

## Chapter Three

### IRON JOHN OR IRONING JOHN? THE CHANGING LIVES OF NEW ZEALAND FATHERS<sup>1 2</sup>

by  
Paul Callister

#### INTRODUCTION

In New Zealand, and internationally, concern has been expressed about the impact of father absence on children (e.g. O'Reilly, 1997; Blankenhorn, 1995). In parallel, there has also been a growing interest in creating greater opportunities for positive, involved fathering. In part, the upsurge in interest in the lives of fathers reflects the realisation that many men are now facing major challenges to their "traditional" roles. These include the loss of paid work for some men, excess working hours for others, having to adapt to non-custodial or shared parenting arrangements and, for another group of men, becoming part of new "blended" families. In trying to adapt to this new diversity many men are having to alter expectations of the roles they wish, or are able, to play in raising children. They are also examining wider attitudes and structures which might assist, or alternatively impede, their preferred parenting option. This includes examining government policies which impact on family life. However, another part of the interest in fathering comes from a group of men who have welcomed and, in some instances even promoted, some of the changes occurring in society. These include changes such as increased participation in paid work by mothers, which have assisted some fathers to take a more active role in parenting.

In this chapter, I begin by briefly exploring some ideas about the traditional New Zealand father, and the traditional family. I then look at some of the new challenges facing fathers. From this, I examine one concept of responsible fathering. On the basis of this definition, I then consider some of the possible barriers to responsible fathering.

#### THE "TRADITIONAL" NEW ZEALAND FATHER

While many feminist historians have rightly complained about the absence of women's lives in *HisStory*, history also tends to overlook the lives of those men who focus on parenting. This is partly why there is much debate as to what the roles of the "traditional" father were. In some accounts, fathers are portrayed as generally having been mentors, even as spiritual guides. Another view is that the traditional father was

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<sup>1</sup> This title was inspired by the British book *Ironing John* (Leith, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Fathering the Future forum held in Christchurch in March 1998 and at the Fathers, Families and the Future forum held in Auckland in September 1998.

often a tyrant. Certainly, there is often the view put forward that fathers were mainly seen as a source of income. Based on interviews of New Zealand men, Gray (1983: 96) describes what we now often think of as the “traditional” New Zealand father in the early post war era:

They took their responsibilities as providers very seriously - with the socialisation they had they could hardly do otherwise. But they were trapped, the better they provided, the less they were home. And since they had little training in the intimacies of daily family life and few opportunities to practise, most preferred to opt out of this area altogether and concentrated on what they knew best. Those who did want to stay at home, could not - that is, not unless they were prepared to accept a lower standard of living and face the scepticism of society at large. The odd one or two who dreamed of getting the best of both worlds through a more flexible work structure hesitated when they counted the cost in money, promotion and prestige.

Like all generalisations, there were exceptions. Many fathers (perhaps most) were not emotionally remote and, in addition, some fathers did provide both “quality” and “quantity” time. One is Lex Grey, who would subsequently become a key figure in the New Zealand Playcentre movement (Callister, 1998a). In 1948 he and his wife took their daughter to a Wellington “nursery play centre”. He said of his local playcentre (Mitchell and May, 1993: 38-39):

I could go and I was welcome, mainly because I could hammer a nail in to the place - more for that reason than any other. But we gradually changed that and I became secretary and they began to realise that men were able to relate to children - that men wanted to relate to children - that the men were just as scared of children as women can be - that men were human and men were people - that we had to take a bit of the sexism out of pre-school and start thinking in terms of people instead of male and female in what we were doing.

Around this time other men were also challenging further areas of “traditional” behaviour. For example, some men did not want to opt out of attending the birth of their child. In the 1950s, both men and women in the newly formed Parents Centre lobbied to allow the involvement of fathers in childbirth.

The “swinging 1960s” is often seen as the period in which traditional roles for both men and women faced a high level of critical scrutiny. Yet, most men still had stable jobs, most children were brought up in couples, and most women spent a considerable amount of time out of paid work when raising children. However, there again were exceptions in this period. For example, on September 30th, 1967, Playcentre history was made when three fathers who were highly involved in looking after their children were presented with Assistant Supervisor Certificates (*Playcentre Journal*, 1968).

In the late 1960s, while some fathers may have felt trapped in the traditional income-provider role, many mothers were feeling trapped in the home. In this period, the

emergence of the second wave of feminism, assisted by an expanding economy and job market, began to help or, in some cases, force mothers to move back into paid work. From the 1970s, both mothers and fathers in two-parent families increasingly worked outside the home. However, the man was still usually the main income earner in full time paid work, while women generally worked part-time once the children reached school age.

The 1970s was also the period in which sole parenthood and, in particular sole motherhood, started its dramatic growth in New Zealand and other industrialised countries. While in the past death was a prime reason for sole parenthood, marital breakups became the key reason in this early growth period in New Zealand.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the 1970s marked the period in which unemployment for prime-age men, including fathers, started its dramatic rise.

## **FATHERS IN THE LATE 1990s**

### **Changes in Employment**

In the late 1990s there are many challenges faced by men. A major challenge is the change in paid employment. Having a well-paid job and steady future earning prospects has historically been a key factor in marriage decisions as well as in decisions to have children. Marriage has tended to be delayed in times of economic recession. If there is still a widely held view that men in childrearing couples should be the main income earner, then the changes in employment mean that many men are now facing major problems in the “marriage market” (Callister, 1998b). While many factors are influencing the decline of couple families, one theory is that many men can no longer provide financial support for families (e.g. Birrell and Rapson, 1998; Wilson, 1987). While there has been a long term decline in men’s participation in paid work, this was particularly strong over the 1986 to 1991 census period (Department of Statistics, 1993). These dramatic changes in employment can be illustrated by looking at paid work participation rates of men aged 25-29 and 30-34. These are the age groups in which men (and women) have traditionally started to form couple households and have children.

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<sup>3</sup> In the not too distant past, disease, war, accidents, and starvation meant that many children actually grew up without a father, or a mother. It also meant a high proportion of children did not reach adulthood. Certainly, few people survived long enough to be grandparents. Although discussing a period well into the industrial revolution, Uhlenberg (1980) notes that in the United States, even as recently as in 1900, 1 out of four white children under the age of fifteen had lost a parent, and 1 out of 62 had lost both. The corresponding figures for 1976 were 1 out of 20 and 1 out of 1800. Sole parenthood and fatherless families are therefore not new issues.

**Table 1 Percentage of men and women aged 25-34 who were in paid work, 1986 to 1996**

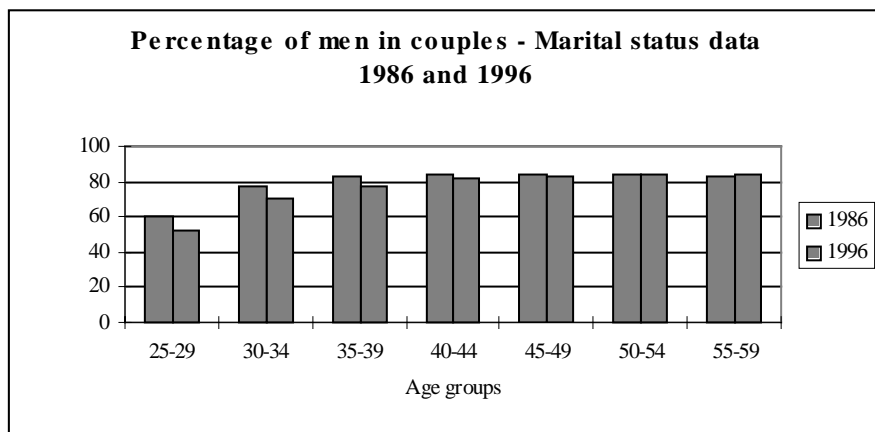
		% of men in paid work	% of women in paid work
25-29	1986	90.6	57.0
	1991	77.0	54.9
	1996	78.9	62.9
30-34	1986	92.7	57.8
	1991	81.7	54.7
	1996	80.8	60.4

Source: Census of Population and Dwellings, Statistics New Zealand.

The table indicates a large-scale loss of jobs by men in the 25-34 age group between 1986 and 1991. Then, despite strong growth in the economy over the subsequent five years, there was no growth in participation rates for men. By contrast, although starting from a much lower base, there was only a small decline in women’s participation in paid work between 1986 and 1991 with an increase in the subsequent five years.

While it is difficult to determine the cause of the change, a decline in the proportion of men in couples occurred in this age group, as well as amongst those aged 35-49, between 1986 and 1996 (Figure 1).<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1**



Source: Census of Population and Dwellings, Statistics New Zealand.

Note: This shows men in both de facto and legally married couples, but they are not necessarily living in the same household as their partner.

<sup>4</sup> In 1996, amongst those New Zealand men aged 25-59 who were in full-time paid work 52 percent were in a couple with a dependent child. But amongst those unemployed this declined to 38 percent and further to 33 percent for those men not in the labour force (Callister, forthcoming).

## **Employment and partnered fathers**

Changes in employment mean that not only are single men less likely to be in paid work but also that a significant number of fathers who have formed two-parent families now cannot find long-term paid work, or a job which pays enough to support a family. This is especially the situation amongst men with few formal qualifications and, linked to this, those from Maori and Pacific Islands groups (Callister, 1995). For some other men, even if they keep their jobs, workplace changes often mean that they are offered fewer hours than they want or need, which is usually associated with lowered income. However, for yet another group, there is far more pressure to work long hours in one job or to hold multiple jobs. No paid work, too little, or too much paid work are problems facing many fathers.

However, changes in attitudes amongst some people, as well as greater opportunities amongst women in the labour market, also mean there has been an increase in partnered fathers who, through choice, are staying home full time and looking after children or working part time (Callister, 1993, 1994).

Other changes in the labour market may have also resulted in some partnered fathers spending more time with children. An increase in shift work and weekend work means that some couples work non-overlapping shifts, with fathers looking after the children while the mother is out at work (Presser, 1988). While there are currently no data for New Zealand, a recent US study of couples with a preschool child where mothers went out to paid work indicated that the father was the main care giver in 16 percent of these families (Casper, 1996).<sup>5</sup>

## **The growth of sole parent families**

The growth of sole-parent families has provided another major challenge to traditional fathering. Many theories are put forward to explain the growth in sole-mother families and, to a much lesser degree, sole-father families. As discussed, some people link the growth primarily to economic changes, particularly the loss of ability by men to support families, others to a growth in the welfare system (e.g. Murray, 1984), while some researchers identify changing social attitudes as significant (e.g. Jencks, 1993). In the late 1990s, the transition to sole parenthood can occur in a variety of ways. For example, Rothman (1989) notes that new technologies increasingly allow women to “father”. She observes how women can not only employ other women to care for their children, but also to bear children from their “seed”. The new technology allows the purchase of sperm off the internet (McIlroy, 1998) and the growing of human sperm in rats (*Dominion*, 1999). The cloned sheep Dolly shows that soon men may not even be needed to provide this genetic material. Children produced by cloning could be truly “fatherless”.

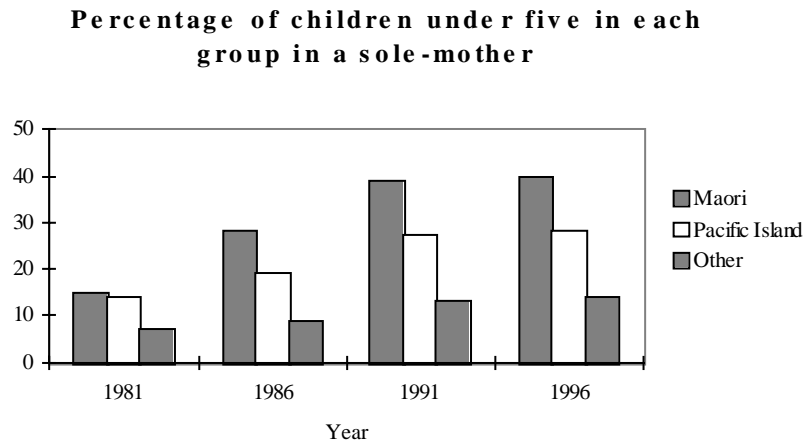
Whatever the reasons for the growth, the increase in sole parenthood has been the strongest amongst the Maori and Pacific Islands communities. The following chart

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<sup>5</sup> The results of a New Zealand childcare survey carried out by Statistics New Zealand will be available in early 1999.

shows the percentage of children under five in sole mother families by ethnic group. Figure 2 is based on the ethnicity of the children.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 2**



Source: Statistics New Zealand, from Davey (1998)

In 1981, there were just over 20,000 children under five in sole mother families, but by 1996 this had risen to nearly 58,000. In 1996, there were around 27,000 preschool Maori children, over 6,000 Pacific Island children, and nearly 24,000 "Pakeha/other" children in sole mother families. In comparison, in 1981 there were just under 2,000 preschool children in sole father families, and this had only increased to nearly 5,000 in 1996. In this latter year, half of the children in these sole father families were Maori (Davey, 1998).

Unfortunately, this type of data gives no idea of father involvement in these families. Some sole-mother families could, in fact, be harmonious shared parenting arrangements, while in others, for a variety of reasons, the fathers may have no involvement with his children. In addition, not all sole mothers live in single adult households. Some are living in extended families, so grandfathers or other male relatives may be part of the household and take an active role in parenting (Jackson and Pool, 1996).

It is also of note that these data are simply a "snapshot". While New Zealand data are not available, Canadian research based on longitudinal data suggests that for many fathers there will be a number of transitions between living arrangements (Juby and Le Bourdais, 1998). According to this research, just under 90 percent of all Canadian men will become fathers. Of those becoming fathers for the first time, over 90 percent will do so initially within an intact two-parent family. In turn, nearly 80 percent of these

<sup>6</sup> There is some debate regarding defining the ethnicity of a family by the ethnicity of a child (e.g. Jackson and Pool, 1996)

fathers will remain in this family arrangement until their children leave home. Overall, this means that only two-thirds of all men will be in an intact two-parent family with their own children across their potential parenting lifecycle. The research also suggests that many sole-parent families will move to being two-parent families through the parents finding new partners. Finally, these data also suggest that in the late 1990s a significant number of children will be part of sole-parent families for at least some of their childhood.

### **The disappearing “traditional” family**

The traditional family is still often seen as being a stable childrearing married couple, where the father has a long-term career in paid work and the mother stays home or works part-time for much of her adult life in order to look after the children. At times, this model still affects those making, or implementing, social policy or law. Yet, in reality, this model has been in a long term decline. Many factors have led to this decline, including that fewer people are marrying, fertility rates have lowered, a longer lifespan means that the period of childrearing is substantially reduced, and a change in the age structure of the population (Davey, 1998: Jackson and Pool, 1996).

In terms of paid work arrangements for two-parent families, while some fathers have moved out of paid work, mothers keep moving into it and many are now working longer hours. This shift to higher participation and longer hours has been particularly strong amongst mothers with tertiary qualifications. In some situations, the move by women into paid work is because men can no longer support families on their income alone. However, many mothers, particularly well educated mothers, want to be in paid work, preferring “quality” rather than “quantity” time with their children. Changes in both living arrangements and employment patterns for families with pre-school children are illustrated in the following table.

**Table 2 - All families with a child under five - % in each group**

	1986	1991	1996
Father in paid work, mother not in paid work	49.2	35.6	28.5
Mother in paid work, father not in paid work	0.8	2.1	2.4
Both Parents in paid work	30.2	28.4	35.8
Neither Parent in paid work	3.2	9.8	7.6
Sole parent - Mother in paid work	2.1	2.8	5.3
Sole parent - Mother not in paid work	13.3	18.8	18.4
Sole parent - Father in paid work	0.6	1.0	0.9
Sole parent - Father not in paid work	0.6	1.5	1.1
n=	173,202	192,546	197,718

Source: Census of Population and Dwellings, Statistics New Zealand.

The table shows a very dramatic decrease in the traditional family arrangement since 1986, and growth in many other family and work arrangements. This includes families where the father is not in paid employment. This can be a non-employed father in a two-

parent family or a non-employed sole father. In 1986, there were just under 8,000 fathers in these two groups. But by 1991, this had risen to nearly 26,000 fathers and, while declining in the next five years, there were still just under 22,000 non-employed fathers in 1996. However, the table also indicates that in a significant number of two-parent families where the father was not in paid work, the mother was also not in paid work.<sup>7</sup> In addition, many of the two-parent families will be “blended” families with a non-biological mother or a non-biological father. Moreover, this table does not show other parenting arrangements such as same sex-couples. Both gay couples and lesbian couples represent, in very different ways, a further challenge to traditional fathering.

As Breiding-Buss notes in chapter 6, this type of data gives no indication as to who takes primary responsibility for caring for the children. Such information is difficult to obtain. For instance the small sample size of the forthcoming time use survey will restrict the analysis of many family types, and issues such as responsibility rather than actual time spent with children cannot be addressed.

### “Work-rich” and “work-poor” fathers

A further analysis of census data for fathers in heterosexual couples shows much diversity in hours of paid work.

**Table 3 Partnered fathers with a child under five not in paid work and by hours of paid work, 1996\***

*% in each group*

Not in paid work	13
Working less than 30 hours/week	5
Working 50 or more hours/week	42
Working 60 or more hours/week	20

Source: Statistics New Zealand

\* % of those specified

A 60 hour week means someone has to work 12 hours per day, 5 days per week, or 7 days at around 8.5 hours per day. Perhaps these are the fathers buying books such as *The 60 Minute Father* (Parsons, 1995) or his follow-on book for even busier fathers, *The 60 Second Father* (Parsons, 1997).

Providing some comparison, only a decade ago less than 5 percent of fathers of pre-school children were not in paid work. In 1991, 39 percent worked 50 or more hours per week, so the 1996 hours data represents a small increase. It is worth noting that in Britain there has been concern expressed that around a third of fathers with a child under 10 worked more than 50 hours per week (Burgess, 1997).

Also of interest is the labour force status of the partners of fathers working long hours of paid work. There is one view that the men who devote their lives to paid work tend

<sup>7</sup> Some reasons for this are discussed in Callister (1998c)



to be those with partners at home looking after the children and doing all the housework. But, in fact, data for couples with a child under five show that very long hours of paid work are more common amongst men with partners working full-time than amongst those with partners not in paid work.

**Table 4 Hours of paid work of partnered fathers with a child under five by hours of paid work by labour force status of their partners, 1996\***

*% in each group*

		Fathers hours of paid work						
		Under 10	10-29	30-49	50-69	70 or more		
Mothers hours of paid work	Full-time	1.6	4.1	51.0	32.3	11.1	100.0	
	Part-time	1.3	2.9	49.0	38.6	8.2	100.0	
	Not in paid work	2.2	3.4	56.0	33.2	5.3	100.0	

Source: Statistics New Zealand

\* % of those specified. In addition, in New Zealand a person working under 30 hours per week is classified as working part-time.

The changes in the labour market and in family type over the last couple of decades mean that in New Zealand:

- there has been a dramatic decline in the “traditional” two-parent family, where the father is the sole income provider and the mother stays home and looks after the children,
- one group of men may be seeing far less of their children due to the growth of sole motherhood, or because they are working long hours in paid work,
- another group have actively chosen to spend more time with their children,
- a further group of men have had the opportunity to spend more time with their children thrust upon them through the growth in male unemployment.

This growing diversity, and potential ambiguity, in the role of fathers has been recognised by a number of researchers. For example, Juby and Le Bourdais (1998: 163) note:

On the one hand, a reduction in male wages, rising unemployment and higher female education create opportunities for women to work, thereby demanding a greater male involvement in traditionally female roles in the home and strengthening the father/child bond; separation and divorce, on the other hand, weaken links between children and their fathers who may henceforth assume neither the provider nor the carer role.

## **SO WHAT IS IT TO BE A RESPONSIBLE FATHER?**

In light of all these changes is there some common view emerging as to what it is to be a responsible father? In America, Levine and Pitt (1995: 5-6) have suggested a definition. They argue a man behaves responsibly towards his child by doing the following:

- He waits to have a baby until he is prepared emotionally and financially to support his child
- He establishes his legal paternity if and when he does have a baby
- He actively shares with the child's mother in the continuing emotional and physical care of their child, from pregnancy onwards.
- He shares in the continuing financial support of their child, from pregnancy onwards with the child's mother.

In a review article on fathering, Doherty *et al* (1998) note this definition is useful as it can apply to a variety of fathering situations not just those within intact couples. However, it does exclude fathering by adoption, or becoming a father by step-parenting. In addition, while this set of criteria might represent an ideal for a biological father, it is a set of criteria that many men, often through no fault of their own, cannot meet. For example, as already discussed, the loss of jobs means many men may not be able to financially support their children. In situations of family separation, a variety of circumstances, including attitudes within Family Court, can prevent the goal of shared custody (Birks, chapter 11).

In addition, the goal of providing both time and money naturally creates a tension for many parents. The child development research literature is clear that children benefit from having sufficient financial and material resources to enable them to fully develop physically, emotionally, and intellectually (e.g. Duncan *et al*, 1998). The labour market research also shows that, generally, a high level of time commitment to paid work is associated with higher hourly earnings brought about by greater opportunities for training and promotion. In addition, other labour market literature shows that low-income people need to work long hours simply to support their families. Therefore earning sufficient income to support children generally requires either a mother, father, or both in two parent families, to be absent for significant periods. Many men, and increasingly women, simply do not, and never will, have the resources to make a choice to spend a considerable amount of time with their children.

## **WHAT INFLUENCES RESPONSIBLE FATHERING?**

As well as discussing concepts of responsible fathering, Doherty *et al* provided an overview of factors potentially influencing such fathering. In common with other areas of social science, they conclude that there is not some simple causal factor and that the influences are very complex. They suggest that personal characteristics of mothers, fathers and children all have a direct impact and also interact with each other. In addition, outside forces are also very important. In their article they provide a list of factors influencing responsible fathering. These are (p. 285):

1. Contextual factors. Within this set of factors were institutional practices; employment opportunities; economic factors; race or ethnicity resources and challenges; cultural expectations, and social support. Institutional practices include such issues as whether within legislation there is a presumption of dual custody of children following the separation of a couple.
2. Father factors. These included the father's background and his attitudes. The factors specifically noted were role identification; knowledge; skills; psychological well-being; relations with own father; employment characteristics, and residential status.
3. Coparental relationship. This includes marital or nonmarital status; dual versus single earner; custodial arrangement; relationship commitment; cooperation; mutual support, and conflict.
4. Mother factors. The factors noted were attitude toward father; expectations of father; support of father and employment characteristics
5. Child factors. The child's characteristics and attitudes are also seen as important. The factors noted were: attitude toward father; behavioural difficulties; temperament; gender; age, and development status.

This list is drawn from international research carried out on fathering prior to 1998. As the research literature develops some aspects of this list will no doubt be challenged, altered or added to. While each of these factors could be explored in some detail, I have chosen to look at two areas that potentially influence behaviour.

### **Nature/nurture arguments**

Are men really from Mars and women from Venus? Perhaps, as Fukuyama (1997) suggests, men are not genetically predisposed to be faithful or to look after their children. This question of differences between men and women is an important dimension of the "fathering" literature. In discussing the possible benefits of fathers being more involved with their children, there are two schools of thought. One of these upholds an "equity" philosophy while the other a "difference" philosophy.

At its extreme, the equity way of thinking suggests that both motherhood and fatherhood as well as paid work roles, are cultural constructs and that either parent can provide a nurturing environment or income. If all barriers were removed, men and women would have a similar set of options in paid and nurturing work. Moreover, it is seen as beneficial to children to have models of both men and women who can be nurturers and income earners. Within this strand of thinking, there is also the idea that roles for boys and girls are primarily culturally constructed.

The "difference" strand of thought suggests that fatherhood is inherently different to motherhood and that a father, albeit usually the biological father, is essential to bring up well adjusted children, particularly boys. Fathers are needed to provide positive role models of "masculinity", to teach boys to be real men and not become "motherbound" (e.g. Biddulph, 1995). According to this model, in the absence of fathers in families, it is advocated that male role models, or mentors, need to be available in areas such as

childcare and schooling. For instance, male teachers might allow some boys to be more active learners instead of being classified as having attention disorders. It is argued that there is currently a “feminised” pre-school and school education system and, consequently, if boys are particularly “boisterous” they will be sanctioned. At an extreme, these boys are seen as needing to be “calmed” by drugs such as Ritalin. For a variety of reasons, men are highly under-represented amongst those in childcare and pre-tertiary teaching occupations. For example, 1996 census data show women comprise around 95 percent of paid childcare workers. While further research is needed, the use of Ritalin has also been linked to boys living in sole-mother families or families lacking a positive male presence (Gliksman, 1998).<sup>8</sup>

One danger of this difference approach is that “masculinity” can become very narrowly defined, making outsiders of those who do not fit the stereotype. Girls can do anything, but boys can only play with trucks or grow up conditioned to take on the physically demanding jobs which are rapidly disappearing from the economy.

My view is that gender roles are a complex, but still uncertain, mixture of social construct and biology. Take breastfeeding as an obvious example of a potential major barrier to father involvement. In New Zealand, exclusive breastfeeding for six months is promoted for health reasons and this creates the potential for a close initial bond between mother and child. But, there is no evidence that in societies where there are very low rates of breastfeeding that there is more gender equity in unpaid work. In fact, there is evidence of the opposite occurring (Galtry, 1997). In New Zealand, examples can be found of couples taking 12 months parental leave, with the mother taking the first six months and the father the second six months (Podmore and Sawicka, 1995). Other examples can be found of fathers who are primary caregivers taking the child to the mother’s workplace to be breastfed or bottle feeding expressed milk (Callister, 1994). In addition, parenting involves more than looking after a child in its early months.

Subscribing to the idea that mother’s and father’s behaviour is primarily genetically determined could provide some interesting dilemmas for policy makers. For example, if “step fathers” are believed to have a greater genetically determined propensity to be abusive than “step” mothers, then this provides a strong argument for giving custody to biological fathers in the majority of custody disputes.

Overall, it is clear that men cannot (as yet) get pregnant, give birth, or, in normal circumstances, lactate but there is little research which suggests that they cannot look after children. They may, however, through a combination of biology and social conditioning have different parenting styles to women. But, then many women have quite different parenting styles to each other. My own view is that there is a need to move beyond biological differences when looking at behaviour and instead focus on those factors that are associated with positive parenting practices for both men and

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<sup>8</sup> The long term effects of prescribing Ritalin, and similar mind altering drugs, to children, often for long periods, are as yet unknown.

women. Women have no monopoly on caring behaviour, neither do men have a monopoly on destructive behaviour.

## **Norms**

If, as I believe, societal roles are heavily influenced by factors other than biology, then social norms will have a significant impact on behaviour.

As discussed, in New Zealand and overseas, there is considerable concern about the impact of absent fathers. Many people tend to think about sole mother families in this context. Yet, it is important to look at the people who fill the popular media in New Zealand. They are men who, by the nature of their feats or work must be absent for long periods from active care of their children. We have climbers who spend months overseas, yachties who are also away for long periods from their families, rugby players who constantly tour the country and the world, businessmen who wheel and deal on a global basis, working long hours in the process, and, at times, politicians and child development experts who promote family values but nevertheless spend very little time with their own children. It is these men who are increasingly appearing on television and in magazines as role models, or to provide “expert” comment on fathering. Media super-mums are now being joined by super-dads, both of whom cheerfully, and with great skill, are portrayed as providing “quality time” to their children.<sup>9</sup> These new role models may help some groups of fathers become more committed and responsible and support the idea that not only women but men can have both a career and family life. But the super-dad model may also simply reinforce the old stereotype that the only truly successful father is one who succeeds in the public world.

But some men are giving both quality and quantity time to their kids. As with mothers who give both quality and quantity time, this usually involves sacrificing money and prestige in the process. The research literature certainly shows that transgressing social and employment norms by providing this quantity time to children can be difficult. For instance, studies carried out in New Zealand, Australia and America on fathers who had become primary caregivers indicate that these men faced strong reactions from their social groups, including their own parents. Some of these responses were positive, some positive with reservations, but the majority, at least initially, were negative (Grbich, 1987, 1992; Hutchins, 1993). Yet, not surprisingly, the men who stayed longest in this parenting arrangement and who felt good about themselves had considerable support from their friends, relatives, and the communities in which they lived.

There is a group of fathers whom society needs to be particularly concerned about - those who have lost their jobs. Some of these men will continue to cling to traditional notions of gender rather than seeking ways to positively adapt to their new situation. Others, however, are wanting to change. Like women, who often turned to women-only support

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<sup>9</sup> These skilled “jugglers” often fail to acknowledge the support people, such as cleaners, “nannies” and childcare workers, who make such a lifestyle possible.

groups when gender roles were challenged, many men are also looking for positive support in their new situations. Although they are now attempting, to varying degrees, to be more inclusive those traditionally women focussed, and mainly white middle-class, groups such as New Mothers' Support, Parents Centres, or Playcentre cannot easily give such support to these men. Many of the men in this unemployed group are neither white nor middle class. Some of this "gap" is being filled by the many "men's groups" springing up around New Zealand. These include very diverse groups such as Shore Fathers, the Father&Child Trust, and the Promise Keepers.<sup>10</sup> There has also been an upsurge in publications about fathering in a variety of situations. However, it is unclear how the needs of men who are not part of the middle-class are being met. This group includes Maori and Pacific Island men.

## CONCLUSION

There are some major challenges facing fathers as we move towards the new millennium. But, opportunities for positive change can emerge out of challenges. Overall, the research literature generally agrees that given the rapid changes in economic and social conditions there will be an increasing diversity in parenting arrangements. In terms of biologically based or adoptive two-parent families, models of employment and childcare will include:

- various shared parenting and income earning models. These can include both parents working part-time and both undertaking a high, and equal, proportion of childcare; and dual-career families with increased "professionalisation" of childcare through creches and afterschool care programs operating during the day, evenings and weekends and/or parents hiring nannies;
- "difference" based shared parenting, such as men undertaking outside activities with the children and women doing inside work, but both earning income;
- men becoming home-based primary caregivers or working part time and women working full time as primary income earners;

Research also shows a considerable level of fluidity in working arrangements. Both men and women move in and out of paid work, as well as in and out of caring roles. Models may develop where roles change over a child's lifecycle. For instance, a mother may take six months parental leave on the birth of a child, the father a further six months, then the father may work part time while the mother works full time while the children are pre-schoolers.

Adding further complexity to the changing employment patterns within couples who are both the biological parents, new types of two-parent families are becoming more common. This includes "blended" families, same-sex childrearing families, and

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<sup>10</sup> For example, in the United States it has been suggested that there are at least five men's support and lobbying groups. These include the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, Feminist Men's Movement, Fathers' Rights Groups (F.R.E.E), Men's Rights, Christian Men's Movement, Men's Recovery, and the Fatherhood Movement  
(source: <http://info-sys.home.vix.com/pub/men/history/accounts/throop5.html>)

families where, through new medical technology, the child is not biologically related to one or both parents.

In addition, one parent families, mainly headed by mothers, are unlikely to decline. However, there will be much diversity in these family types too. This will include anything from shared custody arrangements to situations where fathers, or mothers, through a variety of reasons, including death, are totally absent. In addition, many children will spend some period of their life in a one-parent family, given the current relatively high rate of couple dissolution and reformation. All these changes, along with underlying demographic shifts, mean that it is almost certain that the “traditional” family will continue to decline.

There will, of course, continue to be much discussion on the impact of each of these very different models on children, with all the emerging family types needing to face the same scrutiny as the traditional family. However, one thing is clear. The interest in fathering issues is increasing. Just as feminism has helped shape attitudes and social institutions, including the “family”, the fathers’ movement, in its various forms, has the potential to become an important force in shaping the attitudes of individuals, families, employers and society in general.

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