply for custody - joint or otherwise - whereas mothers invariably do and, not surprisingly when it is uncontested, they get it (Bertoia and Drakich, 1995). In Canada, for instance, mothers get sole custody of the children in 86% of cases although this represents the mutual decision of both parents (Ibid, p. 237). When fathers petition for custody, however, it is either almost equally distributed to mothers and fathers, or the majority of decisions are made in favour of fathers. Applications for sole custody by fathers tend to be extremely rare. US research has also found the almost equal distribution of custody awards in contested cases (Polikoff, 1983; Weitzman, 1985). This is disputed, however, by the work of Maccoby and Mnookin (1992) which claims that mothers are favoured in contested cases. As already indicated, we have almost no information on these matters in Ireland.

A study was carried out of two fathers' rights groups in Ontario, Canada which examined, inter alia, their reasons for joining the group, their conceptualisation of fatherhood, and their opinions on topics such as joint-custody, child access, divorce, mediation, and support payment enforcement programmes (Bertoia and Drakich, 1995). The authors of this study were particularly struck by the fact that many of the fathers wanted liberal access to - but not necessarily custody of - their children. As one father told the researchers: “All I want is good access so that I am not a visitor. I want to have the freedom to phone them, and I want the freedom for them to phone me. I want to be able to see them when they want to without asking permission all the time” (Bertoia and Drakich, 1995, p.239).

Many of the fathers interviewed seemed to have a notion of fathering which involved "helping" rather than being a fully accountable co-parent. According to the authors, "not one of them realised that to speak of "helping" was to delegate the task of child care to mothers" (Ibid, p. 239). The researchers concluded that this reflects how fathers take for granted mothers' primary responsibility for child care. While some fathers referred to the joys of being with their children, "not one father talked about wanting to have the responsibility of the everyday care of his children"
(p.241). The researchers suggest that the fathers in these organisations were seeking a traditional father role which did not involve full equality in physical custody and everyday care but a right to exercise the level of parenting which existed prior to the divorce (Ibid, p. 241). In other words, "the post-divorce fatherhood role for many fathers means a continuation of their pre-divorce role and not a reconceptualized role of the equal parenting dad typified in the fathers' rights public rhetoric" (p.242).

This research is significant in drawing attention to deep-seated assumptions about the roles of father and mother and how the physical and emotional care of the children is often seen as the main responsibility of the mother, even in organisations which advocate joint custody. It bears emphasising that the Irish situation may be different although the assumption that the mother is the primary parent is probably quite widespread among many fathers, irrespective of whether they are married, single or separated. The research evidence is also useful in terms of showing how concepts of parental justice and parental equality are grounded in assumptions and lived realities about motherhood and fatherhood. As a result, the decisions of the courts in granting sole custody to mothers is often no more than the application of everyday assumptions about the roles of mothers and fathers in families. It is precisely these assumptions which we have endeavoured to challenge in this book.

Another aspect of joint custody is whether it works in practice and under what circumstances it is in the best interests of the children. One review of the evidence in a number of US states cautions that joint custody arrangements may not always be in the best interests of the children: "Laws favouring joint custody arrangements effectively abolish the best interests of the child standard for making custody determinations. The best interests standard requires the judge to carefully analyse the facts to determine which of the parents is better able to parent the child given the child's particular needs. Laws favouring joint custody presume that joint custody is in the best interests of all children. The fact that joint custody is not the best arrangement for a particular child is often not enough to overcome a joint custody
presumption. Usually the parent opposing it must show that joint custody is actually harmful to the child or meet a higher burden of proof than preponderance of the evidence" (Zorza, 1992, p. 922). In some US states, it appears that the parent opposing joint custody has an almost impossible burden to meet to convince the court that it is not in the best interests of the child. Many US statutes make it clear that courts may impose joint custody awards even if only one parent requests it. Judges have been found to generally prefer joint custody provisions because they make their jobs much easier. They "hardly need to look at what the particular child needs or how capable each parent is relative to the other in parenting" (Ibid, p. 923).

In cases of domestic violence, joint custody is dangerous for women and children, as some Irish commentators have pointed out (Ferguson, 1997c; Task Force on Violence Against Women, 1997). This however is an argument against the improper use of joint custody; it is not an argument against the underlying principle of joint custody.

Taking all the evidence we have reviewed here into account, we believe that the courts should have a discretionary - as opposed to a mandatory - power to award joint custody. In our view, joint custody is the appropriate option for the court to consider, unless the evidence and the circumstances suggest otherwise; where the evidence and the circumstances suggest otherwise, the best interests of the child should be the organising principle on which court decisions are based.

It is clearly wrong for fathers to be adversely judged purely on the basis of being fathers, just as it is unjust for women to be punished by the courts simply because of unquestioned assumptions about mothers. Meeting the best interests of children on a case-by-case basis can be established by eliciting children's views, as well as each parent's, and by taking full account of the distribution of responsibility and the nature and quality of relationships in the family prior to the marital breakdown. There is a compelling case for separating couples - and indeed children - to have
routine access to mediation and counselling services to promote communication, conflict resolution and healing.

6.8 Abusive Fathers and the Law

“... and no one knew
my father was eating his children. ...
and yet as he lay
on his back, snoring, our lives slowly
disappeared down the hole of his life”.
From the poem Saturn by Sharon Olds

A further point of contact between fathers and the law - both the civil and the criminal law - involves the abuse of children and women by fathers/husbands. There can be little doubt that, while most men do not abuse, one of the factors that has contributed to the negative perception of men and fathers is the new public visibility of domestic violence and the widespread reporting of child physical and sexual abuse cases and statistics.

In the area of sexual abuse towards children, the number of cases confirmed by the health board suggests that in Ireland at least one in every 1,000 children are sexually abused (McKeown and Gilligan, 1991). However a national survey of adults in Ireland revealed that up to 6% of the population claim to have been sexually abused as children (Market Research Bureau of Ireland, 1987). Of particular interest in this context is the fact that around 90% of child sexual abusers are men (McKeown, Gilligan, et al, 1993, pp. 107). Fathers are the abusers in 35% of confirmed cases compared to 3% of mothers; in other words, fathers are over ten times more likely to sexually abuse their children than mothers - the remaining categories of abusers being outside the immediate family - including baby-sitters, relatives, neighbours - although still being men in the vast majority of cases (Ibid, pp. 110-111). Studies in other countries also confirm that fathers are much more likely to sexually abuse their
children than mothers. It is worth emphasising however that the vast majority of fathers do not sexually abuse their children.

The situation with regard to the physical abuse of children is quite different in terms of the roles of mothers and fathers. Child physical abuse and especially neglect are more commonly recognised than sexual abuse, comprising two thirds of all confirmed child abuse cases coming to the attention of health boards in Ireland in 1995 (Ferguson, 1996b). Some research has found that mothers are just as likely to physically abuse their children as fathers and to seriously abuse them (Sternberg, 1997). Research which points to similar trends in child neglect suggests that these patterns have to be seen, in part, in the context of women spending proportionately more time with, and carrying greater responsibility for, children. Significant relationships between violence against women and other forms of child abuse - including maternal neglect where the woman's capacity to parent well is weakened by the male violence - are also emerging as significant in Irish and international research (Ferguson, 1997b). Again, it is worth emphasising that the vast majority of fathers or mothers do not physically abuse their children.

The research evidence indicates that men are much more likely to be violent to their partners than the reverse. Children who are witnesses to 'domestic' violence in its many forms - be it physical, psychological, emotional, isolating or other forms of 'coercive control' of the women - are experiencing abuse in its own right, often in addition to other forms of child abuse directly perpetrated against the child (Kelleher and Associates and O'Connor, 1995; Ferguson, 1997b).

As indicated above, aside from the key child protection provisions of the Child Care Act 1991, the main legal protections for women and children who are the victims of domestic violence and abuse are barring and protection orders, applications for which constitute more than half the entire family law system in the courts. The study by Fahey and Lyons (1995, p.32) revealed that 4,500 Barring or Protection Orders
were processed through the District Court in 1993-1994. In the case of unmarried spouses, there is now provision for protection in the Domestic Violence Act 1996. It bears emphasising that huge problems have been shown to exist in regulating abusive fathers. These include: (1) uneven implementation of pro-arrest policies by the Gardaí which results in missed opportunities to arrest and charge violent perpetrators; (2) relatively small numbers of cases getting to the courts; (3) the down-grading of offences by the courts, such that inadequate penalties are given; (4) the need for a court accompaniment and advocacy service for abused women to support victims and increase their confidence in the system, empowering them to follow through on civil and criminal proceedings (Task Force on Violence Against Women, 1997). It also bears emphasising that the Report of the Task Force on Violence Against Women, as well as pointing out these difficulties, has set out a comprehensive, co-ordinated strategy for effecting change in promoting the protection of abused women and children and rendering abusers accountable. In Chapter Seven below we review in greater detail the development and orientation of services for working with abusive fathers.

6.9 Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter has reviewed some of the main ways in which the role of fathers is defined and regulated by law. The Irish Constitution makes no reference to fathers; unlike mothers, they do not have a constitutionally-protected right to their children. However the position of unmarried fathers is particularly weak since, under the Irish Constitution, they are not recognised as either a parent or as part of a family and have no constitutional rights to their child. Both the Constitution Review Group and the Commission on the Family have considered this issue and have suggested that the adoption of Article 8 of European Convention on Human Rights - which guarantees every person respect for ‘family life,’ this being interpreted to include non-marital family life - would be one way of granting constitutional rights to unmarried or “natural” fathers. An alternative approach, and one which we
favour, would involve drafting a constitutional provision to guarantee that a mother and a father have equal rights to a child where the child is conceived through their mutual consent. The right of each child to know and be cared for by both its parents, whether living together or not, should also be enshrined in the Constitution. The exercise of these rights would be regulated by law and would always be applied in the best interests of the child.

Moving from the Constitution to statute law, our analysis revealed that unmarried fathers do not have automatic guardianship rights to their children. Our view is that this legal situation is not conducive to joint parenting and is not sufficiently supportive of the child’s right - as enshrined in both Article 8 of European Convention on Human Rights and Articles 7 and 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - to be brought up by both its parents. Nor is it sufficiently supportive of the child’s right to have paternity legally established. We have also considered the evidence - albeit much of it anecdotal in Ireland - concerning separated fathers and the apparently low rates of joint custody of children. This effectively undermines joint parenting since it gives the mother total responsibility for bringing up the child and leaves the father’s access to his child almost entirely at the discretion of the child’s mother.

The law relating to guardianship, custody and access has an important impact on the level of contact between children and their non-resident fathers. Our analysis suggested that many non-resident fathers in Ireland want to be involved in the care and upbringing of their children but have difficulty in affirming their right as an equal parent of their child. This has been articulated in the work of Treoir: Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children and more recently in the work of Parental Equality: The Shared Parenting and Joint Custody Support Group.
The chapter drew upon existing analyses of family law cases through the courts in 1993/1994 in order to look at the uses which fathers make of the family law system. The analysis, based on Fahey and Lyons (1995), revealed that only a small proportion of family disputes and separations are resolved in the courts. Most family law cases are initiated by women and many of them are against men in the sense that they involve barring and protection orders. Guardianship is effectively the only area where fathers use - or can use - the family law system to redress family disputes. Applications for guardianship have increased significantly in recent years - possibly reflecting an increased interest by unmarried fathers in their children - although they still amount to only 6% of all registered birth outside marriage. The court system has an independent effect, over and above the content of the law, on the resolution of family disputes. In general, our analysis suggests that the court system needs to do more to be supportive of fathers who are separating or unmarried. Our view is that a Family Commission - which would effectively remove family cases from the remit of the courts - could be the best way to proceed.

Evidence from elsewhere suggests that the concept of “joint legal custody” may not be sufficient to promote contact between non-resident fathers and their children unless it actually means “joint physical custody”. Moreover other measures which impact on families - such as income support payments from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, particularly Child Benefit (Children’s Allowance) and the One Parent Family Payment - may need to be re-adjusted to make joint custody a viable option.

We have considered the strong argument that exists for joint custody being established as the norm for all parents who are legally separating - with the presumption that parents have equal rights of custody and access - and that the onus should be on the courts to prove why joint custody would not be in the best interests of the child and its parents. We have concluded that on balance the discretionary power given to the courts to award joint custody is appropriate. It leaves in place the
best interests of the child as the organising principle on which decisions must be based, while at the same time establishing joint custody as the appropriate option for the court to consider, unless the evidence and the circumstances suggest otherwise. In forming this view, we have attempted to acknowledge the complex interactions between notions of parental justice on the one hand and assumptions about parental roles on the other.

Fathers also come in contact with the law because a minority are known to abuse their children. Some of the key statistics in this area were reviewed. It is our view that the widespread and wholly appropriate reporting of child abuse cases has contributed to the sometimes widespread and negative perception of men and fathers; it is worth emphasising however that the vast majority of fathers do not abuse their children.

In summary then, our analysis revealed a number of areas within the law where the rights of fathers - particularly the rights of unmarried fathers - require attention. It is our impression that the rights of separated fathers to joint custody of their children may not receive the enthusiastic support from the courts that it deserves and this needs to be addressed. Within the Constitution, we favour a declaration which enshrines the equal rights of father and mother to the guardianship of their child where the child is conceived through consent, irrespective of whether both parents live together. As elsewhere in the book, our analysis is informed by the primacy of the best interests of the child and our belief that this is usually best served when the child knows and is cared for by both its parents, irrespective of the legal or personal relationship between those parents.
Chapter Seven

State Services and Supports for Fathers

Harry Ferguson

“Some men live with a limp they don’t hide, 
stagger, or drag 
a leg. 
Their sons often are angry. 
Only recently I thought: 
Doing what you want ... 
Is that like limping? Tracks of it show in sand.”
From My Father’s Wedding 1924 by Robert Bly.

7.1 Introduction

In countries like Ireland, parenting and family life are deeply influenced and constituted by expert knowledge. Expertise has taken over from tradition and the passing on of wisdom and knowledge through families and communities (Giddens, 1991). This does not mean that extended families and significant others such as mothers and fathers no longer have influence on parenting practices. However it does mean that a structural shift has occurred during the twentieth century where the balance of influence is firmly with the State and, more broadly, with the expert. Childbirth has been medicalised, and child rearing mediated and thoroughly colonised by expertise, from public health nurses, to GPs, to schools, social services and so on. Parents - and especially mothers - also increasingly regulate their own behaviour by using expert knowledge through consulting advice books, magazines and other media. The power of expertise is such that social intervention and knowledge no longer merely reflect and act on a pre-existing reality of child rearing. Expertise inherently shapes and actually constitutes parenting norms. Thus, an interrogation of the gendered norms and perspectives on parenting that characterise
expertise and social intervention in Ireland today has much to contribute to our understanding of how fathering is constituted and ways in which it can be changed through public policy.

This chapter suggests that social intervention into parenting and family life occurs on a continuum. At one end, there are universal State services such as hospitals/maternity care, general practice and public health nursing to which all citizens have a right to promote their children's and their own well-being and competence as parents (section 7.2). At the other end, there are specific, selective services which intervene pro-actively in the interests of child welfare to regulate deviant parenting. The most significant of these that we examine here are those governed by the duties of the Health Board community care teams under the Child Care Act (1991) and the Child Abuse Guidelines (1987; 1995) to investigate and manage suspected child abuse (Ferguson and Kenny, 1995). A new Domestic Violence Act (1996) also places increased obligations on Health Boards, the Garda', and the justice system to protect adult members of households and regulate gender relations in the private domain (section 7.3). In the majority of cases this involves protecting women from men's domestic violence (Kelleher and Associates and O'Connor, 1995). Our review of the evidence suggests that not only are women still the primary focus of social intervention in their capacities as mothers, but that women are the main child care workers and providers of public child care services. Men are largely absent from involvement with children in public provision, yet are over-represented in management positions, a gendered division of power and child care work that, we suggest, public policy will have to seek to proactively change if fatherhood, masculinity and gender relations more generally are to be genuinely recast in ways that advantage children, women and men themselves (section 7.4).

Fathers, as we have stressed throughout the book, are not an homogenous group. They differ greatly in orientation, style, social and legal status, and so on. One thing that seems common to all fathers, however, is the need for support and guidance.
Precisely the same must be said of mothers. Yet, as our analysis shows, fathers tend to be largely avoided by State and social services, which still tend to assume that ‘parenting’ is synonymous with ‘mothering’. The result is an almost total absence of supports for men from all social backgrounds. We show that this arises from the fact that little or no concept of men’s vulnerability exists either in society in general or, more specifically, within the professional caring community (section 7.5). This has much to do with how dominant forms of ‘masculinity’ are constructed and perceived in Irish society, not least by men and male-dominated institutions themselves. Thus, in this chapter we seek to provide at least a start in deconstructing the myth of the invulnerable man and father. We give particular attention to identifying the needs of those men who have to father in marginalised communities and circumstances, such as the long-term unemployed and young men, and consider strategies for social intervention. These strategies include the development of men’s groups as well as education and youth work programmes for young men which place the fatherhood role and responsibility at the core of their masculine identity.

7.2 Universal State Services and Fathers

Research and practice suggest that at every point on the continuum of State services and supports, fathers tend to be avoided by professionals, and there is a great deal of uncertainty among professionals about how to approach men and work with them. Traditionally, in the mainstream of social intervention, ‘parenting’ has implicitly been synonymous with ‘mothering’. Intervention has focused on women as the primary carers while the place of men and engagement around fathering has at best been ambiguous; at worst, men are ignored entirely. An illuminating example is a recent qualitative study of 35 lone-parent fathers in the North-East of England which showed that a number of the men interviewed were surprised and disappointed by the lack of attention they received as lone-parents (Barker, 1994). Apart from some initial contact with court welfare officers, when custody issues were being clarified,
A social work intervention was minimal. Some of the lone fathers were critical of this hands-off approach feeling that “social welfare agencies were failing in their duties by not ensuring that everything was satisfactory in new lone father households”. The study also disclosed "a surprising lack of involvement by health visitors in the lives of lone fathers and their children" and concluded that "a sizeable minority of lone fathers felt they would have benefited from some professional being available to give them advice and validation in their parenting roles, [and] health visitors would have been ideally placed to have adopted such roles, and some lone fathers were surprised that they had not" (Barker, 1994). The author makes no substantive claims as to what caused this tentative approach but speculates that it could arise from mismanagement, a respect for patriarchal rights to authority and privacy, difficulties in (female) health visitors relating to (male) parents, or some other cause. But the result was clear: what the author calls "fit fatherhood" was neither being nurtured nor monitored.

While no equivalent research has been carried out on intervention with lone-fathers in Ireland, there is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that similar patterns exist here and, moreover, that fathers in general - whatever their status - tend to be avoided by welfare professionals. This is despite the fact that socio-economic changes have resulted in there being many more 'vulnerable' fathers, such as long-term unemployed men who are at home with children. In Chapter One, we estimated that there were 5,000 lone parent fathers with children under the age of 15 in Ireland in 1996 of whom about 40% are unemployed (see Table 1.2 above). At the very least such men - like all fathers - are in need of engagement around how they see their role and what their needs as fathers are in terms of advice and support services. There is also evidence that the absence of fathers from welfare intervention and support programmes is a two-way process. Just as professionals avoid men, many fathers tend to resist engaging with welfare practitioners, regarding such encounters as "women's business" (Milner, 1996). Typically, mothers and professionals such as public health nurses are left to get on with it. The attitudes and
general orientation of the welfare professionals undoubtedly have a significant bearing in shaping such bias in social intervention. But so too do men's attitudes to becoming involved with the services and the degree to which they define themselves as active fathers and co-parents. In practice, many men are not available due to work and other commitments during the hours when services are being delivered.

7.3 Selective Intervention With Abusive Fathers

At the other end of the continuum, even in those situations where there is reason to be deeply concerned about fathers who are known or suspected of putting their children at risk of abuse, the bulk of the work has gone into mothers. Recent research into child protection work in Ireland demonstrates how social workers and other professionals place women at the centre of intervention in ways that can empower and support them and their children; equally however it disempowers them because it is a form of discriminatory practice which simply expects too much of women and little or nothing of men (Buckley, 1997). One Irish study that examined the response to cases where there was concern about both domestic violence and child abuse found that while the man was the suspected abuser in the vast majority of cases, most of the work went into the mothers as generally the (violent) men were ignored, avoided or themselves managed to avoid the professionals (Ferguson, 1997b).

These findings are supported by official reports concerned with child abuse, such as the Report of the Kilkenny Incest Investigation (McGuinness, 1993), which notes the absence of work with men and the importance of trying to get more fathers involved in family support services as a way of preventing abuse and parenting difficulties. Similar trends have been disclosed in research into UK policy and practice (Milner, 1993; DHSS, 1995). Professional avoidance of men who are abusive in intimate relationships arises from a number of factors. Such men generate fear for personal safety and a sense of hopelessness that they cannot or will not change no matter what is done. It is a symptom of a lack of confidence that has arisen from the general
neglect of work with men and the skills deficit that needs to be corrected in the health, social and criminal justice services (Ferguson and Synott, 1995). The upshot is that “social workers unwittingly collude with ... the effective minimisation of father’s roles and behaviour by concentrating on women who provide a softer target for their efforts” (Milner, 1996, p. 119).

As one social work academic and former practitioner has wisely observed, it is one thing to recognise deficits in skills and confidence around work with men and quite another to change it (O’Hagan, 1997). As well as changing attitudes and awareness of gender issues, the institutional development of actual programmes that work with abusive men has a crucial role to play. Intervention programmes based on group work with violent men have been developing in Ireland since the late 1980s, and there are now two distinct programmes in existence: the MOVE (Ireland) - Men Overcoming ViolenCE - programme, and the Cork Domestic Violence Project (Ferguson and Synott, 1995; Cork and Ross Family Centre, 1995). A failure to engage violent men is at least in part a product of the limited intervention options available to practitioners. Once such 'treatment' options become available, the more professionals in the community become aware of and use them, practice can be re-oriented to focus more strategically on abusive fathers. It is crucial, however, that the specific development of work with abusive men takes place through the adoption of core principles for best practice which have now been set out as the basis for government policy in this area (Task Force on Violence Against Women, 1997, Chapter 10).

The resourcefulness of fathers to protect and promote the welfare of children in vulnerable family situations is rarely considered, let alone promoted by State intervention. While child sexual abuse tends to gain more media attention, child 'neglect' is still the most commonly reported problem investigated by Health Boards (Ferguson, 1996b). It is a complex phenomena which is characterised by the inter-relationship of poverty, disadvantage, deficits in parenting skills and personal
coping resources, all of which requires that - where present - fathers as well as mothers are mobilised as active carers. In practice, the majority of abuse cases involve children who are 'in need' and who are being parented in circumstances of material and emotional adversity. A strategic focus on fathers needs to be part of an overall approach which is not only concerned with intervention after the fact of 'abuse', but which identifies and integrates vulnerable households into supportive child care services in a manner which seeks to prevent either abuse or the need for children to be received into care (Ferguson and Kenny, 1995).

Thus, it is clear that in 'high risk' parenting, public policy faces a major challenge in re-focusing practice from its primary concern with the ability of mothers 'to protect' their children. There are undoubtedly situations where, for reasons of safety to women, children and the professionals themselves, it is quite legitimate not to be man-centred or father-centred in intervention. However, the general absence of work with men means that many are being illegitimately 'missed' by the services with a high cost to women, children and men themselves.

7.4 Fathers, Men and Public Child Care Provision

We have already noted in Chapter Four that men are virtually absent from childcare and related services. As Murphy's comprehensive analysis of Irish child welfare and family support services shows, the involvement of men in the public provision of child care, in crèches, family and day care services is virtually non-existent (Murphy, 1996). While women have engaged enthusiastically in the vast array of community and personal development initiatives that have developed - mainly in the voluntary sector - in recent years, men are virtual strangers to such services. Ryland's study of parenting programmes in Ireland confirms that the take-up by fathers is minimal (Ryland, 1995). Moreover, it is women who do the bulk of professional child care work. In the Irish Pre-School Playgroups Association about 20 of their 1700 members are men (personal communication). In primary schools it is rare for male
teachers to take infants classes; only one man in the Cork area, for instance, is currently known to do so. The prevailing ideology is that teachers get "promoted" out of junior infants, the implication being that the "real" work of teaching goes on with older children and adults (personal communication with Dr. Francis Douglas, University College Cork). At second level, the subject of Home Economics is taken by a third of all pupils, mostly girls, and all who teach it, with one or two exceptions, are women.

The under-involvement of fathers in parenting and support services is underpinned by perceptions of the 'feminised' nature of child rearing which aptly reflects the gendered reality that child care work - both in public and private domains - is predominantly women's work. Similar patterns are evident in social work and other helping services. As Doherty's analysis of service providers in the Midland and Mid-Western Health Boards has shown, 85% of the front-line social workers employed in those two Health Boards are women (Doherty, 1996). Management structures, however, are male-dominated as senior positions are overwhelmingly held by men.

A picture emerges of a dominant form of state intervention into family life that is deeply gendered. While the day-to-day work of public and private child care is essentially feminised being predominantly done by women, men's role is largely restricted to child care 'managers'. They are the administrators of family life; bureaucratic men whose (paternal) authority lies in organisational rationality and accountability, but not in the emotional depth and commitment that true intimacy and mentoring of the next generation demands. At best then, men are the imaginary heads of public and private 'households', as it were. For while men have very real administrative power, they have limited involvement in terms of day-to-day child care practice and their direct impact on the domain of the intimate appears limited. That said, the ways in which men perform these administrative tasks in terms of promoting openness and emotional communication for staff are crucial.
This suggests to us that it is not only crucial for fathers to take an active paternal role with children and to be acknowledged for doing so, but for welfare agencies and practitioners to adopt perspectives on intervention which are open to acknowledging and fostering men's active role with children and in family life. Thus in saying that social intervention essentially ignores fathers we are not arguing that this reflects a simple reality where women are the primary parents and men do nothing at home. That may be the case in some households. We are arguing rather that there is a palpable gender bias in how expertise and intervention actually shape the situation which encourages mothers but not fathers to be the primary carers. It is a bias that effectively ignores the work done by fathers and prevents the fatherhood role from developing to its full potential by keeping men stuck in traditional roles and, at worst, discouraging them from getting involved with children at all. The professional community must become fully aware of guiding assumptions and practices around gender roles and needs to re-imagine its relationship to fathers and mothers if it is to genuinely allow for the empowerment of men as well as women as active parents. As Murphy concludes: “The real challenge for public policy will be to convince fathers and men in general that there are real gains to be made for them and their children from acknowledging and developing emotional literacy. Authoritarian child-rearing approaches will need to be replaced by the skills of nurturance and negotiation in the more democratised personal relationships of a post-modern society” (Murphy, 1996, p.95).

In our view, this represents just as great a challenge for 'public' fathers who hold administrative power and the reins of public policy in the State as it does for the parenting practices of fathers in private.

### 7.5 Intervention Strategies With Vulnerable Fathers

Fathers from different social backgrounds have different needs in terms of State services and supports. The specific issues pertaining to non-resident fathers, and
working fathers, for instance, are dealt with elsewhere in the book. Our focus in the present discussion is on what we call ‘vulnerable’ fathers in the sense of men who are socially excluded. Before elaborating further on their needs, it should be stressed that more ‘mainstream’ men, even fathers who are middle-class and affluent, can be extremely vulnerable fathers in the general sense of experiencing major problems with intimacy and forming worthwhile relationships with their children and partners, and indeed other men.

A recent study by Terrence Real, an American family therapist and academic, called *I Don’t Want to Talk About It: Overcoming The Secret Legacy of Male Depression*, names and gives shape to the huge problem of depression among men which is so often ignored and misunderstood. This is not least by men themselves. *Overt depression* is characterised by feelings of worthlessness, worry, poor concentration, helplessness, poor sleep, and so on. Clinical work with men who are depressed shows that their poor experiences of being fathered are central motifs in their problems with intimacy and depression and their difficulties in forging meaningful emotional connections with their own children and partners. What Real calls *covert depression*, settles below the level of consciousness as the man desperately defends against the onslaught of acknowledging such pain. Whereas overt depression involves surrendering to and enduring the toxic relationship to the self, covert depression involves warding off all toxic shame, at any price. The covertly depressed man relies on external stimulants to rectify an inner baseline of shame. His life is governed by ways of relating and activities (work, ‘achievements’, addiction to alcohol, drugs, sex, dieting) which, rather than enhancing an already adequate sense of self-esteem, desperately tries to prop-up an inadequate one. It is an experience of depression that “is not about feeling bad so much as losing the capacity to feel at all” (Ibid, p. 55).

This analysis has relevance to men from all social backgrounds, as it reveals the hidden pain apparently experienced by many (but obviously not all) ‘driven’, affluent and outwardly successful men. At worst, such men become violent and
batter their spouses and children, demonstrating that such violence by men is prevalent in all social classes (Task Force on Violence Against Women, 1997). They may even end up trying to kill themselves, too often succeeding. Real draws out the contradictory experiences and expectations that surround masculinity - how society on the one hand now wants men to be more in touch with their inner-selves and feelings, and on the other colludes in not allowing men to be vulnerable by so often punishing those men who do take the risk of intimate exposure. He cites American studies of college room mates where female students reached out to their room mates for support about being depressed and were met with caring and nurturing reactions. By contrast, when male students disclosed depression to their room mates, they were met with social isolation and often outright hostility. Real concludes that “It is true that men do not easily disclose their depression. But it also seems true that many may have good reason to hide” (Ibid, p. 38). He also shows that GPs, for instance, tend to know little or nothing about men’s inner-lives and how to approach and assess them on an affective level in non-traditional ways. This kind of research and clinical experience exposes the shadow side to Western manhood and the price of power that many men experience and the need for men to re-define masculinity and gender relations in more self-regarding, mutually supportive and caring ways (Kimmel, 1994).

Such studies are also significant because they recognise the urgent need to develop methodologies of working with men. It is one thing to recognise that some vulnerable men - and those they live with - are in trouble. It is quite another to get them to come forward, engage directly about their problems and use help. The challenge is to get men to identify problems like depression and move men beyond “our love of invulnerability” (Real, p. 38) and defences to achieve intimacy and learn the “hard discipline of learning to love from within” (Ibid, p. 57). This has to involve the man “stopping running” and dealing with the pain that has driven his behaviour. “First, the covertly depressed man must walk through the fire from which he has run. He
must allow the pain to surface. Then, he may resolve his hidden depression by learning about self-care and healthy esteem” (Real, 1997, p.63).

In situations involving vulnerable long-term unemployed men, redefining their role can be literally a matter of survival. Taking on an active fatherhood role can be a way of finding a meaningful place and value in society. Emphasising to these men that they should become more involved in child care for reasons of social justice, because they have power, is problematic. This is because they usually feel powerless, and this aptly reflects the subordinate structural position they find themselves in. An approach that just emphasises fairness and equality issues, as discussed in Chapter Four, is unlikely to work with men who themselves feel like they have been treated unfairly. Indeed, it will very likely make things worse for these men and their families as they eventually refuse to engage at all with the services and become even more isolated. We are not arguing that such men should be approached as victims and not be challenged as well as supported in how they manage change. The key point is both methodological and substantive. Men who are suffering in such circumstances need primarily to have their pain, loss and struggles affirmed. They need help to (re)discover their essential worth as human beings, their capacity for generativity and to have an opportunity to give value to, communicate and to receive such care in social relationships. Through this process, which is as much a spiritual journey as a sociological one, men may be helped to (re)claim new meaning in fatherhood and intimate relations more generally (Arthurs, Ferguson and Grace, 1995).

The men’s spouse and children also need support. Families of distressed men may worry about the stigma that surrounds depression and, because of an impulse to “protect the male ego”, may collude in the man’s denial of his problem and reluctance to receive help. But as Terrence Real remarks, “when we minimise a man’s depression, for fear of shaming him, we collude with the cultural expectations of masculinity in a terrible way. We send a message that the man who is struggling
should not expect help. He must be “self-reliant”. He must resolve his distress on his own” (Real, 1997, pp.38-9). The leap in imagination, understanding and conceptualisation of masculinities that it takes to view men as vulnerable and in need of such support should not underestimated. We are simply not accustomed to seeing men as vulnerable. The dominant construction of masculinity in Ireland constitutes an ideology, a series of images and cultural rules against which manhood tends to be assessed, which adds up to the view that men are essentially invulnerable. While men (and women) never buy into these ideologies in any simple sense, they still impact hugely on what men internalise and how men feel about themselves and others and their capacity for intimacy (for an extended discussion of these issues, see Ferguson, 1997b; Bannon, 1976). Recent research has begun to challenge the prevailing image of male invulnerability by showing, for instance, that men are often extremely frightened by being the victims of violent crime. One study looked at 33 men who were the victims of violent assault by men and how they were affected by it. The study found that the men’s experiences of being victims were traumatic and similar to women’s. The men reported feelings of fear, phobias, disruption of sleep, hyper-vigilance, aggressiveness, personality change and a considerably heightened sense of vulnerability as a result of the attack (cited in Newburn and Stanko, 1994).

None of this is particularly surprising. It is the idea that men are invulnerable, and are not affected by such things that stops us from seeing how many do, in reality, suffer. Thus, “Services which assume that men do not need help or will not accept help merely collude in the reproduction of an ideology which places the traits of ‘strength’, ‘resilience’ and ‘emotional independence’ at the centre of the dominant conception of masculinity” (Newburn and Stanko, 1994, p.163).

At least some men feel vulnerable some of the time, though some are unlikely to admit to feeling so. Men "are, as such, emotional beings capable of asking for support" (Stanko and Newburn, 1994, p.161) and we need to maximise the
opportunities for men to make such requests and come forward with their distress, worries and express their need for support. We believe that recognising men's vulnerability and enabling them to surrender to it constitutes an urgent agenda for professionals in the health and social services.

In our view, social intervention needs to go much further still. Based both on our reading of the literature and, perhaps more importantly still, our experience of working with men's groups, vulnerable men also need to be linked into wider social networks and in particular to engage in development work around fathering and masculinity in general in the presence of other men. Vulnerable men can get stuck in grief, mourning for the loss of self, and have huge problems finding meaning in intimacy (Smith, 1996). The further development of structures such as men's groups can actively reach out to such men and break into their isolation, sense of failure and create structures for mutual support. Through this healing process, a space is created in which issues of justice and responsibility can be addressed and men can reach an operational definition of themselves as “good fathers” that is in tune with their own needs and perspectives as well as those of their partner and children (see Chapters One and Four above).

These issues should extend into schools as well as youth and community work to include intervention which addresses vulnerable young men's definitions of themselves and their active participation as future fathers (Furstenberg, 1995). A clear concept of responsible fatherhood in the definition of masculinity needs to be clarified and adopted in intervention with young men. This is especially true for those young men for whom the whole notion of employment has become meaningless, who do badly out of the education system and who cannot get work. The loss of a traditional masculine identity has left some vulnerable young men impoverished in terms of a place in society. Many who become fathers are not only excluded from work, but are excluded from parenting, either by themselves or by their partners.
The dynamics of these processes and the possibilities for more pro-active intervention strategies have begun to be vividly shown-up in research into vulnerable young men and fathering in the inner-city. Furstenburg (1995) and Marsiglio (1995) consider how intervention programmes can attempt to encourage young fathers' long-term paternal involvement and alter vulnerable young men's views about fatherhood and masculinity. Furstenburg’s study is an analysis of the accounts of inner-city young men about their lives, masculine identity and struggles to become actively involved fathers. He also interviewed the young women who were mothers of the children. The meaning of fatherhood for these young mothers involved more than just helping to support children financially. "Concern that fathers remain emotionally involved in their children's lives ran high" (Furstenburg, 1995, p.125). The young men themselves mostly had similar aspirations of fatherhood - "doing for your children" - as involving more than material assistance. Fatherhood meant something important to the young men as a chance to redeem themselves in the context of their unemployment and no other real opportunities for them to be a man (Ibid, p.133). In practice, however, a number of the men, by their own admission, found it difficult to live up to their standards. The theme of broken promises loomed large. The fathers who disappeared from their children's lives felt real shame and loss. The rare men who managed to stay involved with children were esteemed by everyone the researcher spoke to.

The young men had no preparation at all for parenthood; most pregnancies were unplanned; and the community was suspicious of their ability to honour their pledges. Nearly all of the men spoke of being emotionally undernourished by their biological fathers, leaving some feeling inadequately trained in how to be a caring father (Ibid, p.134). They were faced with having to learn child care on the job which proved to be difficult for most of the men. Many young fathers turned out to feel more restricted by domestic routines than they imagined, unwilling - as their women partners usually saw it - to give up street life for home life and become more reliable.
partners in child care. Men generally tend to think that they receive too little credit for what they do in the domestic sphere. This difference in perspective between the sexes on the amount of domestic work each does is not unique to young inner-city couples, but appears throughout social classes and lifestyles. What is particular to this group, however, is the centrality of street life. Such young men are used to coming and going as they pleased. Without establishing a reliable domestic or often work routine, such men quickly become auxiliary figures turning up when they please, rather than co-parents. They drift apart from and finally lose contact with their children and their partners - who are disappointed and angry at the injustice of the men's failure to be supportive - and the situation breaks down.

The policy implications of such findings are particularly significant if viewed through the lens of a developmental perspective (see Chapter 4, section 4.3 above). A striking feature of these young men's lives is the lack of any supports to enable them to make successful developmental transitions into fatherhood. Policies and practices need to reverse this trend by addressing vulnerable young men's definitions of themselves in terms of active participation as future fathers (Furstenberg, 1995). Youth work - and work with young men in general, in schools, and so on - needs to include a concept of responsible fatherhood in the definition of masculinity adopted in intervention.

In the US, the National Urban League has endeavoured to reach out to vulnerable young men through its "Male Responsibility Project". In this project, young men are encouraged to delay fatherhood and concentrate on their educational and work roles. If they do contribute to an unplanned pregnancy and birth, they are expected to give priority to their father identity and assume responsibility for their children (Marsiglio, 1995, p. 92). The intervention programme attempts to support them in doing just that. Rather than postponing intervention or adopting a hands-off approach to men's involvement with their children, it is far better that we adopt practices which help fathers adjust to their new role transitions immediately. This
prevents the increased difficulties that arise from providing fathers with ample time to establish a pattern of paternal irresponsibility and, most important of all, prevents children experiencing the agony of feeling abandoned by absent fathers. It is also crucial to ensure that men do not retreat from fatherhood responsibilities because they are presently limited in their ability to contribute financially to their child's support. It is the inter-personal and emotional aspects of fathering, as well as responsibilities connected with providing financial support, which must be emphasised.

7.6 Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter has shown that various forms of State intervention in families - particularly by health care, family care and child care professionals - have a significant impact on fathers by shaping and reinforcing the existing parenting roles of mothers and fathers. Our analysis reveals that fathers tend to be largely ignored or avoided by State social services. These services still tend to assume that it is mothers who will take responsibility for childcare and, by making this assumption, they help to ensure that fathers do not. The State’s health and social services have made little effort to get men directly involved in fatherhood, a neglect which plays into men's traditional reluctance to define themselves in terms of nurturing and caring roles. The result is an almost total absence of supports for fathers from all social backgrounds.

One of the reasons why professional caring services avoid fathers is that there is little or no concept of men’s vulnerability either in society generally or in the professional caring community specifically. This has much to do with how dominant forms of ‘masculinity’ are constructed and perceived in Irish society, not least by men and male-dominated institutions themselves. It is necessary therefore to start deconstructing the myth of the invulnerable man and father.
There is a great deal of uncertainty among professionals about how to approach men and work with them. The experience tends to be mutual however: just as professionals avoid men, many fathers tend to resist engaging with welfare practitioners, regarding such encounters as "women's business". In practice, many men are not available due to work and other commitments during the hours when services are being delivered.

One of the consequences of the neglect of fathers by State services is that the resourcefulness of fathers to protect and promote the welfare of children in vulnerable family situations is rarely considered, let alone promoted by State intervention. While child sexual abuse tends to gain more media attention, child 'neglect' is still the most commonly reported problem investigated by Health Boards and this clearly involves mothers as much as fathers. Thus, public policy faces a major challenge in re-focusing practice from its primary concern with the ability of mothers 'to protect' their children and to start working with fathers so that they too can become more involved in the parenting process.

We have already noted in Chapter Four that men are virtually absent from childcare and related services. The under-involvement of fathers in parenting and support services is underpinned by perceptions of the 'feminised' nature of child rearing. Within the health care system, men's roles are largely restricted to child care 'managers'. This confers very real administrative power but carries limited involvement in terms of day-to-day child care practice.

We are arguing that the gender bias in State services to families creates a situation which does not encourage fathers to get involved with their children. We are also arguing that the professional community must become fully aware of its guiding assumptions and practices around gender roles and needs to re-imagine its relationship to fathers and mothers if it is to genuinely allow for the empowerment of men as well as women as active parents.
The main recommendation to emerge from this analysis is that professionals involved in support services for families need to re-examine their practices from the perspective of fathers. These professionals include Public Health Nurses, Social Workers, General Practitioners and Childcare Workers. In our view, professionals need to be made aware of how their assumptions and practices are excluding fathers. Equally, professionals need to be supported through training programmes on how to work effectively with fathers.

Elsewhere in the book - see particularly Chapters One and Two - we referred to the role which men’s groups can play in helping men to find support from each other. We repeat here our endorsement of the support being given to men’s groups by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and recommend its expansion.

Our analysis has revealed that some young fathers are particularly vulnerable because of their exclusion from the labour market as well as from parenting, either because of their own choice and circumstances or their partner’s choice and circumstances. We recommend that programmes should be devised for these young men to help them make the transition to manhood and fatherhood. Our suspicion is that some of these young men may themselves have had poor fathering experiences and could benefit greatly from a well resourced programme - a New Opportunities Programme for Men - to explore their experiences, both past and present. Programmes like this have been tried elsewhere and could be adapted to Irish circumstances.
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