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Low-skilled, low socio-economic, young, co-  
resident, working fathers: Their experience of  
fatherhood

A thesis presented in fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology

At Massey University,  
Turitea, Palmerston North,  
New Zealand

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2009



## **Abstract**

### **Low-skilled, low socio-economic status, young, co-resident, working fathers: Their experience of fatherhood**

Using open-ended interview techniques, 23 low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers aged 20-29 were interviewed about their experience of fatherhood. All participants were in unskilled jobs and all lived with and supported their partners and child/children. This population of fathers is generally overlooked by researchers. Because they take responsibility for some of society's most vulnerable families and children, understanding how they conceive of their role as fathers can promote the welfare of those families and children.

Participants were recruited by casual connections, snowballing and advertisement. The interviews explored the participants' experience of fatherhood and their reasons for being active and committed family members. Focus was given to how they made sense of fatherhood in terms of their life course. Participants had two interviews, the first generic and the second idiographic. Interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. A social constructionist approach was used: transcripts were analysed by identifying and examining the primary domains in which participants experienced fatherhood. Participants spoke of fatherhood as an affective activity, the primary object of good fatherhood being to maintain an emotional bond with one's children. Being a good father was thought to involve eschewing deleterious family practices such as those which had marred their own childhoods. In this regard, participants saw themselves as repairing their family-of-origin's dysfunctional style.

Providing was described as a core feature of fatherhood – subsidiary to, but corollary on, being an emotionally-engaged father. Good fathers were described as committed providers, albeit participants did not consider their own limited earning capacity to compromise their fatherhood. Obtaining a job and providing for one's family was one of the 'pro-socializing' effects of fatherhood. Participants considered fatherhood to not only improve but to also redeem their lives, giving a purpose and focus they had lacked prior to their becoming parents. Being a good father also involved being a good partner. For many of the participants, this involved adopting non-gendered roles in the home. The

sharing of housework and childcare improved home life by reducing the partner's workload. Those who failed to adopt the gender-neutral stance acknowledged this as a personal shortcoming that they planned to remedy.

Fatherhood for these 23 interviewees was one of the few means by which they could obtain social value and status as adults. They lacked access to financial resources, education or supportive family connections, but fatherhood was a domain in which they could present themselves as significant members of society. It also provided a network of emotional relationships which promoted their sense of self-worth and their social and emotional wellbeing.

## **Acknowledgements**

My greatest debt is to the 23 men who were prepared to share their lives with me. For this I am enormously grateful. I sincerely hope the findings of this research may in some form improve the circumstances of these men and men like them.

Many thanks to my supervisors, Prof. Kerry Chamberlain and Prof. Andy Lock, for their direction and suggestions.

I am also very grateful for the sagacious and avuncular direction provided to me by Prof. Ian Evans, Head of the School of Psychology. I am particularly grateful for the input Assoc. Prof. Keith Tuffin has had into my work.

I am very grateful to the Massey University Scholarships Committee for the very generous support they afforded me. Having been given a doctoral scholarship by this committee, I was able to pursue my research without undue financial strain on my family. In a similar regard, I am indebted to the generosity of the New Zealand Vice Chancellors Committee, which awarded me the Claude McCarthy Fellowship.

Many thanks to Warwick Pudney who made some very valuable suggestions.

I must thank the staff at the Massey University Library, Turitea campus.

And many thanks to Lisa Mrkusic, my wife, who has been very patient while I attended to this work. And the five children whose lives I have been either fully responsible for, or partially responsible for.

Also, what's more, thanks to some kiwi blokes who supported my efforts by just being friends. They are: The Wayno, Neils, Paulo, Alisteer, Randie, Dr. Derek, Mar-die, Gero the dero, How-wid, the Waddo and Jace Furguson.

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## **Chapter 1: A Background to Fatherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

To understand the experience of contemporary fatherhood amongst young low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers, it is advantageous to first chronicle the legacy that men inherit on becoming parents. That legacy, composed of discourses and motifs, provides an assemblage of cultural scripts which directs contemporary paternal performance (Dizard & Gadlin, 1990). It arises out of socio-economic and cultural traditions rooted in historical circumstances that both invite and resist alteration (Townsend, 2002a). The resulting social construction of fatherhood is further compounded by the numerous institutions that impact on it.

Parke and Brott (1999) postulate that because fatherhood is less culturally prescribed than motherhood, it is able to occur in a myriad of forms. While motherhood scripts remain similar across most cultures, fatherhood varies (Roggman, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Raikes, 2002). As a consequence, it is a more adaptive and dynamic form of parenting, more vulnerable to social vicissitudes and, as Stearns (1991) described it, more multi-directional. It is placed within the family not by the act of birth but by a network of meanings and relationships, all in constant flux. According to Hochschild (1989), it bears “the footprints of economic and cultural trends which originate far outside the marriage” (p.11). By studying those historical and sociological trends, we escape the familiarity of the popular concept of fatherhood and are able to view it as a socially constructed institution (Richards, 1987).

I will begin by providing a brief account of father-child relations in the ancient and English-speaking worlds. I will then chronicle the formative processes that shaped the family position of fathers in the last century. This will provide a background from which to appraise the operation of contemporary low-skilled, low socio-economic fathers. This historical survey affords an insight into the changes in social structures that have led to the emergence of contemporary fatherhood and family operation. It needs to be noted; historical narratives are problematic and almost inherently reflect the partiality of the author. In addition, limitations on length necessitate slightly simplistic accounts, free of

the extensive variance and nuances which characterize historical processes and periods. In the account provided below, every effort has been made to eliminate this tendency to bias by focusing on the major historical transformations, and where possible, the social construction of fatherhood at the time. Particular attention has been paid to historical contingencies which impacted upon fathering.

### **Father-child relationships in history**

Literary and epitaphic records from Ancient Greece and Rome indicate fathers in those societies were able to have strong emotional connections with their children (Golden, 1990; Rawson, 1991). Although the state afforded children very little regard, this was not reflected in paternal practice. Individual fathers are recorded displaying paternal love and prioritizing their children. During the medieval period affection was a hallmark of fatherhood. Hagiographic and monastic records indicate fathers had great love for their children and made efforts to ensure their welfare (McLaughlin, 1974). The spread of literacy during the Renaissance allowed many fathers to record the nature of their paternal feelings (Pollack, 1987). Autobiographical records detail the strong father-child bonds which existed. Carvings of children who had died in infancy were often appended to the mausoleums of their parents when the latter had died.

In pre-industrial Europe, fathers worked either in the home or the local demesne (Demos, 1986). Most had constant contact with their children, often passing their trade on to their sons (Ozment, 2001). Laslett (1977) argues fathers' accessibility made them central to the home's emotional ecology. Demos (1986) states offspring were a primary feature of a man's social identity, giving him a sense of generational continuity. Although the sentimentalism which characterizes contemporary parental relationships was unknown, emotional connection was implicit in the paternal bond (Badinter, 1980/81; Coontz, 2001). During these historical periods, emotionality and domesticity were congruent with masculinity. Child rearing was shared by both parents (Folbre, 1991). Fatherhood had its own status and form: it did not equate with motherhood but neither was it secondary to it (Barnett & Baruch, 1988). While providing was a core paternal duty, it was not a father's core family identity. That identity was as a socio-emotional agent. This position counters

that advanced by historians such as Aries (1962), de Mause (1974) and Stone (1977). They argued that prior to the modern age, parents – and particularly fathers – had few feelings for their children. This argument has been widely refuted. Most historians concur with Ozment (1983) who suggests “surely the hubris of an age reaches a certain peak when it accuses the other age of being incapable of loving it’s children properly” (p.162).

The Industrial Revolution transformed family gender roles. This transformation took effect earliest, and was swiftest, in Great Britain (Hanagan, 1997). Industrial work required labour to be centralized and working hours to be regimented. This removed fathers from their homes for large parts of the day, so they ceased to be accessible to their children. Unlike agricultural work, industrial employment precluded children accompanying men (La Rossa, 1997). Women became fulltime child-minders. This was compounded by the demise of the extended family dwelling. Although nuclear family dwellings were commonplace prior to the Industrial Revolution, they often included others, such as servants, illegitimate children, fostered children and journeymen (Laslett, 1977). These family add-ons provided constant childcare when both parents were working. The institution of the nuclear family home as part of the industrial family format limited co-habitation with non-nuclear family members. The word ‘housework’ appeared in English in the 1840s: it described and defined what married women did (Hodson & Sullivan, 1990).

Within this family format, fathers became pre-occupied with breadwinning and mothers with care-giving. The traditional paternal roles of moral guide, pedagogue, and companion were relinquished (Demos, 1986). Knibiehler (1985) described this by saying the parenting “gravity shifted towards the mother” (p. 212). The androgynous care-giving that had previously characterized childcare became more polarized by gender (Cancian, 1989). The family economy, once sustained by the dual efforts of both parents, split into separate spheres. Local and regional variations did occur and Horrell and Humphries (1997) caution against falsely homogenizing these. For example, Anderson (1971) found that in some areas of Britain women continued to support the family by taking in lodgers, doing washing or keeping a garden. Those who had to take up paid work would share

childcare duties with other mothers (Clark, 1992). But overall, separate spheres predominated. This was particularly so amongst middle-class women: they ceased to work outside the home altogether (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988).

### **Modern gender roles**

Rigid gender concepts emerged during the mid-to-late Industrial Period. These sustained the 'separate spheres' ideology. The contingency of several processes, including industrialization, urbanization, formation of the nuclear family, privileged the hegemony of the 'male-breadwinner' family format. This format would dominate family operation through the twentieth century and provide the central template against which fatherhood would be measured. One feature of this format was the glorification of motherhood and a corresponding diminution of the role of fathers (LaRossa, Gordon, Wilson, Bairan, & Jaret, 1991). Implicit in this was the popularization of the Victorian ideal of women as moral cynosures, intrinsically maternal and inherently virtuous (Crompton, 2006; Stearns 1991). The argument of inherent maternalism has received considerable attention and widespread evidence found disputing its essentialism (Badinter, 1980/1981). However, in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this position counter-posed fathers as less moral and lesser parents. Filene (1986) argued that as the child-rearing role of motherhood was expanded, the ambit of fatherhood contracted. The institution of 'mother-craft', born after the Boer War, focused women's attention on family life and being mothers (Humphries & Gordan, 1993). It also provided a language to distinguish the sexes. Personal journals from this period indicate men still obtained great pleasure from being fathers and interacting with their children (Lummis, 1982; Lummis & Thompson, 1977; Pollock, 1987), but a process of paternal diminution had begun. It would continue relatively unchecked until the late 1970s.

### **Contingencies promoting gender distinctions**

The advent of the family wage, a single wage sufficient to support a husband, wife and children, facilitated gender dimorphism. It ensured men were free to work in the newly developed industrial factories without the obligation to attend to childcare. First issued in New Zealand in the 1890s (Cooper & Horan, 2004), it promoted female domesticity by

reducing the need for married women to work. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, female home-making and male breadwinning were standardized amongst New Zealand's pakeha population (Phillips, 1996). This followed a similar trend which had occurred in Great Britain much earlier and was rapidly occurring in North America and Australia. The family wage and the male breadwinner family format became standardized throughout the English-speaking world, so families across all these locales have a common structural history. In New Zealand, the family wage was enshrined in law by the Arbitration Act Amendment, 1936. Male-breadwinning and female-homemaking had been accepted as reflecting, not defining, inherent gender differences.

During the Industrial Revolution, marriage had taken on a sentimentality that replaced its longstanding functional purpose (Stone, 1977). The family and home became what Lasch (1977) described as a "haven in a heartless world" (p. 1). Adults turned to it for their emotional and social needs and participation in exterior communities decreased (Anderson, 1980). For many working-class men, however, the exhausting demands of industrial labour left them with little emotional energy for family life. According to Franks (1998), the role of 'emotional mainstay' was assigned to the mother. The 'tender years doctrine' (Gottman, 1998), which first appeared in the 1890s, extolled the importance of mother-infant connection. It required women to remain at home with their children, privatizing them from wider society which had become the domain of men (Mintz & Kellog, 1988). The psychic connection both genders had with the family was increased. Their identity as a family member took precedence over the classial, societal and religious identities they once held. The physical presence and emotional engagement of fathers, however, was reduced due to the pressing demands of breadwinning.

During the late nineteenth century class strictures were relaxed and education and social capacity began to determine a child's life course more than their class of birth or inheritance (Stearns, 1991). Parents, particularly those in the middle classes, became more responsible for ensuring their child was sufficiently prepared for adulthood. That responsibility was largely contracted out to institutions exterior to the home: generally to the state in the form of schools and health care (Nord, Brimhall & West, 1997). Lamb



(1981a) argues this further diminished the role of the father. Amongst the lower classes, fathers ceased to be tutors to their children. They had become almost exclusively an external breadwinner. This “cultural alienation of men from their children” (Burgess & Ruxton, 1996, p. 5) was not without resistance. In the nineteenth century many fathers lamented the dearth of contact with their children (Abbott, 1993; Anderson, 1980). Social commentators in the United States and Great Britain encouraged fathers to spend more time with their children (Franks, 1998; Tosh, 1996). These counter-discourses were not extinguished by the hegemonic male-breadwinner discourse, but remained below the surface of it.

Industrialization set the family format for the twentieth century. By its inception, child socialization and emotional care had passed into the hands of the mother (Juster & Vinovski, 1987). Breadwinning became associated with masculinity. It must be noted that the gender roles which emerged were “the product of social forces that converged in one fleeting era” (Gerson, 1993, p.17) and, once those forces were spent, the social construction of fatherhood would be reshaped.

### **The post-World War II economic boom and hegemony of the male-breadwinner family format**

The post-World War II years were a halcyon era for most of the English-speaking world. High real wages and low house prices saw most people enjoying a comfortable life supported by a single family wage (Coontz, 1992). However, sections of the population remained severely marginalized (Winn, 2002). High fertility rates were a feature of this period and the male-breadwinner family format became the universal and indisputable arena in which children *should* be raised (Atkinson & Blackwelder, 1993). The economic strength and security of the home encouraged family members to focus most of their emotional energy into it (Uhlmann, 2006). Links with exterior institutions continued to be weakened and one’s social identity became increasingly centred around being a family member rather than as a member of another society, be it political, religious or social. As early as the 1950s, church membership in New Zealand began to drop (Matheson,

Breward, Barber, Davidson, & Veitch, 1990) because people choose to spend their weekends enjoying the new ideal of “family time” (Gillis, 1996, p.6).

At the time, social theorists developed a family paradigm which reflected, rather than analyzed, family social construction. A phenomenon that resulted from the confluence of several socio-economic events – economic prosperity, expanding suburbia, high fecundity, high immigration, cheap raw materials – was depicted as innate human progression. Structural functionalism (Parson & Bales, 1956), with its dual spheres ideology, considered the homemaker/breadwinner dichotomy to be the most appropriate human arrangement for child rearing and social stability. Marriage and parenthood were extolled as the chief (and almost exclusive) means by which full human development could proceed (Erickson 1950). In Great Britain, government policy planned for a society which mirrored these gender roles. The Beveridge Report (1944) prescribed a society in which family men could sustain a comfortable family life on a single wage. Women would not have to work; they would focus their attention on child care and family life.

Developmental science provided support for this (Burman, 2008). The principles of human attachment which advanced the need for secure mother-child bonding were laid out by Bowlby (1952, 1965). This theory dovetailed with the requirements of the industrial system and the male-breadwinner regime. Popular child-rearing manuals and public broadcasts recommended separate spheres and divergent parenting practices (for examples, Winnicott, 1949). In his first child-rearing publication Spock (1946) devoted only nine pages to fatherhood. Bettelheim cautioned that the intimate care of young children could metaphorically emasculate a man (cited in Delumeau & Roche, 1990).

### **Fathers edged out of the family’s emotional workings**

Bloom-Feshbach (1981) noted that during the industrial period, work demands compelled many fathers to be absent from the home for long periods. This was compounded by suburbanization which lengthened workplace-home travel time (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988). Because mothers were always present, they set the emotional climate of the family (Bjornberg, 1992). Women were considered by nature to be most suited for this task in

accordance with the disparate gender role models popular at the time (Geerken & Gove, 1983).

These domestic arrangements progressively edged fathers out of their family's emotional workings. Males were groomed to achieve in the marketplace while females were conditioned for family life (Cohen, 1989). In the 1960s, women in America considered a father's primary duty to be that of a provider (Lopata, 1971). During the post war baby boom "adult masculinity was indistinguishable from the breadwinner role" (Ehrenreich, 1983, p.20). Government policies in the English-speaking world encouraged the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver dichotomy (Beveridge 1944; Gillies, 2000; Phillips, 1996). When fathers were at home, they were often little more than disciplinarians or playmates (Stearns, 1991). Pudney (2007) adds that the trauma of World War II forced many New Zealand men to shut off their emotions, making them even more emotionally inaccessible to their children. Although many fathers resisted emotional isolation from their family (Weiss, 1998), the progressive social construction of men as essentially breadwinning agents swamped counter discourses.

The social construction of men as unemotional, peripheral family providers resulted from a set of societal factors outside of the family. These ensured that for most of society family life could be sustained on the single income of a working father. Although this had been de rigueur for the middle class since the 1830s, post-World War II prosperity ensured it was also possible for most of those in the lower socio-economic strata. Male breadwinning and female domestication become the universal standards. Gender differentiation, which had begun amongst the nineteenth century middle class, became ubiquitous (Bjornberg, 1992).

### **Socio-economic homogeneity**

During the post war period, distinctions between those in the lower socio-economic bands and the middle class began to blur. As the lower socio-economic citizens adopted the family structure of the middle class, they also adopted its values (Rubin, 1976). According to Griswold (1992), they became attached to consumerism as a source of

satisfaction, much as the middle class had done earlier that century. The rise in materialism and a drive for upward mobility meant middle-class values became accepted as standard cultural discourse (Townsend, 2002b). Where men had once held political, religious and class identities, they now became preoccupied with domestic identities, family life and socio-economic advancement (Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer, & Platt, 1969; Uhlmann, 2006). Bernard (1981) notes that as economic conditions improved, so too did the standard one had to reach for a male to be a good provider. For most of society this was not difficult. Real wages in the developed world kept rising till the 1970s, affording most people the opportunity not just to put bread on the table but also to enjoy high levels of consumerism (Hood, 1986). The preoccupation with consumerism entrenched fathers within the provider role. That role was about to change as a result of gender-revisioning and economic changes which were to occur in the 1970s.

### **Decline of the male-breadwinner family hegemony**

The confluence of several social forces in the mid 1970s began to undo the hegemony of the male-breadwinner family format. The most pervasive change resulted from the 1973 Oil Crisis. This prompted a period of high inflation and economic recession, particularly in the manufacturing sector. The value of real wages fell (McLanahan & Casper, 1995) and a single wage was no longer sufficient to support a family. Dizard and Gadlin (1990) argue that the family wage initiated the modern family so its demise therefore signals the genesis of the post-modern family. This demise obliged women to enter the labour force to offset the rise in the cost of living (Edgar & Glezer, 1992). Many working-class women had worked before the onset of this economic crisis but research at the time indicated their income was more often considered to “provide jam for the bread” and was not essential for family survival (Yudkin & Holme, 1963, p. 45). Those hardest hurt by the economic downturn were those in the lower socio-economic stratum in which the men were involved in manufacturing. Across the English-speaking world the era of the single family wage came to an end and dual incomes emerged as a domestic necessity (de Vaus & Qu, 2005).

These changes were the catalyst to what Smith (1974) called a ‘subtle revolution’ in which the abilities of the male provider were undermined. Although women’s income at the time, was generally less than that of their husbands and usually considered supplementary (Deutsch, 2002), this began workforce de-gendering and the re-envisioning of the family. It was accompanied by the women’s liberation movement (Greer, 1970; Firestone, 1972) which questioned inequality in the workforce and the traditional allocation of domestic power (Edgar & Glezer, 1992; Pleck, 2004). The drop in real wages in the mid 1970s undermined the male self-concept of the provider (McLanahan & Casper, 1995). Although this compelled women to enter the workforce, and this eventually compelled fathers to perform more childcare and housework (Amato, 1998), Deinhart (1998) makes the point that men at the time were not also compelled to be more emotionally engaged. From the mid-1970s through to the 1990s, psychological research began to extol the virtue of fathers engaging with their children (Lamb, 1981b). Spock (1974) revisited his earlier recommendations. He now advocated early, equal and prolonged paternal input with children. The hegemony of the male-breadwinner family model began to be undermined.

### **The post-modern/post-industrial father**

During this period, there were many fathers who departed from the emotionally distant breadwinning model (Jackson, 1984; Levant, 1988). Doing so was not easy. Peterson and Steinmetz (2000) speculated in hindsight, that the very nature of the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver discourse meant that during the hegemony of the male-breadwinner family format, any competing discourses were viewed as perverted or aberrant. The changes in the 1970s prompted relaxation of gender codes and these competing discourses became increasingly popular. O’Brien (1991) states that this moved the family from being a maternal-centered institution to one in which fathers achieved greater participation and accord. A new form of fathering began to be practiced, one which was no longer defined by breadwinning and being the disciplinarian (Henwood & Proctor, 2003; Roy, 2006)

Although Coltrane (2001) argues that those historical changes in gender activity were due primarily to economic forces, ideological shifts appear to have been equally significant in weakening the hegemony of the male-breadwinner family model (Helm & Demo, 2005; McKeown, Ferguson & Rooney, 1999). Abbott (2002) argues that during the 1970s men from all classes in Britain began to see their traditional responsibilities as oppressing them as much as the traditional responsibilities which oppressed women. Indeed, Furstenberg (1988) found many American fathers expressed dissatisfaction in regard to their lack of connection with their children. Although many fathers felt their role as breadwinner was secondary to their role as father (Douvan, 1976), the requirements of providing often constrained their paternal engagement (Rubin, 1976).

The shift in paternal behaviour involved fathers prioritizing emotional connection with their children and spending more time with them, compared with the time spent by their counterparts in the 1960s (Bianchi, 2000; Fisher, McCulloch & Gershuny, 1999). By the early 1980s a change seemed to have taken effect. Using time studies, Pleck, Lamb and Levine (1986) found that American fathers in 1980 were doing more childcare than fathers in 1965. That transformation appears to be on-going. In Australia, women continue to perform most childcare but Russell et al (1999) noted a substantial shift in how much childcare fathers are expected to do compared with fathers in the mid-1980s. Fathers reported being closer to their children and spending more time with them. Van Dongen (1995) recorded a similar pattern amongst a population of Dutch fathers. It must be added, however, that fathers were more likely to be involved in low stress child activities, such as playing, reading stories and transporting. Women still did the high stress activities such as cooking, dressing children and meeting deadlines (Uhlmann, 2006).

Reports of greater paternal involvement have to be tempered with Lewis' (1995) findings that fathers in the 1950s made similar contrasts between themselves and their fathers. The opprobrium that poor parenting invites nowadays exerts pressure on fathers to over-report father-child interaction (Carlson & McLanahan, 2004). During the Twentieth century, children became progressively more important as family members (Zelizer, 1985).

Parents are expected to do their very best for their children by investing high amounts of personal energy into them (Nippert-Eng, 1996). This importance is compounded by the drop in the number of children per family with more resources being put into fewer children (Folbre, 2001). The many child-centered discourses that result from these changes affect all social activities, including fatherhood. These discourses inform young men who embark on fatherhood and it is this cohort effect which, Bianchi (1994) argues, has provoked the greatest re-formulation of fatherhood.

The “post-modern family” (Stacy, 1990, p.17) or post-industrial family was not defined by gender conduct, although that was a large part of it. As mentioned above, children in this family type were valued differently. Their full development and happiness became the main object of parenting. The emotional importance of the family increased and the family became a reflection of individuality, disconnected from past traditions (Beck & Beck-Gersheim, 1995). Palkowitz (2002) argues that the salient feature of the post-modern family was, for men, the expectation and opportunity for them to emotionally engage with their children. Gerson (1993) states this shift towards ‘loving’ as the central feature of fatherhood, rather than ‘providing’, is indicative of the sacralisation of father-child relationships. It parallels the sacralisation of the mother-child relationship which occurred during the late Industrial Revolution. However, it would be erroneous to read this as a complete change, rather it is slow, piecemeal and tentative. Despite being informed by a post-modern family format, many fathers still consider themselves to be back-up parents, supplementary to the family’s mother (Peterson & Steinmetz, 2000).

Despite the socio-economic changes of the 1970s and 80s, the ‘good provider’ role still pervades fatherhood practice (Flouri, 2005; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 2000; Lewis, 2000). This is particularly so in conservative communities in which it is considered part of the traditional marital arrangement (Behringer, 2006). Emotionality may have become a central feature of fatherhood but providing continues to underpin its social construction. The extent of the breadwinner hegemony, from the mid-Industrial period to the 1970s, left a cultural legacy that continues to inform fatherhood, privileging discursive stereotypes which men, women and children find difficult to resist (Lewis, 2000). Those

discourses are very accessible and retain a great deal of credibility, having dispensed with their long-standing corollary discourses of female subjugation and emotional restraint. Potuchek (1997) argues that the cultural capital of the good provider role is maintained not only by its accessibility as a motif but by its sheer practicality. Many men consider it a form of cultural specialization, given their self-perception as unsuitable primary caregivers (Russell et al, 1999).

Marsiglio (1995) and Flouri (2005) advise against discarding the provider role as a primary fatherhood motif. Marsiglio suggests it is one of two poles from which fatherhood is suspended, the other being affection and nurturing. This highlights the demise of breadwinning as a one dimensional cultural monolith. Any expression of fatherhood that omits one of these two poles is aberrant. The inter-connectedness of the two poles is evident in the dialogues of fathers. Warin, Solomon, Lewis and Langford (1999) found traditional maternal themes littered the dialogues of men discussing fatherhood, despite their prioritizing breadwinning as a paternal motif.

Post-modern fatherhood is emerging as an amalgam of the ‘provider’ and ‘nurturer’ discourses. Hatter, Vinter and Williams (2002) state maintaining a careful balance within this fusion is the current challenge of effective fatherhood. This makes a father’s role in the post-modern family form potentially more difficult than its role in earlier periods. One would have to add that its personal returns are far greater. Whereas fatherhood in the past was prescribed by position, it is now achieved by a dual performance. It is multi-faceted, a feature that increases its potential for enjoyment, but also its complexity.

### **Critiques of the post-modern father**

The post-modern family structure provides fathers with a format that has high cultural adaptivity. It has greater flexibility than the family formats which preceded it and it also ensures a more equitable distribution of labour, even if fathers may resist this. Despite these beneficial features, it has its shortcomings. These are particularly germane to low socio-economic fathers.



The male-breadwinner family format provided a clear and rigorous structure. Its gender roles were prescribed and universal. In contrast, the pluralism of the post-modern format has been critiqued as offering little direction (Lewis, 2002). It has been labeled “opaque and nebulous” (Daly, 1995, p.39). This is compounded by the diverse socio-political discourses – be they religious, socio-ethnic, new age, material – that compete for control over the family. Despite their diversity, these discourses share a concern that men must be “nurturant fathers” (Lamb, 1986, p. 6). It is only to be expected that a variety of post-modern discourses have flourished. During its long period of hegemony, the pervasiveness of the male-breadwinner discourse silenced counter-discourses. With its progressive demise, an assortment of discourses has arisen. It is simplistic to expect these to be philosophically concordant: they spring from various social perspectives and exemplify the inherent pluralism of human experience.

Within the personal practice of post-modern fatherhood it is unnecessary to strive for internal coherence and certainty. Lupton and Barclay (1997) argued, “there are competing discourses and desires that can never be fully and neatly shaped into a single identity” (p.57). It is more useful to think of post-modern fathering as a pool of behaviours. The practicalities of providing and the maintaining of gender roles still have the potential to check emotional engagement but, as stated above, these two activities are best thought of as interwoven rather than conflicting. Post-modern families still retain the homemaker (albeit part-time) provider (albeit dual) gender dichotomy which characterized the male-breadwinner family format. This is not a continuation of traditional power arrangements. Tanfer and Mott (1997) state it is due to women’s preference to prioritize childcare for at least the first few years of the child’s life. Critics of post-modern fatherhood’s lack of clarity possibly fail to appreciate its nascent state and diverse criteria.

The post-modern family format embodies many of the values espoused by contemporary bourgeois urban society; sensitivity, the importance of equity and the benefits of measured emotional expression. The overwhelmingly middle-class tenor of this discourse privileges middle-class fathers who can adopt its precepts with little cultural discord

(Griswald, 1993). They are able to embody the image of the involved and loving father with very little effort (Henwood and Proctor, 2003). By default, this evokes a counter-image of a domineering, inexpressive, low socio-economic status male, locked in the hegemony of breadwinning and retaining an outdated mode of masculinity. The new 'involved' fatherhood image thereby serves as a distinction between the enlightened middle class and the anachronistic uncultivated practices of the low socio-economic status father (Pleck, 2004). Newton (2005) proposes that white middle-class men – long the retainers of gender and class power – have used their socio-political privilege to exaggerate the very limited parental changes they have made. This highlights a significant power disparity. Middle-class fathers may appear to have relinquished domestic hegemony but wider social discourses retain a hegemonic bearing over lower-class fathers and women. This is hypocritical according to Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner (1994). In their opinions, the middle-class post-modern father may be prepared to extol the virtue of emotional connection, but he is unprepared to neglect his career path for that purpose. According to Peterson and Steinmetz (2000), the post-modern family format has been taken up by various sections of society and it is not over-represented amongst the middle class. Deutsch (2002) notes its performance amongst the lower socio-economic strata may not mirror the performance in the middle class, but the underlying concepts remain the same: emotional engagement and child-centered families.

Criticism of the post-modern family format has also come from conservative authors who decry the de-gendering of the home and advocate a return to traditional female-caregiver/male-breadwinner roles (Blankenhorn, 1995; Horn, Blankenhorn & Pearlstein, 1999; Popenoe, 1996, 2005). They argue that the post-modern family format is an aberration which detracts from the security of the child-rearing home, and they recommend a return to structural functionalism. This conservative attitude is indicative of the long-standing hegemony of the male-breadwinner family format. Lloyd (2002) argues that this attitude pervades social institutions which service the needs of children and families. They operate with a 'mother knows best' policy. The lingering power of the male-breadwinner family discourse means these institutions can retain "ossified assumptions about gender" (Longstaff, 2000, p. 5) without inviting social opprobrium.

## **Conclusion**

When men become fathers they draw on discourses to inform their practice, some of which have long standing hegemony. This hegemony is underpinned by assumptions about gender, status, class and human development. In the last 200 years the most pervasive changes to discursive hegemony have been effected by economic pressure. These changes prompt new forms of fatherhood and at every turning point in history new forms emerge. Knibiehler (1985) argues that this is because paternity is a socio-cultural institution which is incessantly transforming and under the pressure of multiple forces. Being aware of these forces provides insight into the changes borne on fathers. It is essential not to lose sight of the subject behind the father figure – the individual, citizen, person, who has a certain life course that leads them to a particular entry to and experience of fatherhood.

## **Chapter 2: A Paucity of Literature about Low-skilled, Low Socio-Economic Status, Co-resident, Working Fathers**

Although fathers may conceive of themselves as atomistic agents, their paternal performance is affected by forces exterior to their own subjectivity and family. These forces include the social economy, the social construction of gender roles and appropriate child-rearing techniques, and the history of father-child relationships that these fathers bring to their position. The participants involved in this research project are located in a certain stratum of the social economy, which positions their parenting in a broader context. Most research has overlooked working-class fatherhood. Researchers have generally preferred to explore middle-class parenting. Projects that have focused on working-class fatherhood have tended to examine aberrant paternal behaviour such as absent, abusive or negligent fathers. Whatever the focus population, most studies have concentrated on providing issues as well as gender roles. These are legitimate topics, but fatherhood extends beyond them. Their popularity with researchers possibly reflects the social construction of masculinity more than the experience of fatherhood.

### **Background to fatherhood research**

Psychological research into fatherhood began in the 1970s. Before then it was neglected, largely due to the prevalence of the psychoanalytical movement which was founded on the crucial importance of mother-child connections. There were few reasons to study the psychology of fathers as they were considered to be primarily breadwinners. Fatherhood studies at the time deferred to the psychoanalytical perspective by using mothers as a benchmark against which fathers were compared (Day & Mackey, 1989). This approach provided few insights and failed to develop a corpus of fatherhood research (Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998). Women's entry into the workforce in the 1970s, and the family adjustments which resulted, provoked a new strand of psychological research that departed from the 'comparison with mothers' model. This interest was sustained in the 1980s by the second wave of feminism and the interest in gender conduct which followed (Lerman & Ooms, 1993).

Although considerable empirical data has been accumulated since, an overarching theory of fatherhood has not been generated. The capacity to develop a theory which accommodates the vast range of fatherhood practices is questionable. Doherty et al. (1998) note that beyond conception, fatherhood is “fundamentally a social construction” (p. 278). Its form is variable according to political, economic and social vicissitudes: it is therefore unsurprising no overarching theory has been generated. It would be more apposite to pursue Atkinson and Blackwelder’s (1993) recommendation, to develop insights into the “culture in regard to men’s parenting” (p. 976). These insights must be well grounded, however. Kimmel (1995) warns against the propensity for fatherhood research to be “bathed in a rosy glow of some mythic [sic] past, or idealized through some vague notions of quality time and self-fulfillment” (p. ix).

Although public opinion might strongly advocate paternal involvement, Burman (2008) points out there is little research into what promotes it. This lacuna has powerful ramifications on the effectiveness of some government social policy. Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004) note that, after decades of expensive research into the topic of fatherhood, “we are unsuccessful in effectively supporting and enhancing fathers’ commitments to their children” (p. 18). I would add this is particularly so with regards to fathers in the low socio-economic section of society. This research project is an attempt to explore fathers in this population and provide insights into the factors which encourage them to be active and committed fathers. When fathers are committed to their family, child outcomes are vastly improved (Amato, 1998; Bjornberg & Kollind, 1996; Marsiglio, 1995; Doherty, Kouneski & Erickson, 1998). Eggebeen, (2002) claims “we cannot fully understand the lives and circumstances of children until we view them as embedded in the ongoing lives of other members of their families” (p. 195). Although this research project focuses on fathers, its intention is to provide findings that promote not only their welfare, but the welfare of their children, their families, and as such, the communities in which they live.

### **Difficulties investigating fatherhood amongst low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers**

Attempts to understand the experience of low-skilled, low socio-economic status New Zealand fathers are hampered by several methodological and practical issues. This population is difficult to access. There is also little literature in this specific field and the literature available examines mostly the practices of disparate communities of fathers. Some populations are similar and provide a point of contrast to, and valuable comparison with, low-skilled, low socio-economic, co-resident fathers in New Zealand. Nevertheless, fathers as a population are characterized more by heterogeneity and it is erroneous to consider them all to have the same needs (Longstaff, 2000).

Compared with mothers, fathers can be difficult to recruit for research. Fathers are more likely to be at work than mothers (Coley, 2001). They are also likely to have other commitments outside the home so they are less available outside working hours (ibid). Fathers tend to be reluctant to engage with researchers as the findings of research around gendered issues have not portrayed men well (Carlson & McLanahan, 2004; Cooksey & Craig, 1998). Young men, particularly low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers, are likely to eschew inquiries which delve into emotional issues (Simms & Smith, 1986). Fathers have not fared well in research portrayals of them, hence their reluctance to engage in research. In this regard Rouch (2005) suggests a patient approach in establishing rapport with young fathers. This is especially so for qualitative psychological research which generally demands substantial researcher-participant contact.

To deal with this, some researchers have gathered fatherhood data from mothers (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Coley, 2001; Tanfer & Mott, 1997). Longstaff (2000) noted, that some researchers treat the terms 'mother' and 'father' as if they were synonymous. I argue this approach ignores the vast differences in the social construction and performance of fatherhood and motherhood. When fathers do participate in research into emotional issues, their contribution can be of limited value. Since the inter-war period, males have developed a culture of being emotionally reserved (Balswick & Peek, 1971; Griswold, 1993; Kimmel, 1996; Phillips, 1996). Komarovsky (1962) and Balswick and

Peek (1971) attributed this to the conflation of manhood with breadwinning. Pudney (2007) adds that the emotional impact of World War I and II on New Zealand servicemen produced a male culture of emotional reserve. Despite changes in gender codes since the late 1970s, this reserve continues to compromise research with New Zealand men. They operate in a “male culture of isolation” (Pudney, 2006, p. 10). It is therefore not surprising that “verbal, relational fields are not confidently discussed by men” (ibid, p.16). In supportive circumstances, New Zealand men can be comfortable accessing and discussing their emotional experiences around family life but only in environments in which such disclosure does not invite ridicule or breach gender codes. Chapman (2005) reports, when women are absent, some New Zealand men are prepared to detail emotional experiences providing they do not feel their masculinity is compromised. Torr (2003) found similar responses amongst working-class men in Britain. Men maintain masculinity or diminish it to convey socially desirable self-presentations (Dench, 1996). The social desirability of emotional display is fostered by popular sports and media icons who express fraternal and paternal bonds in the popular media and in public venues (Knijn, 1995).

Fathers as a populace vary according to their race, religion, class and geography. Jarrett, Roy and Burton (2002) found even amongst seemingly homogenous populations such as inner city young Afro-American fathers, behavioural and conceptual differences were so wide, formulating a generalization about the psychological operation of this population was impossible. Although there are common features linking most fathers, these are apparent and fail to inform us about paternal behaviour and factors which bear on it. Any research must therefore maneuver around its potential to have limited generalisability. From a social constructionist position this is unproblematic because “the intent is not to generalize to all fathers but to elaborate on the ‘idiographic’ experiences of some fathers” (Daly, 1995, p. 23).

Attempting to research fatherhood by focusing on single issue assessments of behaviour may provide findings which are highly generalisable but these do not give “an insight into the inter-actional and interpretive meaning of fatherhood” (ibid). The findings offer a

snapshot of behaviour at a certain time in a select population and fail, according to Cohen (1993), to determine affective changes or transitions. They also fail to explore the reasons behind fathering because they use dichotomous or definitional descriptions which may seem effective codifiers in theory but often fail to apply to human experience (Walzer, 1998).

Survey techniques have similar short-comings because they skim across the surface of fathers' experiences. Eggeneen (2002) argues such techniques also privilege the practices of the hegemonic white, middle class because they are most receptive to their structure and more likely to complete them. The same can be said of time diaries. It is important to place any findings in their socio-economic context. For example, Craig and Mullan's findings (2008) of limited father child-contact do not mean limited father-child commitment. Marsh (2008) postulates it may reflect economic conditions that oblige fathers to work excessively long hours to support their family. Minimal father-child contact in these circumstances would therefore reflect very strong paternal feeling, a feature demonstrated by Fullwood's (2008) autobiographical account. Survey techniques would not assess such sentiments.

A number of fatherhood researchers advocate the most appropriate research style with which to explore the psychological experience of fatherhood, is one which builds on accounts given by fathers themselves rather than statistical tabulations or researcher observations (Blain, 1993; Coley, 2001; Lupton & Barclay, 1997). This approach begins to unpack the hidden cultural concepts underlying and determining fatherhood performance (Dienhart, 1998). It allows researchers to get close to the subject (Gubrium & Holstein, 2006). These idiographic and dialogic techniques were the social psychology method of choice in the past. They provided valuable insights into the lives of poor fathers and families during the Great Depression (Cavan & Ranck, 1938; Komarovsky, 1940/1973). They were also used to develop central principles that continue to inform psychology (Boss, 1987).



### **A psychological investigation of fatherhood**

The intention of this research is to explore the psychological experience of fatherhood amongst low-skilled, low socio-economic status men. This section of society has received a degree of research attention, however, most of it has come from allied fields which take a less individualistic approach to the subject. These approaches can prove insightful. Indeed, I draw on a number of them to provide background to the population I have studied. For example, Komarovksy (1973) completed very valuable research into similar populations in historical periods. Peel (2003) did the same working with a select number of Australian communities as did Newman (1999) in a large American city. But whereas those investigations provided insights into the social circumstances of fatherhood, a psychological investigation focuses on the individual experience of fathers. I would argue this is particularly so for a discursive investigation which draws on how fathers talk about their experience.

Within psychology there has been a growing fatherhood literature focusing on the individual experience. This literature generally shares a theoretical background in social constructionism and a methodology which draws on discursive techniques. Henwood and Proctor (2003) have contributed to this by focusing on “how men perceive themselves and evaluate the changing sociocultural scripts of fatherhood” (p. 340). Although they make reference to the broader socio-cultural context in which fatherhood is performed, their focus is centered upon individual fathers, what they refer to as the “complexity of paternal subjectivity” (p. 352). A focus on subjectivity lends itself to an *insiders* report on parenting, (Breheny & Stephens, 2007), as opposed to a researcher based assessment. A focus on the individual experience has proved particularly valuable in engaging with parents from marginalized sections of society. Frewin, Tuffin and Rouch (2007) took this approach in a study of fatherhood as experienced by teenaged boys. An emphasis on the individual experience allowed participants to construct fatherhood as a positive identity, despite their often difficult relationship and social circumstances. Comparable results were noted by Cherrington and Breheny (2005) who used discursive techniques with a similar population of marginalized parents. Although we need to make reference to the broader socio-cultural context in which the fathering occurs, a focus on the participants

self-report provides a description of that experience slightly removed from the dominant discourses in that socio-cultural context. Those discourses can often be highly critical of parenting practices in marginalized communities (Phoenix & Hasain, 2007). Rouch found a focus on the psychological experience of fatherhood can provide self-reports very much at odds with the popular discourses which construct parenthood by poorly resourced fathers. No matter how much fathers may relate their paternal activities to the broader socio-cultural circumstances, they ground it in their own experience, a feature Roy (2006) observed when he invited fathers to 'tell their stories'. Similar work was conducted by Lupton and Barclay (1997), with a population of Australian men. According to Burman (2008), the value of such a subjective focus, in contrast with a quantified reductionist focus, is borne out in the quality of the insights provided by the findings.

A focus on how individual men talk about and conceive of fatherhood brings us as close as possible to their experience. Their talk will unavoidably draw on, and be composed of, wider discourses reflecting the social construction of fatherhood (Edley & Wetherell, 1999). Examining their experience and construction of those discourses brings us close to their individual psychology of fatherhood (Tuffin & Rouch, In press), providing us with an 'insiders' account of fatherhood.

### **A lack of literature focusing on fathers in the lower socio-economic stratum**

A number of fatherhood researchers have decried the degree to which the practices of those in the middle and upper socio-economic stratum have consumed the attention of fatherhood research (Carlson & McLanahan, 2004; Coley, 2001; Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda 2004; Marsiglio, Amato, Day & Lamb, 2001). From my engagement with the literature, I have found that studies of low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers tend to focus on simplistic concepts and single issues, for example, child care payments (Coley, 2001; Garfinkel, McLanahan & Hanson, 1998) or shallow assessments (Dench, 1996) or have been limited to the study of unemployment and its effects on fathers, for example, Eichbaum, (2001). There has been very little psychological research on low-skilled, low socio-economic status fatherhood as a legitimate practice. Having said this, it is important not to dismiss as irrelevant research which has examined middle class

fatherhood. Although specific parental practices may be unique to the operation of middle class fatherhood, the discourses which inform those practices are able to cross socio-economic boundaries and be adopted by, or resisted by, fathers in low socio-economic strata. Being cognizant of discourses common amongst fathers in the middle socio-economic stratum allows one to identify their entry and diffusion into lower strata.

Lower socio-economic fathering is generally conflated with a variety of social maladies that beset the lower socio-economic bracket. These men are more likely to be studied for their pernicious or non-parenting behaviour than for their parenting. This has detracted enormously from the field. Although the assessment by Sayers and Fox (2005), that references to working-class fathers are rare and often speculative, may be a little extreme, in contrast with studies of middle-class fathers, there are few studies of low socio-economic fathers. This can be attributed to the easy access academic researchers have to middle-class fathers. Additionally, the social environment of the poor can discourage researchers from entering it (Newman, 1999; Peel, 2003; Waller, 2002). Pfannenstiel and Honig (1991) note the vicissitudes of working-class life compound their inaccessibility, with more frequent changes of residence, employment, transportation issues and the likelihood of family crisis.

It is erroneous to unreservedly generalize the findings of research into middle-class fatherhood to all fathers without due regard for the bearing of socio-economic status. Doing so ignores the pervasive effect class of birth has on family operations and a child's outcomes (Kingston, 2000). The propensity to subsume working-class populations within the wider population of fathers defies any appreciation of how family economic circumstances bear on parenting. An over-emphasis on middle-class practices promotes their values as societal norms (Parke & Stearns, 1993) particularly given the socio-economic power this section of society hold. Newman (1999) and Burman (2008) argue that middle-class norms and icons pervade the media and dominate society already. I maintain this pervasiveness sets their standards as societal norms. Consequently the practices of lower socio-economic fathers are more likely to be viewed as aberrant.

Middle-class fathering is often viewed as a teleological achievement in social development. Middle-class fathers are often uncritically considered to be adaptive, pro-social and virtuous (Goodman, 1994; Griswold, 1993). Torr (2003) speculates that because middle-class men have greater linguistic skills than working-class men, they are likely to 'over-report' involvement with their children. He also adds status issues are likely to discourage middle-class men reporting problems with parenting. In the media, middle-class men are depicted as markers of sensitivity and refinement who incorporate the ideals of feminism and gender equity (Burman, 2008). This is packaged with the American model of masculinity: self-successful, self-reliant and accomplished (Kimmel, 1996). Griswold (1993) maintains these icons position working-class fathers as anachronistic, sexist and crude. At the beginning of the new age men's movement, Messner (1993) proposed that the counter-image to the nurturant father was an emotionally restrained, un-engaging and un-nurturing working-class male. Middle-class nurturant fathering operated as a socio-political act which distanced itself from an undesirable lower socio-economic alternative.

According to Coltrane and Allen (1994), this view overlooks the socially adaptive value of middle-class parenting. Rather than be a step in human social evolution, it is an ecological adjustment in an environment in which sensitivity, measured emotional expression and consultative skills are adaptive and valued traits in the marketplace. In addition, Dienhart (1998) states that middle-class fathering techniques are often used to disguise middle-class materialism. Such fathers are liable to spend long hours at work not due to a pressing need to put 'bread on the table', but to sustain high levels of consumer activity. This should not be conflated with promoting family welfare.

The middle-class image of fatherhood portrays blurred gender boundaries around breadwinning and domestic work, a seemingly laudable move towards shared gender spheres (Cabrera & Garcis Coll, 2004). This image ignores research that indicates many middle-class men retain conservative and traditional parenting and co-parenting styles. They still resign large amounts of childcare and domestic work to their partner, using their greater economic productivity as an excuse not to assist (Coltrane & Adams, 2001;

Craig & Mullan, 2008). Although working-class men are more likely to retain traditional gender attitudes (Sayers & Fox, 2005), Deutsch (2002) and Lewis (2000) found that their participation in housework and childcare is significantly greater than that of fathers in higher socio-economic stratum. This supports Pudney's opinion that middle-class men might publicly express high status opinions such as gender equity but they do not practice them in private (Pudney, W. personal communication, October 13, 2008). Working-class men may express unpopular sexist attitudes but Deutsch (2002) and Lewis (2000) found they practice a greater degree of gender equity in private.

Few dimensions of life are more ubiquitous than one's class (Bloom-Feshbach, Bloom-Feshbach, & Heller, 1982; Lareau, 2003; Sennett & Cobb, 1973). Its impact extends beyond the bearing of economics and includes a value system. For example, working-class Americans extol loyalty and duty above the middle-class values of self-advancement and achievement (Lamont, 2000). An appreciation of such differences gives an insight into working-class 'familism' (a pre-occupation with family life) and middle-class individualism (ibid). Also, working-class fathers are more likely to live in unsafe environments. This disposes them to use more forceful parenting techniques to ensure their child's physical safety (Hofferth, 2003; Letiecq & Koblinsky, 2004). Superficially they appear to retain out-dated discipline methods while in fact they are adapting techniques to suit their geo-social circumstances.

The distinction in economic outlook between those in the lower socio-economic strata and those in higher stratum cannot be overstated. Dienhart (1998) describes middle-class narratives as "rich with their sense of choice about their lifestyle" (p. 213). None of Dienhart's research participants spoke of the perils of economic adversity or constrained opportunity. This makes a powerful contrast with low socio-economic fathers who have limited horizons and fewer economic options (Sayers & Fox, 2005). It also reiterates the need for research into the field of low-skilled, low socio-economic status fatherhood to fill the lacuna which exists.

Some research has been completed on poor fathers but, in contrast with research into middle-class fatherhood, it has been preoccupied with the pathology of lower socio-economic status paternity: an over-focus on violence, substance abuse, child abuse, neglect and desertion (Coolsen, 1993; Erickson & Gecas, 1991). Low-skilled, low socio-economic status fatherhood as a legitimate practice is rarely considered and this remains a notable omission in the literature (Coltrane, Parke & Adams, 2004). My research seeks to fill this gap in the literature by exploring how low-skilled, low socio-economic status men talk about fathering.

### **A paucity of New Zealand research into fatherhood**

There is very little fatherhood research in New Zealand. Before applying the findings of overseas research to compensate for that paucity, it is important to consider the relevance of such work. Because most fatherhood research in English is published in the United States, North American motifs and models dominate the English-speaking world, including of course, New Zealand. It is easy for the findings of North American research to be considered applicable to New Zealand circumstances. It is true these findings can be of value to researchers in New Zealand, and Australia, given their common histories. All three nations are liberal democracies, 'settler societies', and all have re-regulated market economies

Despite these similarities, the social activity and values operating in North America are not automatically transferable to New Zealand. Similar concerns have been voiced by fatherhood researchers in Australia (Russell, 2001). This situation has been fanned by the fatherhood/new age men's movement having its philosophical roots in America (Bly, 1991). Alasutaari (2003) warns against the propensity for family research in smaller nations to be subsumed within the cultural hegemony of dominant powers. Most family research has focused on American families but Katz and Konner (1981) note 95 percent of the human population live in family formats which differ from the standard North American family. Despite New Zealand's relative small size, it is important to develop fatherhood literature which is informed by research completed here.

New Zealand's long history of left wing politics (Trotter, 2007), welfare state provisions (Kelsey, 1997) and New Zealand's particular gender history (Nolan, 2000) contribute to the disparity between the two countries and make transposing findings from America to New Zealand problematic. This is compounded by differences in our attitudes to marriage, race, religion and affluence. Robertson, Rogers and Pryor (2006) warn against applying findings from overseas locations to New Zealand as often New Zealand's specific social make-up means such findings have limited applicability.

Some key differences between New Zealand and North American circumstances demonstrate a need for endogenous New Zealand research. From my assessment, I gauge a vast amount of American family research to be pre-occupied with marriage as the defining means of establishing a family. Families created outside marriage tend to be considered fragile (Mincy & Pouncy, 1999). Gavanas (2004) posits many American researchers overstate the importance of marriage in family formation, while they understate the importance of jobs and a social economy which assists fathers to take up the provider role. This reflects the practices of the hegemonic and privileged white population at the expense of the disadvantaged poor Afro-American population. One could say it also reflects America's entrenched conservatism (Flynn, 2008). New Zealand's liberal social democracy combined with its history of state welfare provisions mean unmarried couples are not automatically considered 'high risk'. Dividing families into married and unmarried groups is not standard practice in New Zealand family research.

A vast amount of North American research uses race as a distinguishing feature. Although racial issues remain salient in New Zealand, it is very easy for a New Zealand researcher to get the impression racial boundaries in America are firm and impenetrable, in contrast with those in New Zealand. That *impression* does require careful assessment. Some North American researchers have noted a decrease in the importance of race as a defining factor in partnership formation and childbearing (Root, 2001; Williams, 2001). It remains true, New Zealand has very high rates of inter-racial partnership (Pool, Dharmalingam & Sceats, 2007). For example, in the sample of 23 fathers involved in this

research project, nine were of mixed race and over a third had a partner whose racial make-up did not match their own.

Some social scientists have described America as obsessed with affluence and achievement (James, 2006; Kimmel, 1996). Commenting on this, Aird (2002) states “the most predominant and growing values of our [American] age are materialism and self-gratification” (p. 22). This is evident in the privileging of research into middle-class families and, as Kimmel (1996) states, the practice of using the white middle-class man as the primary referent in constructions of masculinity. Katz (1996) states this is evident in the American attitude to the poor, which largely attributes their position to atomistic choices. According to James (2008), New Zealanders are far less materialistic than other first world nations and far less pre-occupied with wealth and status. The kiwi icon of the “good keen man” (Crump, 1969) detached from class and status symbols still maintains considerable prestige in New Zealand (Phillips, 1996). I would add particularly so amongst the working class. Manhood and wealth have not been conflated here to the degree they have in the United States. It is therefore important to use research conducted in the United States judiciously as it reflects a disparate value system from our own.

Finally, key distinctions between America’s poor and the poor in New Zealand have to be considered before the findings of research conducted there are applied to New Zealand. Although similarities exist, we cannot assume Afro-American and Hispanic populations adhere to the same values as working-class Maori or Pakeha New Zealanders. The depth and constraint of poverty in America is far more intense than that in New Zealand, as evidenced in the social poverty indicators used in America which have little bearing in New Zealand, for example, crime infested neighbourhoods and woefully inadequate schooling (McLoyd, 1990). The legacy of racism and ghettoization has led to the concentration of poverty in inner city areas to extremes unmatched in New Zealand (Flynn, 2008; Katz, 1996; Stack, 1974; Wilson, 1996; Zinn, 2003). Having conducted ethnographic research in such environments, MacLeod (1995) found young American men experienced utter hopelessness as a result of their dire economic circumstances and endless obstacles to social mobility. This was the case for poor, inner-city Afro-



Americans and poor, inner-city white Americans. Newman (1999) described the adversity of these conditions as Sisyphean. Fathers in such environments were regularly compelled to work numerous jobs just to support their family (Jarrett et al. 2002). Venkatesh (2006) found them also likely to engage in illegitimate activities for that purpose, and as a researcher he sympathized with their need to do so. Moreover, historical processes and geographical factors have combined to create extremely poor white communities in parts of rural America, such as Appalachia (Newsome, Bush, Hennon, Peterson & Wilson, 2008). These factors, combined with limited welfare provisions for the poor, mean research conducted in America must be considered carefully before its findings are applied to New Zealanders living in the lower socio-economic stratum.

Having said all this, it is important to give a degree of consideration to research conducted in the United States. Given the cultural hegemony which it exercises over the English-speaking world, the discourses and practices generated in the United States most definitely find expression amongst fathers in New Zealand. Although the socio-political circumstances may differ from those in New Zealand, cultural conventions generated in North America can be adopted by those in other English speaking locales. An example of this is the degree to which Afro-American values, forms of expression and fashions are demonstrated by young New Zealand Maori (Ihaka & Archie, 1993). Given that white Americans also adopt such codes (Tate, 2003), it is reasonable to argue that non-Maori New Zealanders also take on these practices.

Research completed in Great Britain has greater relevance to New Zealand given our racial and political similarities. New Zealand was colonized by Great Britain during the same period in which the male-breadwinner family format was being standardized in that country. That format has had an indelible effect upon family operation in New Zealand since then. A major difference between the two nations is the relatively strong class boundaries maintained in Great Britain (Seabrook, 1985). One could add the scale of working-class life depicted in Great Britain is far more entrenched and has a much longer history than that in New Zealand (Jordan, James, Kay & Redley, 1992). Also Boroman

(2004) claims the level of socio-political discourse in the United Kingdom is possibly greater than that in New Zealand. New Zealanders have far less class consciousness, so their discourses around class are less well resourced. Some non-British researchers have cautioned against generalizing from the British to other populations. In contrast with most other nations, Janssens (1997) states the rise of the British male-breadwinner identity during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was exceptionally swift. This had a powerful effect on the gender and child-rearing techniques enacted there and it is reflected in a uniquely British attitude to fatherhood. We could critique Janssen's (1997) caution by noting that that uniquely British attitude is not unique. Given the colonization of New Zealand during that period, 19<sup>th</sup> century, it can be argued the British settlers imported the same attitude regarding fatherhood to New Zealand. A further reservation is made by Burgess and Ruxton (1996). They state that because Great Britain is the home of John Bowlby and the nation in which his theories were given greatest application, traditional gender roles remain very strong there.

Research conducted in Australia can be of significant value in providing insights into fatherhood in English-speaking settler societies which are liberal democracies, for example, Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Peel, 2003; Russell, 2001, 2002; Uhlmann, 2006). The rise of industrial-capitalism in the two nations occurred at similar times, that is, during the early part of the twentieth century (Uhlmann, 2006; King, 2003). Industrial-capitalism shaped the form the nuclear family took over the course of that century (Uhlmann, 2006). But key demographic and geo-political distinctions mean what may appear a minor disparity can count towards a significant cultural distinction. The bearing of Maori on any indigenous New Zealand concept of fatherhood cannot be overlooked, nor New Zealand's unique gender relations history and divergent social policies. These vary along issues of child care provisions and health supports (Pocock, 2006). These have the potential to have a powerful effect on how fathers enact family life and the resulting family identities. Patterns of Australian child care and parental involvement, such as those explored by Craig and Mullans (2008), may not be germane to New Zealand circumstances.

## **Conclusion**

Accessing and engaging low socio-economic New Zealand fathers for research purposes can be problematic. They tend to be wary of social research and generally move in cohorts difficult for social scientists to penetrate. This issue is compounded by the paucity of New Zealand research from which to launch any investigation. Although research conducted overseas can prove insightful, it can have culturally specific drawbacks and its findings need to be carefully critiqued before they are applied to New Zealand fathers. In addition, fatherhood research conducted with populations other than low socio-economic fathers is likely to examine cultural mores which lack familiarity to those in the low socio-economic community. Juxtaposing the two value systems is perilous and can be patronizing. The most effective means of examining the practices of low-skilled, low socio-economic status, co-resident fathers is to engage them in open ended interviews. This provides a format in which they can give a full and unconstrained account.

## **Chapter 3: The Culture of Low-skilled, Low Socio-Economic Status Fathers**

Most research examining low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers has focused on them being absent, negligent or abusive (Coolsen, 1993). Very little research has considered working-class fatherhood as a bone fide parental practice, and thereby examined it 'sympathetically'. There are features of fathering amongst this population which distinguish them from other populations. Generally, low-skilled, low socio-economic status men commence fatherhood earlier than men in other socio-economic strata. This compels them to assemble the necessities of family life and family structure with little time for preparation. Some researchers have noted the bearing this has on their experience of fatherhood, in contrast with fathers in higher socio-economic stratum. These factors combine to make the practice of low-skilled, low socio-economic status fatherhood a distinct parental activity.

### **Early family formation**

Since the mid 1970s there has been a trend of delayed childbirth throughout all of the developed world (MacLean & Eekelaar, 1997) including New Zealand (Pool et al. 2007). In 1972 the mean age of first time child birth was 23.0 years for New Zealand women. By 2002 the mean age had risen to 29.9 years (ibid). This trend is associated with higher rates of tertiary education, greater personal aspirations and numerous pre-conditions young adults set before they have a child, including finding the perfect partner (Western, Qu, Parker & Alexander, 2004). Jacobs (1995) states this trend is a hallmark of middle-class life, a means by which capable adults construct their envisaged future. According to Thery (1993), delayed child-bearing is part of society's shift towards 'de-marriage', a move away from marriage and family life as a means of defining one's social status.

Low-skilled, low socio-economic status men defy this trend by embarking on family life and fatherhood much earlier than the demographic norm. This tends to be an unplanned event and often in relationship circumstances which are unclear (Cabrera, Tamis-

LeMonda, Bradley, Hoffereth & Lamb, 2000). This propensity, to commence fatherhood while still relatively young, is common amongst low-skilled, low socio-economic status men in most of the English-speaking world, although most relevant research has focused on first-time motherhood (Huinink, 1995). Numerous researchers have appraised early commencement of parenthood as an economically unsound social practice (Levine & Pitt, 1995). Many conservative thinkers consider it socially reckless and the cause of innumerable social problems (Blankenhorn, 1995). Early and unplanned parenthood can be construed as part of the bifurcation of society into a shrinking population of well educated middle-class professionals and an expanding demimonde comprised of the uneducated and low-skilled. The nature of these divergent populaces – the middle class and the lower working class – extends this assessment to arguments which are conflated with race and privilege.

Economic theory predicts men should delay parenthood until they have sufficient resources to support their partner and child (Easterlin, 1973). Casper and Bianchi (2002) state:

Masculinity is partly defined by the ability to provide economically, men marry when they feel they can provide for a family, and women seek husbands who will be good providers (p. 272).

A lack of personal and material resources prior to family formation compounds the economic stress faced by numerous nascent families, whatever their socio-economic status (Cooney, Pedersen, Indelicato & Palkowitz, 1993; Fox & Bartholomae, 2005). This is even more so for low-skilled, low socio-economic status men. Marsiglio (1995) reasoned father-child bonding is more likely to be hampered, given the multiple demands facing these young men and their limited economic choices.

Within these working-class families, restricted opportunities for female partners to acquire job skills mean most men who commence family life while relatively young are compelled to adopt and retain the role of the 'exclusive' breadwinner. This is despite

them having a limited capacity to perform that role (Tanfer & Mott, 1997). These fragile families are at high risk of poverty and family break-up (Terry-Humen, Marlove & Moore, 2001). An understanding of what promotes paternal commitment to family welfare in these circumstances could assist efforts to reduce the possibility of parental separation. This adds to the importance of studying this vulnerable group.

Numerous researchers have detailed the poor family prospects of children born to unmarried parents in young low-skilled families. Many have focused on income and paternal presence, finding the lower the man's income, the lower the likelihood he will reside with his children (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999; Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Landale & Oropesa, 2001; Woodworth, Belsky & Crnic, 1996). The evidence is not conclusive. Other studies, particularly those which factor in broad socio-economic issues, find the relationship between income and paternal presence is not so strong (Garfinkel et al. 1998; Pleck, 1997). Whatever their findings, large scale statistical projects are unable to identify the reasons fathers choose to be active agents within their family. This research project sets out to explore those reasons.

According to Glick, (1989) the principal reason members of the middle class delay family formation and childbirth, is so they can secure means by which to sustain a high consumer lifestyle. Access to economic opportunities is limited for most low socio-economic men. Their capacity to realize opportunities is constrained by their limited personal resources (Flynn, 2007). Glick (1989) makes the point that for low socio-economic men, the opportunity cost of delaying child rearing is very small. If one has limited skills and few chances of wage rises, the argument that parenthood should be delayed until one is financially comfortable is irrelevant. As Rubin (1976) assessed many years earlier, in her extensive interviews with lower socio-economic families, there is no purpose planning for a future when you don't see a future to plan. Glick (1989) notes for those who do delay family formation, their partnership choices become narrower. Critics of unplanned early family formation overlook the responsible behaviour fatherhood is able to prompt in these circumstances (Cabrera et al. 2000; Rouch, 2003). This is despite

these young men having to “scramble to assemble the material resources required of them to make a marriage and a home, and to have children” (Gillies, 2000, p. 233).

It is possible to consider those in the low socio-economic stratum of society as retaining family formation practices developed in the 1950s and 60s, when a long-standing buoyant economy assured young families of high wages and low costs. This assessment can be explained by Young and Wilmott’s (1973) principle of Stratified Diffusion, the progressive movement of social mores from the higher stratum of society down to the lower. It would be expected that in time members of the lower socio-economic stratum will adopt the practices of those in the middle class. The adoption of wider middle class childbearing and rearing practices is likely to be hampered because they do not have the economic opportunities which prompted the changes in middle-class behaviour. While their outlook remains so limited, they have little need to change their childbearing practices.

### **The emotional effect of new fatherhood on younger fathers**

The emotional effect of first time fatherhood on men is popular folklore. Greenberg and Morris (1974) were among the first to give it academic attention describing it as “engrossment”. Using interview techniques with first time fathers, Ehrensaft (1990) found many men described it as falling in love with their newborn. Mothers are reported to bond more quickly with their offspring, with up to two thirds doing so at birth (Belsky & Kelly, 1994). But the capacity for men to bond instantly should not be over-looked. The disparity between women and men’s self-reports of instant bonding possibly relates more to gender codes and strictures on male emotional expression (such as detailed by Levant, 1995) than to any innate difference. This can be contrasted with the pressure on females to display motherly feelings and the expectations they are inherently maternal (Badinter, 1980/1981; Burman, 2008; Oakley, 1974).

Palkowitz (2002) found fatherhood has a far greater emotional effect on younger men than it has on older men. He described younger men as getting a “jolt” (ibid, p. 66) from fatherhood. Frewin, Tuffin and Rouch (2007) found fatherhood effected a powerful and

at times global identity transformation on young poorly skilled men. These young men accepted with little resistance their identity reformulation which was effected by them becoming fathers. Not only is younger men's emotional experience reported to be more profound than that of older fathers, the changes fatherhood effects on them are far more global. The 'snap' which effects fatherhood identity adoption, as described by Daniels and Weingarten (1982), is greater in both the magnitude and immediacy for younger men. Palkowitz (2002) attributes this to their different levels of parental preparedness. Younger men tend to have limited employment skills, few capital possessions and can be overly engaged in high risk behaviours, one being unprotected sex (Cabrera et al. 2000). Fatherhood prompts a widespread transformation as they acquire the necessities for home-life and adopt pro-social attitudes. These acquisitions are made to ensure the welfare of their child. In contrast, older men are more likely to have attained these, so their response is not one of hasty assemblage. For them, fatherhood is more likely to be a "gentle evoker" (Palkowitz, 2002, p. 66). What are significant are the factors that promote a young father's adoption of pro-fathering techniques which support his new family's welfare. Although the 'fatherhood snap' may be an intimate intra-psychic experience, it is largely played out in the community where the man adopts the precepts of a supportive, pro-family man.

### **Providing for low socio-economic families**

Young parents are more likely to be on lower wages, and more likely to have one parent working and one in full time domestic care giving (Pool et al. 2007). As the euphoria of first-time fatherhood diminishes, most men become pre-occupied with providing for their family (Cohen, 1993). It is not surprising there is a subsequent rise in workforce participation amongst men who are soon to become, or have just become, fathers. This has been noticed in diverse communities (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Hatter et al. 2002; O'Brien, 2004). Pudney and Cottrell (1998) describe these men as worker bees, busy with long hours at work and busy at home attending to domestic chores and childcare.

Drawing on Ericksonian concepts, Marsiglio and Hutchinson (2002) refer to this as a turning point in fathers' identity development: "a translation of paternal identity into



paternal generativity” (p.161). This move promotes motherhood domesticity as she provides a secure base for her child at home. Most fathers report parenthood has changed their attitude to work and increased the amount of work they perform. In contrast, Hatter et al. (2002) found a portion of British fathers actually decrease the amount of hours they worked so they could spend more time with their partner and child. These men were middle-class professionals without pressing economic obligations. Sayers and Fox (2005) maintain the good provider role is far more salient for working-class American men because they operate just above the breadline and are more vulnerable to the consequences if they fail to provide.

In New Zealand, fathers of young children make up a significant proportion of those compelled to work long hours. Callister (2005) found 39 percent of co-resident fathers aged between 25-34 years with a pre-school child, worked 50 hours or more per week. Providing continues to be the major feature defining fatherhood, particularly for low socio-economic men as their partner is unlikely to work (White & Rogers; 2000). Being the good provider limits the time and energy men have available for their children. Pudney and Cottrell (1998) found many men regretted this but as they are low-skilled they are unable to work smarter and can only work longer. The long hours fathers are compelled to work has a detrimental effect on their relationship with their children. Amongst Australian men, Russell and Hwang (2004) found it to be instrumental in men’s perception that their father-child relationship was weakening. Research in Great Britain has found the same among new fathers who increase their working hours. Using interviews with parents, Reynolds, Callender and Edwards (2003) reported men decried the long hours they spent at work. Many were aware of the damage this did to their father-child relationship and the minimal parental contact they had as a result. Shift work in particular, has a damaging effect on the quality of co-parent relationships, which is liable to disrupt father-child bonds (Russell & Bowman, 2000). Children of parents who work late night shifts have much higher risks of suffering developmental problems (Heymann & Earle, cited in Heymann, 2000).

Children lamented the long hours their fathers were compelled to work. In interviews with young Australians about work/life balance, Pocock and Clark (2005) found many young people wanted to spend more time with their fathers but were unable to because of their pressing work demands. In the United States this situation is exacerbated by poor labour laws and little worker protection for the low-skilled (Hewlett & West, 2002). Although these children may have a co-resident father, he is unlikely to engage in much quality parenting due to the exhausting effects of long working hours.

### **Scholarly interest in the lives of ‘the poor’**

Whenever socio-economic conditions have resulted in widespread poverty, researchers have sought to explore its experience. Research has been conducted in specific poverty-stricken environments (Booth, 1889/1970), during widespread depression (Orwell, 1937; Komarovsky, 1940/1973; Trethewey, 1989), among marginalized communities (Leibow, 1967; Newman 1999; Stack, 1974) and after the implementation of government policies that have widespread social effects (Williams & Kornblum, 1985). The most recent wave of poverty research was prompted by the neo-liberal policies of Thatcherism in Great Britain and Reaganomics in the United States. The hard-right Rogernomic policies of the fourth New Zealand Labour Government (1984-1990) and the policies enacted by the subsequent National Government (1990-1999) also provoked a degree of New Zealand research into this area (Kelsey, 1997; O’Brien & Wilkes, 1993). Some researchers maintain these conservative economic policies were entwined with conservative family values which advocated the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver dichotomy (Burgess & Ruxton, 1996).

Research at the time tended to focus on the experience of fathers in low socio-economic families because they were more likely to lose their job and experience provider role strain (Nichols, 1994). Ethnographic projects provided the most insightful investigations of poor families and the fathers in them (Williams and Kornblum, 1985). These used culturally sympathetic methods of entering and recording a family’s operation. Researchers were open-minded about family conduct, particularly their capacity to make legitimate decisions discordant with the predominant social values. Nearly all urban

ethnographic researchers develop a deep sense of respect and sympathy for the lives of the poor (Macleod, 1995; Newman, 1999; Peel, 2003; Rubin, 1976; Stack, 1974; Williams & Kornblum, 1985; Venkatesh, 2006). Anthropological techniques provided them with access to meanings and values generally unavailable to those conducting quantitative research. Peel (2003) notes in contrast with most government research which seeks to measure poverty, social researchers seek to investigate the experience of poverty.

### **The demise of the traditional working-class workplace**

The current employment available to young low-skilled fathers contrasts sharply with those their counterparts enjoyed 25 years ago. During most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, young working-class youth entering the workforce would be mentored by older men into a fraternity of working men (Coontz, 1992). This offered them a strong social identity and social support. In the New Zealand context this is corroborated by Phillips (1996) and in Australia by Uhlmann (2006). Work gave men a powerful sense of identity and community. Despite sometimes unenviable working conditions, it was part of their self-concept as valued men.

The re-location of most manufacturing jobs to the growing economies of Asia means for most low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers, there are few employment opportunities beyond low paid service sector jobs and casual work (Gillies, 2000; Nichols, 1994). Young, low socio-economic fathers in first world economies no longer work alongside older men. They are typically in low paid menial positions with little future and no sense of common purpose (Dench, 1996). Kalleberg, Reskin and Hudson (2000) note these jobs offer few if any benefits, poor working conditions and little possibility of promotion or training. Their work is mostly monotonous and unsatisfying. Their providing activity is not bolstered by a sense of co-worker community. These men are a commodity offloaded during economic recession. Foreseeing this move in employment philosophies, Rubin (1976) described it as the dehumanization of work: jobs that instill no sense of dignity or purpose. Working with poor fathers in Chicago, Roy (1999) found, even when the local economy was thriving, prosperity did not trickle down to low-skilled young fathers. Their rates of employment rose but their working

conditions, benefits and demands remained as they had been during the pre-boom period. When the economy slowed, these young men were the first people to be made redundant.

Some authors have described potential family benefits of the workforce re-structuring. The new workplace no longer offers low-skilled, low socio-economic status men an arena for self-fulfillment. Low-skilled, low socio-economic status men are likely to seek satisfaction in a more reliable sphere, particularly their family (Bjornberg & Kollind, 1996). Coontz (1992) concluded the dramatic changes in the workforce would promote this. The capacity for low-skilled, low paid men to do that is compromised by their pressing need to work long hours at tiring jobs and live with constant economic stress. They might turn to their family as a “haven in a heartless world” (Lasch, 1977, p. 1) but it is more likely to be as Hochschild (1989) called it, a shock absorber! The economic conditions severely hampered their capacity to move into the lower-middle socio-economic stratum (Wright & Martin, 1987) so their economic prospects looked unlikely to improve.

### **Effects of the neo-liberal global economy**

The neo-liberal policies of the 1980s and 90s created formidable employment difficulties for young, low-skilled, low socio-economic men who wished to support their family (Gittlemen & Joyce, 1999; Kimbrell, 199). The most deleterious feature of the neo-liberal economy has been the standardization of the individual wage at the expense of the family wage. In America this has promoted the creation of a frictionless, mobile labour force, a growth in temporary work, declining assumption of lifetime employment by a single employer, and a move away from benefit packages for entire families (Mintz, 1998). Similar effects have occurred in New Zealand, according to Dalziel (1992). Low-skilled workers cannot rely on their employment being anything close to permanent but employers can rely on access to a large low-skilled labour force which has minimal bargaining power. These factors have all meant a stagnation or decline in actual wages for the low-skilled and increasing job instability. This shortage of good employment opportunities and job advancement has created a population that has a diminished ability to support a family (Brown & Baker, 2004).

### **The end of social mobility for those in the low socio-economic stratum**

Since the end of World War II, parents have believed their children would enjoy a higher quality of life than they themselves experienced (Coontz, 1992). A primary object of parenting became “giving our children a better life” (Schwartz, 1998, p. 101). As Abbott (2002) has detailed, each generation since has moved further from the prospects of economic adversity. The economic re-structuring of the 1980s and 90s reversed this outlook and since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the prospects of social mobility are reserved largely for those in the middle and upper socio-economic stratum. The socio-economic gap between the middle and working class widens as the value of education increases the income of the middle class (Wilson, 1996).

Young low-skilled men can no longer plan to see their economic prospects improve as they continue to work and raise a family. The changes in the workforce have all but dashed the dream of a better future. For a large proportion of them, tomorrow looks pretty much like today, especially for those with little education (Gittleman & Joyce, 1999). It would be easy to think during periods of economic prosperity, such as that sustained by the New Zealand economy between 2002 and 2007, their prospects are improved. Callister (2005) disagrees. He stated at the height of the economic boom “the New Zealand economy still remains a tough place for men and women with no formal qualifications” (Callister, 2005, p. 63). White and Rogers (2000) found after ten years of economic prosperity in the United States, the marginalized and poor were worse off than they were before it.

### **Conclusion**

Low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers operate not only as domestic agents, but as agents in the market place. The nature of that market place has a profound influence on the style of parenting these fathers enact. Since the neo-liberal policies of the 1980s, meeting the needs of a family has become increasingly difficult for this population. The scope of fatherhood has expanded to promote greater emotional engagement than previous generations expressed. These developments have assisted fathers’ movement

into the emotional core of the family. This could be compromised by the limited opportunities for economic prosperity and the likelihood of financial adversity. Although intra-family factors may encourage fatherhood participation, few extra-domestic factors operate to support this.

## **Chapter 4: The Working-Class Family and their Socio-Economic Circumstances**

Erickson and Gecas (1991) make the point most studies of working-class families focus on female headed households in which fathers are absent figures. Studies of two parent working-class families generally focus on unemployed fathers (Erickson & Gecas, 1991; Fox & Bartholomae, 2005; Hamilton, Broman, Hoffman & Renner, 1990) and there are very few studies of poor nuclear families in which the father is working (Burman, 2008). According to Peel (2003), this reflects a natural inclination to study those who are not coping. Pro-social working-class fatherhood as part of a co-parent family structure is mostly ignored. There are several distinctive features of working-class families and their circumstances. Many of them can be considered social anachronisms, practices discarded by other socio-economic strata. As insightful as this assessment may be, this view fails to consider the socio-cultural circumstances which preserve these practices, conditions which no longer bear on the middle class. This is compounded by the historical propensity for families to have been very conservative institutions (Jackson, 1984). It could be argued, in times of stress, families they revert to or retain traditional formulas and codes. The heightened economic stress working-class families are likely to encounter could primes them to retain more conservative models as each gender focuses on its primary identity to secure the family's well-being. Not all the features of family life discussed here are unique to working-class families. Several reflect pervasive gender codes which effect family life across various socio-economic strata.

### **Commonplace attitudes in relation to those in the lower socio-economic stratum**

This research project examines the experience of fathers in the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum. A number of concepts about families in this stratum are found in the popular and sometimes academic literature. Before discussing the nature of working-class families and their circumstances, it would be useful to discuss the concepts which often inform public opinion regarding this population.

The most pervasive opinion is an atomistic view of economic decision making. It considers one's socio-economic position to be a result of personal free will, not broader socio-cultural factors. This position is embedded within the Western capitalist culture, which extols the capacity to achieve career success and material acquisition (Katz, 1989). Those unable to realize status and material success can be considered perverse or maladaptive (Gonzalez-Ramos, 1997; James, 2006; Katz, 1989). This attitude, according to Gonzalez-Ramos (1997), stems from the English Poor Laws that considered poverty a result of personal behaviour and family profligacy, not broad underlying issues of power and capital. Granovetter (1985) reasons that contrary to right-wing political thinking, the social decisions we make are not atomistic calculations. They are embedded within a network of social relationships which determine and construct the choices available. For those born into lower socio-economic strata, the economic outcomes they achieve will result more from their limited environmental opportunities than from their talent or effort. The social status of men in particular is intricately bound to their earning capacity (Townsend, 2000a; White & Rogers, 2000). This automatically defines low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers as poor performers in a culture where achievement and success define male excellence. Understanding how low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers make sense of their position is a task of this research project.

The second attitude maintains all those in the lower socio-economic stratum are of the same ilk and all are impoverished for similar reasons (Gonzalez-Ramos, 1997). Available nomenclature compounds this attitude. Katz (1989) argues the very term 'the poor' creates a socially constructed distinction that is taken up as if it were a law of nature. As a population, they are misconstrued as a monolithic community. A departure from this attitude splits the lower socio-economic stratum into two bands. In Australian nomenclature, they are 'the battlers' and 'the bludgers' or 'shiftless' (Peel, 2003). The former are decent and hard working, they adhere to the principles of the middle class but lack its capital assets and earning capacity. The latter are society's demimonde, their tragic conditions attributable to their incapacity to delay gratification and plan for the future (Banfield, 1974). Similar distinctions are made in New Zealand. Boroman, (2004) argues a great deal of social policy debate in the New Zealand popular discourse centres



around making a distinction between those who are impoverished due to unfortunate circumstances, and those who are impoverished due to their own inadequacies. In the American parlance of the inner-city, the poor are distinguished as “decent families” or “street families”, with attributes akin to those Peel makes (Venkatesh, 2006). Katz (1996) states this attitude informs American social policy regarding the poor. However, this dichotomized view, according to Venkatesh (2006) “is an inadequate basis for understanding the experiences and world views of families who live in urban poverty” (p. 60). Wheelock (1991) concurred with this assessment. He studied poverty in Britain during the Thatcher government and concluded poverty, and the social dysfunction associated with it, is best conceived of as a dynamic condition; some families descend into it and others rise out of it. This dynamism was found amongst populations in the United States (Levy, 1975) and Great Britain in earlier periods (Bane & Ellwood, 1983). Many working-class members use the bifurcated concept of the poor to account for their own position. Potuchek (1997) found members of working-class families did so by identifying with, and stating they had, historical roots in both sections of this division. They would construct their life stories around moving from one section of the poor to the other, and their self-identities tended to be arrayed across both. The ‘underclass’ were said to be pre-occupied with alcoholism, violence and family desertion. Murry, Field, Brown, Walker and Deakin (1990) added illegitimacy, unemployment and criminal activity to the characteristic features of this sub-population.

The population I drew on to complete my research used the description given by Potuchek (1997) to position themselves amongst a bifurcated working class population. Some participants considered themselves to have come from decent working-class families and they believed they had fallen in with the wrong crowd. Others said they came from dysfunctional and fractured families and they wanted to improve their birth-family’s child-rearing practices. Several were hard-working religious men who had no aspirations for material wealth. Others were raised in severe poverty and wanted to attain a level of comfort for their children. No two fathers within my sample of 23 could be considered the same and although the means by which they made sense of fatherhood were similar, their practices and performances were diverse. Jarrett et al. (2002)

encountered similar findings in a population of apparently homogenous poor inner-city Afro-American fathers.

A third common attitude to those in the lower socio-economic bracket is that they are universally unhappy on account of their improvident circumstances (Hamilton & Deniss, 2005). This attitude is fuelled by a growth fetishism which promotes consumption and wealth (Hamilton, 2004) and equates an increase in purchasing power with an increase in happiness (Layard, 2005). Layard (ibid) gives a critical analysis of this attitude. He concluded once peoples' income is over a basic level, one that ensures their core needs are met, there is no relationship between happiness and wealth.

### **Applying a nomenclature to this population**

Applying a descriptive label to those in the lower socio-economic stratum can be problematic. Peel (2003) found in Australia those with strong Labour Party affinities were quick to refer to themselves as working class, but many had no such class self-identity. According to Pakulski and Waters (1996), this reflects the demise of class based identity, a process hastened by widespread consumerism and the destruction of public society. Peel found participants preferred to refer to themselves as denizens of a particular suburb or township. The socio-economic and cultural associations with that geography served to communicate their class status. Those living in Broadmeadows, Melbourne, referred to themselves as Broadies. Similar self-references are found in New Zealand, such as the appellation "Westies" for those from West Auckland

### **Family gender politics**

Mothers tend to dominate early child rearing and care giving routines across a range of socio-economic communities. In a sample of 100 new parents, Betcher and Pollock (1993) found first time mothers over-asserted their parenting style while fathers tended to defer to her assumed authority. Jordan (1995) found mothers wanted to take control of parenting as well as take control of their partner's childcare activities. In effect, they positioned themselves as the primary parent, becoming "chief amongst equals" (ibid, p. 64). Many men feel women's hormones make them inherently better parents, so they

defer to her capacities (Jordan, *ibid*). Mothers, according to Everingham (1995) established care-giving routines and fathers are compelled to either defer to them or break them. Although males are not socialized to engage with young children or babies (Hatter et al. 2002), they are able to be as sensitive as mothers to their child's needs. Cabrera, Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda and Lamb, (2003) found strong evidence to this effect. They completed observations of a large number of low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers from a range of ethnic backgrounds and found them able to demonstrate effective and sensitive care-giving styles on par with mothers'. However, this competence was incapable of rivaling the long standing social conventions which positioned mothers as natural and superior parents (Burman, 2008).

Mahoney (1995) proposed maternal resistance to male input with children is particularly characteristic of low-skilled mothers who have few other venues for self-confidence and achievement. Some females would machinate so when they started a family they had to take up the care-giving position by default (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonde, 2003; Mahony, 1995). These researchers speculate a large proportion of females adopt the framework of the male-breadwinner family so they can direct domestic routines and operation, a role for which they are well socialized. It is unsurprising that many mothers, and particularly new mothers, resist paternal input. O'Hara (1995) gauged them to be uncomfortable with fathers moving into an area of expertise generally associated with good motherhood.

Parke & Brott (1999) stated this propensity for female care giving and male breadwinning is reinforced by wider cultural images which portray women doing anything, including motherhood, and fathers depicted only working. It is not surprising the euphoria of early fatherhood can be dampened by the demands of breadwinning, while mothers compound their parent-child connection with intense and prolonged mother-child contact. Aldous (1996) found for many couples birth draws mother and child together while impelling men into the workforce at the expense of their father-child contact.

Because low-skilled, low socio-economic status men have greater earning skills than their partners, the duties of providing fall more heavily on low-skilled, low socio-economic status men than they do on middle-class men who can share providing duties (Burghes, Clarke & Cronin, 1997; White & Rogers, 2000). According to Sayers and Fox (2005), this explains the retention of the male-breadwinner family format in the lower socio-economic stratum; there is limited opportunity for co-providing. Fatherhood identity in this section of society is therefore more likely to become intertwined with the concept of providing because this is the major distinction between the genders in that stratum.

The process accentuates differences in family format between the middle and lower socio-economic stratum. It also raises the likelihood of co-parental stress and disagreement. Kalmijn (1999) found women in shared-care families are more content than those in traditional, male-breadwinner families. They attributed this to having their domestic workload reduced and having major outlets (career/work) besides their home and family life. It is probably more the latter as other research indicates middle-class fathers do not contribute as much at home as working-class fathers (Deutsch, 2002).

### **The family is an inherently conservative institution**

Commenting on the English-speaking family in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jackson (1984) claimed that “the family remains a highly conservative institution, especially so at its most intense moments — marriage, birth, crisis, success, death. It evolves with caution” (p. 133). The stress and novelty of first time parenthood inclines many couples to revert to, or adopt, traditional gender roles (Uhlmann, 2006). Although couples may voice a post-modern family ideology, its uptake and practice is limited. Despite the popular impression of the involved post-modern father, Lareau (2002) found fathers across a wide range of socio-economic strata resigned most of the mental work of child rearing and interaction to their partner. Craig and Mullan (2008) found similar patterns across a range of first world nations. Fathers had a lack of knowledge about their children’s interests, circle of friends, and disposition (Lareau, 2002). Townsend (1999), Deutsch (1999) and Walzer (1998) all observed similar gender role patterns. Parenthood not only moved couples to traditional roles, it encouraged them to adopt traditional

gender attitudes. This process highlights the extent to which gender is used to organize domestic life. Gender dichotomy continues to be embedded in social interaction and structure; the transition to parenthood is a particular point at which these dynamics are visible. This reversion to traditional gender routines prompts Walzer (1998) to question the extent to which social codes, not self-agency, control individual choices.

The above researchers examined North American populations. In New Zealand some research has found men actively participate in domestic routines while working long hours in paid employment. Callister (2005) described them as having a “double burden” (p. 16). This is particularly acute, he states, for low-skilled, no-skilled fathers who are unable to increase their income without increasing their employment hours. The expectations remain that fathers should do more in the home than their own father did. Before this observation is generalized to all New Zealand men, it should be noted Callister’s findings did not break down the sample by socio-economic status. It might represent the behavior of New Zealand men but it does not necessarily depict the behaviour of those in the lower socio-economic stratum.

### **Features of the Working-class family**

Working class families have a history of investing a large amount of their time and identity into their nuclear and extended family. Wilmott (1963) studied working-class families in the east end of London in the 1950s. He found their level of kin contact to be very high, far exceeding that of those in the middle class. Newman (1999) and O’Brien and Jones (1996) found similar patterns of high kin contact amongst disparate lower socio-economic communities. High levels of kin-contact afford families numerous informal but reliable supports during economic adversity. Having studied American working-class families, Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton, (1985) reported comparable behaviour. They speculated members of the working class invest high amounts of time and energy into their families as a fortification against alienation commonplace in the working-class world. Sayers and Fox (2005) speculate the current lack of job satisfaction and dearth of career opportunities disposes them to invest in areas with high personal returns, namely their own family.

Working-class families have parenting techniques which distinguish them from the middle class. Lamont (2000) noted, as a population, lower socio-economic status Americans tend to have more rigid parameters and limited exposure to cultural stimuli outside their narrow domain. They were found to admire code compliance above enterprise and to be committed to a culture of order. In contrast, middle-class parents adopted the 'project of the child' approach. They parented "in such a way that the individuality of the children can develop fully [ ] the accent is on individuality and self-development" (Verheyen, 1987. p. 37). Their focus on morality and rule compliance were diminished. They preferred to emphasize self-realization activities.

Differences in child discipline techniques are also evident. Parcel and Menaghan (1994) found a strong relationship between parenting styles and paternal employment. High levels of occupational complexity will dispose parents to encourage their children to internalize behavioural norms. Those with low levels of occupational complexity are more likely to rely on external controls, raising the risk of behavioural problems. Similar findings were noted by Kohn in a number of historical studies (Kohn, 1969, 1979; Kohn & Schooler, 1983).

Working-class child-rearing techniques could be considered a hang-over from a socio-political epoch when rule compliance and conformity were extolled virtues (Kohn, 1969; Kohn, 1979; Kohn & Schooler, 1983). Analysis of this phenomenon should be contextualized. The social conditions adults in the lower socio-economic stratum encounter, for example, their need to conform to work regulations and employer demands, prime them to parent in a certain manner. The socio-political circumstances which fostered this style of parenting may have disappeared for middle-class parents but they remain intact for those in the lower socio-economic stratum. This viewpoint may explain why those marginalized by greater society because of their lack of affinity with the prevailing tenets of cultural capital (MacLeod, 1995), are so prepared to comply with its demands. It might also explain why others, who are severely marginalized, disengage from mainstream society. They perceive themselves unable to obtain any status under the

hegemonic value system. Some researchers have referred to this underclass as having a “fuck you” attitude to society (Abbott, 2002, p. 153: Venkatesh, cited in Levitt & Dubner, 2005 p. 95).

### **The effect of co-parental acrimony on the paternal position**

North American research has found a strong connection between the quality of the co-parental relationship and the quality of that between the father and child. Using data from the 1992 phase of the Marriage Over the Life Course Longitudinal Study (begun in 1980) Amato (1998) found fathers in happy partnerships had a stronger relationship with their offspring. Deater-Deckard and Scarr (1996) found marital satisfaction was deeply associated with the quality of fathering. Parental acrimony undermined the quality of the father-child relationship. Using multi-variate analysis, Coley and Chase-Lansdale(1999) identified a strong correlation between a positive parenting partnership and father-child engagement. Gornick (2004) explains this with reference to the cultural reverence accorded to the mother-child dynamic. That revered connection is maintained at the expense of the father-child bond during periods of family stress. Children’s primary loyalties generally lie with their mother. Parke and Beitel (1988) speculate the mother-child relationship to have greater biological connection and internal regulation, with greater self-preservation under stress than the father-child bond. Burgess and Russell (2004) highlight structural factors which contribute to the demise of father-child relationships under stress. They say when the mother-child relationship fails, a vast range of services and agencies intervene to restore that relationship. When a father-child relationship fails, no such response is forthcoming.

Several researchers have observed when a parenting partnership fails, parents are prone to over-focus on their area of specialization. Mothers will emphasize their care-giving role, edging the father out of the family’s emotional network. This effect could be accentuated amongst those in the lower socio-economic stratum because low-skilled, low socio-economic status mothers are less likely to have career outlets and fathers are heavily focused on the breadwinner activity (Sayers & Fox, 2005). Specialization is likely to compound an already notable gender difference in the lower socio-economic

stratum. Allen and Hawkins (1999) refer to mothers as potential “gate-keepers” (p.199) to their children. They can limit paternal access to the children even in co-residential relationships. In difficult parental partnerships, pillow talk exchanges of information were less likely to occur, so fathers would remain less informed of their children’s needs and development (Heimer & Staffen, 1998).

### **The post-modern family operation possibly hampered by economic demands**

The re-formulation of sex roles in the 1970s allowed fathers to take up an emotionally active parenting mode. Although a portion of fathers had always been emotionally engaged with their children, the gender developments of the 1970s and onwards meant this could become the *raison d’être* of paternal activity. The “nurturant father”, as Lamb called it (1987, p. 6) played an active role in his child’s life and spent his spare time with his children.

The post modern family format offered a venue in which the nurturant father could take an emotionally active role. With shared breadwinning and shared child care, this became a viable lifestyle option. Waite and Nielsen (2001) state this option is primarily available to the educated members of the middle class. This is borne out by Hatter et al.’s (2002) findings that middle-class fathers are far more likely to reduce their working hours when they become fathers than low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers. Middle-class fathers have benefited from the new de-regulated economy and can make lifestyle and gender role choices as a result. As Dienhart (1998) observed, their lives are filled with choice. As the operation of the post-modern family format takes hold, its practice amongst those in the lower socio-economic stratum is hampered by a compelling need for low-skilled, low socio-economic status men to work long hours.

### **Economic stress**

Economic stress has a powerful bearing on family operations and parental performance. Its effect is moderated by the co-parental partnership and the stage family life is at when it impacts. The popular social construction of masculinity and femininity also bears on this. Poorly resourced parents are most vulnerable to the effects of economic stress. The



post modern family form and its nurturant fathering style offer men a venue for effective fathering even if their providing capacities are constrained.

Although both middle and working-class communities are vulnerable to economic stress, those in the lower socio-economic band are most vulnerable to high income-to-needs stress. Mahony (1995) encapsulated the distinction between the two strata saying the middle class “may think they are under financial pressure, however, most are not struggling to survive but to satisfy high and relatively new expectations about consumption” (P. 246). McLoyd (1990) notes the white middle class have greater personal and community resources, while the poor and particularly the ethnic poor, are likely to have a lack of savings, low wages, an absent spouse or partner, low social support, an intermittent work history and concerns for neighbourhood safety. These factors, according to McLoyd, heighten the effects of economic hardship on low income families, particularly those constantly on the brink of poverty.

Working-class parents have a greater likelihood than other parents of experiencing financial pressure, poor working conditions, disordered neighbourhoods, racial or ethnic discrimination, and difficulties with interaction with a range of public institutions (Wilcox, & Bartkowski, 2005). It is the combination of these factors, rather than their specifically low income, that undermines the quality of life for those in the lower socio-economic stratum. Although families in other strata may encounter adverse life events, the “threshold effect” for those who are in the lower socio-economic band is far more damaging (Leinonen, Solantaus & Punamaki, 2002, p. 431). Wilcox and Bartkowski (2005) state the stress resulting from these cumulative effects disposes fathers in this bracket to punitive and less affectionate parenting styles.

### **Gendered responses to the bearing of family economic stress**

Severe economic stress has been reported to have a gendered effect on parents. Because the fatherhood identity was inter-woven with the provider role, economic hardship severely undermined a father’s status (Elder, Conger, Foster & Ardel, 1992; Harris & Marmer, 1996). Corwyn and Bradley (1999) reasoned the greater a father’s self-concept

as a breadwinner, the greater his parental vulnerability during periods of economic stress. Because low-skilled, low socio-economic status men are more likely to retain traditional gender ideology, their paternal status is potentially very vulnerable. Townsend (2002a) proposed most men see marriage and co-parenthood as a tripartite package consisting of partnership, parenthood and working. An incapacity to perform the breadwinning role saps his commitment to the other two. Across a range of socio-economic strata, fathers have been found to prioritize their earnings as underpinning their family's sustenance (Lamb, 1997).

Leinonen et al. (2002) found even though economic adversity stresses fathers and is demonstrated in their co-parenting style, it seems to not be as significant as it was in the past. This is because the post-modern fatherhood form places far less importance on economic provision than the male-breadwinner family format did. The chagrin incurred by men when they are unable to be very good providers is therefore greatly diminished. That is not to say the stress resulting from financial difficulties is not real, but fathers are no longer held exclusively responsible for it. Sayers and Fox (2005) also found the post modern family role, with its expectation of emotional as well as economic engagement, diminishes the sense of inadequacy fathers may have when their breadwinning capacities are limited.

### **Domestic effects of economic stress**

Severe and chronic economic stress has the potential to undermine co-parental relationships. Using data from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics Australia survey (HILDA), Bradbury and Norris (2005) noted a strong relationship between economic stress and partnership breakdown. This breakdown is possibly more due to behaviour changes resulting from economic stress, such as drinking and depression, rather than the stress itself. In contrast Flouri (2005), using data from the National Child Development Study (a cohort of 17 000 children born in 1958), found no correlation between income and family breakup. Her data, however, was from a longitudinal study, a design prone to dropout from participants in the lower socio-economic strata of the

population. Additionally the study did not distinguish financial hardship from income level.

Numerous researchers working in a variety of economically stressed communities have found the domestic effects of chronic economic stress could be assuaged by longstanding and or very strong emotional support between the parents. Bakke (1940) noted this during the Great Depression and other researchers have done the same in recent periods (Stoneman, Flor, McCrary, Hastings & Conyers, 1994; Conger, Rueter & Elder, 1999; Leinonen et al. 2002). Cavan's observation, although historical, seems to remain constant; well organized families are less likely to lose their sense of cohesion, while severe economic stress exacerbates crisis in disorganized families (Cavan, 1959). Having studied data from the Great Depression, Elder, Liker & Cross (cited in Earls, 1986) came to a similar conclusion, "hardship influences are contingent on what people bring to a situation, on how they define the situation and respond to it" (p. 111). Although all families are vulnerable to economic stress, Becker (1991) poses the reduced human capital of those in the lower socio-economic stratum compounds the effects of stress on working-class men. The value of strong supportive relationships as part of that human capital cannot be overlooked.

Economic stress is liable to have an effect on parental conduct. Economically stressed parents are more likely to resort to punitive behaviour (Leinonen et al. 2002), and are also less able to provide support and guidance for their children. McLoyd (1990) found parents' sensitivity to their children's needs diminished during such times. In summarizing how economic pressure reverberates throughout the families they studied, Simons, Whitbeck, Melby and Wu, (1994) stated:

Parents who are under high economic strain are liable to be preoccupied and minimally involved in a parenting role until serious or flagrant child misbehaviour jars them to action. Such transgressions are likely to demand a harsh response so that the pattern of parenting displayed is inconsistent and explosive.

The cumulative effects of stress cause fathers to be less affectionate and prone to authoritarian conduct (Wilcox, & Bartkowski, 2005). Self manufactured styles of dealing with stress can be undermined and abusive inter-personal strategies demonstrated. These may include strategies men witnessed their own fathers use, such as violence, ridicule or intimidation. Elkind (2002) found expression of these abusive styles can also be extended to include the mis-treatment of wives.

### **The pressure of hyper-consumerism**

Hyper-consumerism aimed at children compels many fathers not only to retain their provider role but to amplify it so they can satisfy their children's market-driven consumer demands (Dex, 2003). These forces are able to undermine the parent-child connection. McLanahan and Davis (1989) found that the consumer expenses associated with raising children in the post-World War II economic boom detracted from the emotional pleasure parents obtained from their offspring. Rampant consumerism, they speculated, compels many fathers to do little more than maintain the 'provider' position. Mintz (1998) believes that low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers are particularly vulnerable to being cast as mere economic providers. Their precarious position just above the breadline intensifies their duty to provide. This is at the expense of emotional contact and relationship building.

According to Bauman (1998), those in western society no longer operate as producers but are now fixated on consumerism. The effects of this are profound on fathers, given that a sizable portion of advertising is indirectly aimed at fathers' incomes through their children (Pocock, 2006). The expansion of desired consumer commodities and the ever-increasing expected standard of living, raises the pressure on fathers to supply their children with goods. Caplovitz (1979) completed his research during a period when the male-breadwinner family still held substantial status. He found if fathers were unable to supply children's consumer commodities, children were prone to have a lowered opinion of them (Caplovitz, 1979).

The constant rise in consumer demands has raised the level men must earn to constitute sufficient providing (Pudney, 2006). Interviewing a large number of British fathers, La Valle, Arthur, Millward, Scott and Clayden (2002) found lower socio-economic status fathers regretted having to work long hours to ensure their children had a higher standard of living. The over-fuelled consumer goods market has swollen the number of expected requisites for family life. McLanahan and Carlson (2004) maintain fathers who find the logistics of performing this expanded breadwinner role Herculean are less likely to find fatherhood rewarding, and more likely to disengage from it. The emotional and financial consequences for children of such families are very unfortunate. This is even more so, given that a degree of financial support could have avoided family break-up.

### **Fatherhood exercised in extreme economic environments**

There is a section of the lower socio-economic stratum which is compelled by severe economic circumstances and low wages to work very long hours (Roy, 2004; Russell, 2002). This is not so they can maintain high levels of consumption but to maintain family sustenance (Lamb, 1997). These circumstances result partly from government policies which have had a profound bearing on society. In New Zealand “the much vaunted move to deregulated labour markets and workplace flexibility has for many resulted in working long hours, for low wages with job insecurity and a decrease in the quality of working conditions” (Pool et al. 2007, p. 412). The obligation to work long hours to maintain family wellbeing can have a harmful effect on a father’s self-concept as a provider. It serves to remind him of his incapacity to perform a fundamental dimension of fatherhood. Hochschild (1989) warned it also limited men’s capacity to expand the emotional realm of fathering because their paternal identity is preoccupied with breadwinning. Russell (2002) made a similar assessment: the pressure to act as a good provider “takes an overwhelming priority in their lives” (p. 7), consequently their emotional connection with their child is compromised.

Coupling fatherhood with providing has encased fathers within a narrow operational sphere. The unabated capitalism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century intensified their identity within that sphere and obfuscated the pre-industrial practices which characterized fatherhood. As

Bernard (1981) proposed, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century “success in the good provider role came to define masculinity itself” (p. 4). Research conducted during historical periods of extreme economic stress indicates the paternal identity can lose its predicating foundation if fathers have no capacity whatsoever to provide for their children (Gerson, 1993). Under such circumstances, children can serve as a reminder to a father of his incapacity to provide sufficiently (Leibow, 1967). Using data from the Fragile Families and Child-Wellbeing Study (Garfinkel, McLanahan, Tienda, & Brooks-Gunn, 2001) Carlson and McLanahan (2002) found amongst ‘fragile families’ the provider role and the ability to perform it was a primary factor in determining the level of family involvement fathers were prepared to take up. Those in poverty stricken environments resist adopting the paternal role because they are unable to enact its corollary, the breadwinner (Wilson, 1987). Women in such environments resist marrying men who are unable to provide, even if they are the father of their children (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993; Casper & Bianchi, 2002; Edin, 2000; Huinink & Mayer, 1995; Waller, 2002; White & Rogers, 2000). Leinonen et al. (2002) propose once income and opportunity drop below a particular threshold, paternal withdrawal follows. Their conclusions were drawn from interviews with 527 Finnish mother-father-child triads. Indeed, Roopnarine (2004) found amongst a group of poor Afro-American fathers, breadwinning was reported as the most important aspect of fatherhood; once they had enacted this they felt they could commence a legitimate emotional interaction. Even though New Zealand lacks the extremes of poverty which characterize parts of the US, this propensity has been noted in New Zealand by those working with violent lower socio-economic status men (Liebrich, Paulin, Ransom, 1995).

The limited personal and family resources of men involved in this research project mean the spectre of severe provider role strain is never too far away. Although it is grave, the direness of such prospects is diminished by New Zealand’s current welfare provisions, particularly those provided by the fourth Labour government (1999-2008). These provisions make New Zealand’s socio-cultural landscape distinct from that in which most of the research detailed above has been conducted. It reinforces the need for endogenous

research which focuses on specifically New Zealand fathers in specifically New Zealand circumstances.

### **The socio-economic environment of New Zealand at the time of this research**

During the time this research was conducted, the New Zealand economy sustained robust economic growth. Unemployment rates fell below four percent in the second half of 2004 (Dept of Labour, n.d., a) and as low as 3.5 percent in September 2007 (ibid). This made New Zealand only one of five nations in the OECD with a rate below four percent at the time (Dept. of Labour, n.d. b). Wages during this period continued to rise at rates above four percent per annum (Dept of Labour, n.d., c). In the region where most of the primary research was conducted, unemployment levels were very low and a labour shortage was reported (Katterns, 2004). Low-skilled and no-skilled fathers had little difficulty obtaining work. They were also able to ignore anxieties about the possibility of future unemployment or job insecurity because there seemed little reason to think the economic boom would end. The combination of these economic factors is strongly associated with family formation and child-bearing within co-parental units (Easterlin, 1973). When young, low-skilled men believe they are able to support a family, they are far more likely to start one and commit themselves to it (ibid). Despite all this, low-skilled workers in the region continued to be paid the 'Wairarapa wage', an hourly rate several dollars less than that paid to workers in similar jobs in larger urban centres and other regions (Kelly, 2006). This, combined with the rising cost of living, meant many workers were not being paid a livable wage (Crang, 2006).

Researchers have observed economic prosperity tends to increase the impoverishment of the lower class. Yelland (1998) found during the economic boom of the 1990s the disparity between America's wealthiest and the poorest increased. Although most of that disparity was attributed to the rising levels of wealth in the middle and upper classes, it affected the poor directly by causing a rise in housing demand and rents. Inflation was also able to compound the financial stress poor families faced. White and Rogers (2000) observed even though an economic growth rate of over three percent was sustained for most of the decade, the wages for young men were likely to fall. During New Zealand's

recent economic boom (2002-2008) these negative effects were averted by several government initiatives. The Working for Families Package, launched by the Labour Government in 2005 provided a substantial supplement for most families. These policies set out to reduce some of the social disparities which had long beset the nation. In 2004 the Ministry of Social Development identified a quarter of New Zealanders lived with a degree of hardship, and eight percent of New Zealanders lived in severe hardship (Jensen et al, 2006).

Numerous job opportunities and substantial government welfare provisions meant the economic circumstances of the low-skilled and no-skilled were greatly improved prior to and during the data-gathering period of this research. It may not have been a gulf, but a distance emerged between the livelihood of the poor and the 'breadline'. That distance is not a permanent fixture. The economic downturn facing New Zealand in 2009 is likely to have a profound bearing on low-skilled and no-skilled fathers in their twenties, particularly because the service sector jobs they take up offer few training prospects and little long term security (Nelson & Smith, 1999). This research project examines how low-skilled fathers conceive of themselves and their role when widespread –economic adversity is not an issue.

## **Conclusion**

Families in the lower socio-economic strata have a distinct operational style. This reflects the cultural traditions they bring to the activity of parenthood and childrearing and also the socio-economic circumstances in which they operate. Gender roles and gender conditioning can have a powerful influence upon how fatherhood in this section of society is performed, particularly in regards to providing for the family and the co-parental response to stress. Although working class families are particularly vulnerable to economic stress, this does not in any way compromise their status as a legitimate venue in which to raise children. The propensity to commence family life while still relatively young, and with few economic or employment resources, must be viewed as a cultural adaption to their socio-economic environment. Although it may prime the family to greater economic stress, the emotional sustenance provided by a structured family unit



should not be under appreciated. It can be interpreted as members of the lower socio-economic strata preferring to risk economic stress in the emotional network of a family, than not risk it and remain single.

## Chapter 5: Methodology

If we are going to study fatherhood in a low socio-economic group, we should use a methodology which affords us access to the emotional and social subjectivities that constitute fatherhood. Psychology has generally eschewed exploration of strong emotions (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). This neglect reflects orthodox positivism and its preoccupation with quantification – and the assumed impossibility of calibrating emotional experience. However, one effective way of documenting emotional experience is via language. In-depth interviews, carefully interpreted, can provide accurate insights into both fatherhood practice and the personal self-composing of a fathering identity.

The colloquial language of research subjects can accurately communicate the discourses and themes they use to construct their experience (Valsiner, 2000). Language (and particularly the language of everyday life) is the means by which social agents construct the experiences, concepts and methods of the cultural practices they engage in every day – including the fatherhood this study focuses on. The undressed linguistic contributions of the participants in this research project are also, like any text, available as objective data. Using interviewee contributions as data, the researcher can reliably re-construct the experiences and concepts involved in the practice being studied – in this case, fatherhood. As language is the raw data to be examined in this research, it is important to consider the nature of its performance, to shed light on “...how people make sense of their life experience” (Dienhart, 1998, p. 203).

Attempts to provide an epistemological justification for interview techniques can be traced back to the German phenomenologists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast with the positivist and reductionistic principles of De Comte and Ebbinghaus, phenomenologists argued for the significance of ‘meaning’ in human behaviour. Dilthey’s (1894/1977) work was seminal in this regard. He stressed the importance of *verstehen* (interpretive understanding) in people’s lives, as the primary means of understanding others’ ‘lived

experience'. It was argued that human subjectivity, or meanings, should be the central focus of any human study.

Wittgenstein (1963) proposed that any study of social meanings must include a study of related language-use. Actual language-use can vividly demonstrate the rules and methods via which meanings are constructed. Language provides a vehicle through which the complex and subjective experience of meaning can be demonstrated. Wittgenstein stated that we understand a person's behaviour when we access the meaning they attach to that behaviour. This stance concurs with that adopted by Geertz (1973:1984), who had spent many years in ethnographic field work. Geertz argued the most appropriate way to understand a person's selfhood was "...by searching out and analyzing the symbolic forms – words, images, institutions, behaviours – in terms of which, in each place, people actually represented themselves to themselves and one another" (pp. 125-6).

### **The nature of discourse**

Because language is a communal activity, any self-reporting is part of a communal interpretation of the world. The discourses that emerge in sub-cultures and societies embody specific interpretations of the world. They operate to communicate meaning and to construct it. As these are subjective productions, the truths they construct are plastic, contextual and multiple (Derrida, 1972). This feature is probably the most marked departure from conventional psychological subject matter. Conventional psychology sought out grand theories, overarching paradigms and methodological meta-systems (Lyotard, 1984). If we abandon the search for grand theories our attention can be directed, much more fruitfully, to the multifarious discourses by which people actually and naturally create their everyday realities (Gillett, 1995).

According to Foucault (1970) discourse represents symbolic interaction between people and also provides the context of rules governing their everyday lives. Disparate discourses can be maintained, juxtaposing and negotiating discontinuities in order to achieve a coherent synthesis. A single discourse is unlikely to dominate a person's

subjectivity. Rather, their identity will be composed of numerous diverse discourses. We bring different discourses to bear in making sense of our everyday experience.

Discourse can be defined as “assemblages of knowledges [sic] that serve to produce notions of the human subject” (Lupton & Barclay, 1997, p. 5). A great variety of discourses are always circulating in society. Some are ideological or ‘hegemonic’. Foucault (2003) states that these hegemonic discourses invite people to conform to societal norms and expectations. Some discourses appeal to peoples’ wants, thereby circumventing the need for coercion. While hegemonic discourses dominate societies, other discourses are subversive and act as agents of resistance to ‘established truths’. Complementary discourses help to sustain certain hegemonic discourses even though the two discourses may not be mutually coherent. Specific discourses act to define and delineate sub-societies. In this research, the meaning of fatherhood is dependent on the discourses that participants select to construct it. Participants selected specific discourses to achieve certain ends. The multi-subjective nature of their experience results in their sometimes not presenting an internally coherent account.

The family is a hotbed of discourses. It is also a venue into which public, including government, discourses intrude (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). Fathers take up and dispense with discourses according to their capacity to achieve given ends. Some discourses lose social capital and are overshadowed by others – which might be old discourses being reinvigorated or novel discourses emerging from other quarters and acquiring hegemony. Because fatherhood, like any complex practice, is multi-discursive, it resists being fashioned into a monolithic corpus. Rather, it oscillates over a range of discursive sites. We adopt and abandon discourses according to our circumstances and intentions. Any attempt to fathom the nature of fatherhood should therefore focus on the discourses fathers actually use.

### **A background to interviewing**

Interviewing has often been used to examine the experience of marginalised populations, for example, Mayhew (1965) recorded the lives of London’s slum dwellers with the

object of obtaining “a history of the people, from the lips of the people themselves” (p. xxxiv). He was undeterred by the “unvarnished language” of his subjects, considering this to be a reflection of their experience. Komarovsky (1940/1973) used similar techniques with similar populations during the Great Depression of the 1930s, providing an incisive view of family life amongst the poor. But the expanding hegemony of the positivistic laboratory model, popularized in the post-war period, overshadowed interviewing –pushing it to the very periphery of respectable science (Pancer, 1997). This change in method also reflected a change in underlying ontology. Under the behaviourist regime, which held hegemonic domination of psychology in the 1960s and 70s, humans and their experience were seen to be stable and accessible, their identity singular and their interpretation of meaning rational and coherent. This ontology mirrored the principles of hard science, with its assumption that human activity could be reduced to numerical values and explained with over-arching laws – a stance that even B. F. Skinner (1950) came to disapprove of.

Interest in interviewing as a heuristic method was rejuvenated in the 1960s with its use in the allied disciplines of sociology and anthropology (Kuczynski & Daly, 2003). During this period chroniclers of social history began to turn away from historical records provided by authorities and seek accounts provided by common people. This was accompanied by the counter-culture movement which rejected the authority of social experts and associated power imbalances (Alasuutari, 1998). The positivist scientific model that sought to explain human behaviour in terms of grand theories was discarded by many researchers.

### **The turn to language in psychology**

The turn to language in psychology was partly a reaction to ‘the crisis’ arising from the incapacity of traditional positivistic psychology to provide insights into major social issues (Elms, 1975). The traditional quantitative methodologies reduced human behaviour to numerical codes. Drawing on the German empiricist tradition, it deemed human behaviour predictable and quantifiable (Baken, 1972). The grand theories this tradition generated proved to have little general applicability. The inherent instability of

the social environment defied attempts to accumulate grounded knowledge (Gergen, 1997). Social psychology was encountering what Kuhn described as “a pronounced failure in the normal problem-solving activity” (1970, p. 74). The resulting discontent opened psychology up to a number of enriching influences from allied disciplines. All these new influences emphasised language.

The post-modern psychology that emerged drew on several traditions – the continental philosophies of Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida, and the English-language works of Wittgenstein (1963), Austin (1962) and Garfinkel (1967). All shared a concern with the constructed nature of reality, particularly the role of language in its construction (Kendall & Michael, 1997). Language utilises “*verstehen*”, that is “an empathetic and imaginative identification with the subject” (Gillett, 1995, p. 112). Language is both the means by which a person makes sense of his own experience and the means by which an observer makes sense of another person’s experience (Wittgenstein, 1980). An approach which draws on social constructionism focuses on the ‘action orientation of language’ (Gergen, 1997). How language is made to do specific things and how our experience is constructed in and through language (Tuffin & Rouch, in press).

### **The operation of interviews**

Interviewing is well suited to the heuristic requirements of qualitative research. It provides a context in which experience can be recounted in a natural and unpremeditated manner. Rather than being subsumed within a numerical technique, interviewing stands on its own as a research method. The open-ended discursiveness of the interview allows participants to create multiple meanings within their accounts. Dialogues can be non-linear, complex and internally incoherent. Arendell (1997) notes that this process can be a proving ground for nascent self-concepts, particularly for participants from marginalised societies who lack a descriptive language Alasuutari (1998) adds. An interview-based inquiry is bound to produce multiple truths – because of the undeniable complexity of human experience. These truths will be plastic and contextual (Foucault, 1969; Gergen, 1973). Understanding provides far more insight into human behaviour than does the search for mentalistic ‘causes’ or ‘forces’ (Kuczynski & Daly, 2003). Taylor & Bogdan

(1984) defined the semi-structured interview as “repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed towards understanding informants’ perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their words” ( p. 77).

Possibly the most liberating aspect of semi-structured interviewing is the acceptance that an objective reality is unknowable (Franklin, 1996). What is obtained is an insight into how the participant “creates, makes sense of and interprets his or her life” (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995, p. 106). This insight is boosted by the researcher’s appreciation of what Schwartz and Jacobs (1979) describe as the ‘ethnographic context’ of the interviewee’s account. Participants use their everyday knowledge and experience, their own self-concept and cultural appraisal, to furnish their account.

### **Researcher input**

Interviews should not be considered asymmetrical encounters where information is acquired passively from a participant (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). It is a venue in which knowledge is created. The interviewer’s contribution to that knowledge-creation should not be overlooked. The fact that the researcher has selected some questions over others to some extent pre-determines the contribution required of the interviewee. It could be argued that there is no such thing as ‘presupposition-less research’ (Jones, 1985). The impersonal, unbiased machine-like investigator is a chimera. The researcher’s influence is used creatively, consciously and contingently to develop a particular relationship with participants – so that they can tell us of their experience with as little prescription as possible. For example, there is no necessity for the investigator to censor interviewee contributions that conflict with other contributions from that interviewee (Lamont, 2000).

Most researchers will have a personal interest in their topic. Given that the researcher has selected one topic rather than another, it is bound to be germane to his value system and experience. Schutz goes so far as to say that every realm of the social sphere has some personal value content for every researcher. No investigator is entirely disinterested.

The world of nature as explored by the natural scientist does not mean anything to molecules, atoms and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientists – social reality – has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the beings living, acting and thinking within it. (Schutz, 1962, p.49)

It is only appropriate that the researcher limit his or her input into the raw data obtained. Any claims that a study's conclusions are not coloured by researcher input would be misleading. Rather, the research project is the researcher's personal engagement with a social practice and his own interpretation of it according to research conventions.

In the course of completing this research project, I had a powerful bearing upon the nature of the findings. I engaged with the participants in a typically male fashion, I made connections with them as a fellow father, someone they knew either directly or indirectly. In the course of interviews, I was fashioned into a mentor, confidant and sounding-board. My positioning as such reflected my personal characteristics, and how the participant engaged with them/me. My fashioning of the findings extended beyond this. The deep interest in consumerism and social policy was borne out in the nature of the broader analysis I completed. These features of 'human instrumentality' are implicit in all research. Making them overt assists the reader to understand the contextualized circumstances in which that research was completed. Doing so also reduces the requirement of obtaining a 'second-opinion' regarding the analysis. The analysis is presented as the researcher's instrumentality with the topic, and it needs to be considered with that in mind.

### **Authorship**

The dominant self-concept in Western society is that of individuals as unified, bounded agents with a unique subjectivity (Geertz, 1984). In this Euro-Christian model, self-agency predominates and self-consciousness determines human action via free will (Geertz, 1984). Each of us is the author of our own productions. This is exemplified in Terkel's (1974, 1986) work, which considered people to be vessels filled with information and experience. Interviewers merely siphoned off copies.



In contrast, the social constructionist position states that, as social agents, we have access to pre-established discourses circulating in society. We selectively use these to fabricate ourselves. Many of the dialogues participants engage in are socially constructed discourses with accrued and self-sustaining dialogical capital. They are not produced by the participant but are part of what Atkinson (2002) calls ‘ageless universal themes’. The interviewee draws on them to put together his account. The author of the ideas is not a single consciousness, nor is he the exclusive source of the ideas and experiences he presents (Foucault, 1984). When interviewing an author/participant, we are actually interrogating several people or phenomena – the zeitgeist, old conventions, the interviewee’s parents, authority figures in the interviewee’s life, popular opinions, trends both nascent and fading. Within this pastiche there is unlikely to be a coherent or uniform identity. When an author draws on discourses from external institutions, his account is no longer an individual story and neither is he the exclusive author of it. The account arrives having moved through other subjectivities. As Gubrium and Holstein (2001) state, it “...suggests that ownership is something rather diffusely spread about the topical and processual landscape of speech activities entailed in the interview” (p. 24).

### **Apposite techniques for researching fatherhood experience**

It makes good sense to examine fatherhood with techniques that facilitate accounting of emotional bonds and the cultural conventions associated with them. Researchers have argued open-ended interview techniques are the most effective means of doing so (Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Marsiglio, 2004). Marsiglio (ibid) described interview techniques as “ideal for studying the complex web of self-reflective and interpersonal processes associated with fathering” (p.61). The practicalities of conducting lengthy interviews limit the sample size. This is compensated for by the rich data interviews yield (Chandler & Field, 1997). Experiential accounts are composed of competing and complimentary discourses. These are able to emerge only in the course of prolonged and in-depth talk (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). The multiple subjectivities that compose any account lend themselves to internal contradictions and disparities in the dialogue of a father. This should not invite criticism. It is the nature of human experience and little is

achieved by focusing on producing an internally coherent account. Competing gender and socio-economic discourses pervade society. As social agents we amalgamate, edit and doctor these to create our own subjectivity, one which is vulnerable to inconsistencies. Dienhart (1998) states quantitative studies fail to elucidate the cultural concepts and assumptions that are lodged within fathers' discourses; in contrast, open-ended interviews gain access to these.

A notable hazard of data gathering is participants' propensity to deliver the answers they sense are socially appropriate. This is particularly so in regard to parenthood research, as the opprobrium for inappropriate child treatment is severe. Participants are liable to preserve their social esteem with misleading answers. Dench (1996) states qualitative techniques, particularly in-depth interviews, have a capacity to circumvent this. She used these to enter the family experience of various ethnic groups in Great Britain. Dench asserts that the value of ethnographic interviews lies in their capacity to establish a format in which insincere but socially esteemed answers fail to be sustainable and more legitimate accounts emerge. Gomel, Tinsley, Parke and Clark, (1998) found qualitative research particularly effective in ascertaining the nature of economic hardship amongst Afro-American families given the complex emotional experience it can provoke. Despite this, few research projects have used interview techniques to explore the experience of working-class fathers (Lupton and Barclay, 1997).

This research takes Coley's (2001) suggestion that fatherhood research would be enhanced were it to focus on reports obtained from fathers themselves. The research data was obtained by open ended interviews in which participating fathers reported their experience. That report was then analysed using discursive techniques. Drawing on a critical social psychology and social constructionist epistemology (Potter & Wetherell, 1994; Tuffin, 2005), their reports were considered as constructing their experience. That experience is constructed using the metaphors and discourses available to participants. A fine grain examination of their accounts highlights the discourses they drew upon.

### **The nature of analysis**

There is an inclination within family studies to generate templates, models of parenting which distinguish one sector of society from another. Within a social constructionist perspective this is impossible – given the variety present in any population and the precedence of discourse over format. Focus is placed on discourses used to construct fathering. What the men share is their use of those discourses. Generating a specific model of fatherhood within a population is impossible. Fatherhood discourses generated in particular sub-populations will predominate over or co-exist with other discourses of fatherhood. Broader socio-economic trends foster the predominance of one discourse of fatherhood over another, usurping old discourses and promoting new ones.

### **Multiple subjectivities**

‘Subjectivity’ refers to the various forms of self we define ourselves as. In social constructionism theory, subjectivity is mutable, discordant, and a site of disunity and conflict (Weedon, 1992). In the humanist tradition, especially amongst French humanists, individuals were considered to have a unified consciousness, governed by a knowing, rational self. Post-modern theory, the theory employed in this research, claims that, when interacting, we assemble different subjectivities to convey different impressions. A panoply of identity concerns is available and, collectively, they set the ‘conditions of possibility’ of who and what we can be (Foucault, 1988). Rose (1996) describes the discourses and practices related to their associated subjectivities as ‘regimes of the person’. Select regimes are associated with given social practices – fatherhood, employment, gender-specific activity. Multiple subjectivities can also be used to characterise different periods of one's life. Or they can be assembled in such a way as to construct a sense of continuity (Gergen & Gergen, 1997).

### **Conclusion**

The traditional positivist, ‘grand theory’ approach in psychology is increasingly seen as assuming an impossible ideal of objectivity and quantifiability as regards human behaviour. The interview-based methodology of this study is typical of the contemporary departures from this essentially outmoded traditional model. The interview technique

takes advantage of the primary role that language has in the research participant's construction of his own subjectivity, experience and practices. Accurately recorded, the participant's linguistic contributions comprise an invaluable documentary resource for the researcher. Although selective emphasis and interpretation is clearly required before general conclusions can be drawn from the linguistic data that has been gathered, these selections and interpretations can themselves be accurately specified.

Research participants may employ a colloquial dialect somewhat different from the more formal language employed by the researcher and his psychologist colleagues. This is certainly the case in the present study. However, the fact of an extended research project, which thoroughly accustoms the researcher to the participants' idiom and to a collaborative stance vis-à-vis them – and to some extent involves him in their daily lives – uniquely qualifies the researcher as an interpreter of the linguistic data, or 'texts', that he records. Concentration on the subtleties of the language employed by the research participants can thus provide accounts of the participants' concepts and experiences that are both penetrating and empirically robust.

## **Chapter 6: Method**

The object of this research is to gain an insight into the nature of fatherhood and family life as experienced by low socio-economic New Zealand fathers in their twenties, who were working and supporting their partner and child or children. It was essential fathers who participated were able to express their experience in their own terms, unconstrained by predetermined concepts of fatherhood. Semi-structured interviews were used as they allow participants to discuss their experience without being severely hampered by researcher preconceptions. They produced a discursive account of fatherhood which reflected their conceptualization of its role in their life. Analysis of their accounts identified and explored the dominant discourses they used to construct their experience. This drew on the text produced in the interview with attention to its content and construction. This method is part of a naturalistic paradigm in which “researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). This approach considers text/dialogue legitimate hard data. It is within this dialogue, or ‘language’ that meaning is communicated.

### **Participant criteria**

Most studies of fatherhood have focused on middle-class populations (for example, Carlson & McLanahan, 2004; Dienhart, 1998). Research and popular discourses have taken a deficits approach when considering low socio-economic fathers, focusing on unemployed fathers (for example, Jordan et al. 1992; Peel, 2003), non-custodial fathers (Nelson, Clampet-Lunquist & Edin, 2002) or absent fathers (for example, Cooksey & Craig, 1998). Very few studies have examined the experience of those fathers who have limited job skills and were working to support their family. The aim of this research is to provide an understanding of the experience of this overlooked population, an understanding that views its operation as a legitimate practice, not aberrant or dysfunctional. There were five general criteria used to define viable participants. This combination of criteria was “designed to draw on some common experiences thought to

be associated with families which have young children” (Dienhart, 1998, p. 207). The accounts they provided would thereby be ‘framed’ within a common experiential boundary (Goffman, 1974, cited in Daly, 1995) creating what Peel (2003), describes as a “polyphonic portrayal” (p. 9).

### *Co-resident/biological*

As detailed in chapter two, numerous studies have examined the experience of absent fathers or part time fathers. This study examined the experience of fathers who chose to reside with their partner and children. It sought to understand how these men experienced family life, how it was placed in the context of their own lives and how it emerged from the modus operandi of their birth family. Therefore, the primary criterion was that participants lived with their family and children. This study aimed to understand fathers performing a socially laudable activity; living with and supporting their family. The preponderance of deficit-focused research, positions co-resident fathers as a societal norm, one unworthy of investigation because of its simplistic naturalness. Such an approach constructs the population of fathers as dichotomous, either in the family or out of it. This approach ignores the features that promote and discourage family formation and paternal co-residence.

Participants with diverse family morphologies were not precluded, for example, participants with non-resident children to other women and participants with resident or non-resident step-children. Although this compounded the variety of participant circumstances, blended families are so common, that omitting them would limit the relevance of the findings to New Zealand society. What was essential, however, was that at least one of the co-resident children was the biological offspring of the participant and his co-resident partner.

### *Working*

To be included, fathers had to be in full-time work. Because providing (bread-winning) has long defined fatherhood, one object of this research was to understand how fathers in this section of society appraised their role as provider and how they saw the act of

providing define them. Fathers whose partner worked were not precluded. Those who worked and had their income supplemented by lawful or unlawful means were also not precluded.

*Low social status/human capital*

Low socio-economic families are most vulnerable to what Leinonen et al. (2002) called a “threshold effect” (p. 431). That is, having so few resources the buffer between their current standard of living and the breadline is very narrow. In his research into poor Australian communities, Peel (2003) found the defining feature of poverty was “persistent [economic] insecurity” (p.8). This research explores how men in these families appraise their economic circumstances and their sense of obligation to support their family. It also considers how they see themselves fitting into a wider society, particularly one in which they are juxtaposed with citizens who enjoy a far higher standard of living.

For the purpose of this research, Becker’s (1991) definition of human capital was used. It calculates human capital to be a composite of a person’s education level, their employment skills and the socio-economic status of their birth family. To be included in this study, fathers had to have limited school qualifications. The highest any had was New Zealand School Certificate, a qualification gained by examination when students are about 16 years of age. At the time it was the most basic school qualification achievable. They were also required to have limited jobs skills. None had any trade training with the exceptions of some low level proficiency certificates,- for example, fork lift driving, tree pruning. Occupational status is a notoriously difficult topic to handle and given this, there was a degree of variety amongst the population. Overall, participants had very limited employment skills. Finally, participants had to have been raised in a low income, low socio-economic family; middle-class sons who had fallen on hard times were precluded. These features combined to limit participants’ access to resources.

By using Becker’s three criteria, I could be confident participants were members of the lower socio-economic stratum, had been raised in the low socio-economic stratum and

had little prospect of ever moving out of that stratum. Neither their personal resources, nor extended family connections would provide them with a lever out of the lower socio-economic bracket. Notable financial limitations were therefore not just a predicament but likely to be a long term prospect. With such limited resources there is little padding to soften the blows of misadventure. Misfortune and health problems or personal crises have an exaggerated capacity to destabilize low socio-economic families (Pilling, 1990). In my study I did not collect information on the participants' income or access to capital, I used an impressionistic assessment of their conditions in the same way Peel (2003) did in his Australian research. In my estimation all participants were "doing it hard" as Peel (2003) puts it (p. xiii). Their homes, the furnishings of their homes, their cars, their attire and their neighbourhood indicated their family lived on very limited income.

#### *Young fathers*

Young parenthood is generally defined by American family researchers between 18-25 years of age. This research lifted the lower margin to 20 years to preclude teenage fathers (men who became fathers while teenagers were included). The upper limit was increased to 29 years of age. This allowed a larger number of fathers to be involved. Also, given the requirement that their youngest child had to be born prior them being 25, they and their partner would have a child that still had high needs. The period 20 through to 29 was marked by greater developmental homogeneity across the population than the periods preceding or following this sampling frame.

During this period (20-29 years of age) participants are likely to have limited job experience or training, particularly given their low human capital. They are unlikely to have bought their own home and their children will be younger and so more dependent. The demands of child care mean their partner is less likely to be working fulltime so the family will have less income. These factors combine to increase the economic pressure on participants and their families. This research aimed to understand how fathers in families with high potential for financial stress appraise their role as caregivers and providers.



The upper limit of 29 years of age increased the likelihood that the participant's child would still be a child who required a substantial amount of parental organization. As such, childcare and domestic duties would occupy a large portion of the participant's time.

An unexpected bonus of this age criterion was to have a population which grew up during a period of intense socio-economic change. The primary research for this work was completed in 2006 and 2007. All participants therefore grew up during the neo-liberal Labour government reforms of the late 1980s and the hard right National government policies of the 1990s. The severe social welfare retrenchment policies of the latter, were unmatched in the OECD (Starke, 2008) and had a profound effect on those in the lower socio-economic quarters. The widespread redundancies and layoffs which accompanied those neo-liberal policies undermined the welfare of the very families from which participants came. The dialogues of the participants provided an insight into some of the personal effects of those policies.

*Youngest child is older than twelve months.*

To avoid including parents who were still "engrossed" in their new baby (Greenberg & Morris, 1974, p. 520) and enjoying a "baby honeymoon in the early postpartum period" (Miller & Sollie, 1980, p. 462), only men with children at least twelve months or older were included. At that age, children have a higher degree of self direction so an increased level of parental involvement is required. The stress levels associated with child rearing start to counter the euphoria of early parenthood (ibid). It also allowed parents time to establish family routines that were likely to be permanent (Walzer, 1998).

### **Recruiting participants**

I intended to recruit between 20 and 30 fathers. In total, 23 fathers participated in the research. Two primary means were used to recruit participants. The first (and least fruitful) means of recruiting participants was to place advertisements in venues frequented by potential participants. A4 size notices were put up in selected work sites (see Appendix A). They included a saw mill, a bakery, a printing plant, a meat processing

plant, and a wood treatment plant. A description of the project was detailed on the poster and those interested were invited to phone a 0800 number. Notices were also put up in non-work venues which were likely to be frequented by viable and potential participants. The local home budget advisory service, community counseling offices, the local addiction services centre and community churches all allowed posters to be displayed. Posters were also put up at crèches and kindergartens which had low socio-economic catchments (see Appendix B). Notices were placed in weekly newsletters of low decile schools (those with a decile ranking of '4' or below). Before displaying recruitment posters, approval was sought and obtained from relevant authorities to do so. This method of recruitment obtained seven responses. Four of these respondents participated in the study, the other three were eager to do so but travel arrangements and personal commitments limited their availability.

The second means of participant recruitment was by making contact with men with whom I was familiar, who met the participation criteria. I made casual contact with such men in an encounter I arranged so as it appeared uncontrived. In the course of that encounter I made the point of discussing my research with the potential participant. Having lived in the community for 13 years and taught at a low decile school for eight years, I was familiar with many men who fitted the participation criteria. Casual encounters with them allowed me to engage in "purposive sampling" (Denscombe, 2007, p. 17). I began this activity by visiting several pubs with low socio-economic clientele. These venues supplied no chance encounters with possible participants.

I then began visiting work sites where viable participants were employed. Supermarkets, the Warehouse and trade stores all offered the opportunity for me to 'bump into' a potential participant. Just hanging around downtown also afforded many 'chance' encounters, especially on Thursdays (payday/shopping day). It was easy for me to strike up a conversation and in the course of chatting mention my research. Most fathers approached by this means were quick to identify themselves as potential candidates and accept an invitation to participate. I later visited the participant at their home and gave them relevant documentation detailing the research project and their contribution should

they wish to participate (see Appendix C). The next day I phoned them and asked them if they were prepared to be involved. Thirteen fathers were approached in this manner and eleven said they were eager to participate (one was discounted as he did not have a job). A time for the first interview was arranged. Snowballing (Seale & Filmer, 1998) was then used to make contact with other potential participants. Nine referrals were made and all nine were prepared to participate in the research.

A number of researchers have reported difficulty recruiting men to participate in psychological research projects (for example, Daly, 1995). I did not find this to be the case. Although the response rate to advertisements and posters was very low, of the 29 men who either made inquiries regarding the project or were invited to be involved, 23 did so. This number of participants seemed sufficient to provide the breadth and depth of experience to reach theoretical saturation, “where further interviews will not generate significantly different views or information relevant to the theoretical category being explored” (Dienhart, 1998, p. 206). Because the intention of the research was not to obtain a demographically representative sample of the general population of low-skilled, low socio-economic status fathers, there was no compulsion to obtain more than the number forthcoming. My aim was akin to Daly’s (1995), that is, “not to generalize to all fathers but to elaborate on the idiographic experiences of some fathers” (p. 23). My object was to look into the “complicated character, organization and logic of [a]culture” (McCracken, 1988, p. 17). In this case, that was the culture surrounding fatherhood. Carlson and McLanahan (2004) make the point that committed and involved fathers are over-represented in most fatherhood studies. I reason the very high take-up rate amongst solicited participants reduces the possibility my sample is over-representative of particularly enthusiastic fathers.

### **Interviewing**

All the participants chose to have the interview conducted in their own home with the exception of two who preferred to have it in my office. The interview commenced with me detailing the ethical codes of my project, the nature of the project and their rights should they choose to participate. After that, I clarified that they understood the nature of

their contribution. I then asked if they had any questions. Following this participants were invited to sign a participant consent form (see Appendix D). To ensure participants were not taken off guard by questions, I made a prefatory description of the scope of the interview. I also explained why I was interested in facets of their lives so as to allay any anxieties they might have about my inquiries.

I stated that only I would listen to the tape recording, I would delete identifying data in the course of transcription and only my supervisors and I would have access to the transcripts. Once those issues were finalized, they were invited to sign an informed consent document and the interview began. All interviews were tape-recorded. This enhanced the researcher-participant rapport by allowing a natural conversational flow. Raply (2004) noted the permanent record made by a tape recording could inhibit participant discussion. This was borne out in only one interview. Discussion in that encounter had been fluid prior to the tape recorder being switched on.

During the interview I also took field notes and analytical memos. I noted para-linguistic and extra-linguistic features, for example, eye-rolling, sighing, gestures made in the course of story telling. Codes were used to indicate at what point in the dialogue these were made and this was noted on the transcript (prosodics were noted during transcription).

Although I was familiar with many of the participants, I followed a plan to promote, not just rapport, but a form of collegiality. This is particularly important when exploring emotional issues with men (Marsiglio & Hutchinson, 2002). Discussion always began with a non-threatening topic, something neutral that required little reflection (it was never sport). From there, I inquired about basic demographic data and biographical features. Being a familiar and simplistic issue, participants found themselves chatting easily. It was very important during this stage to move slowly so as to develop rapport and avoid the biasing effects the interviewer-researcher interaction can generate (Babbie, 1995).

Whilst promoting rapport I had to be mindful of the disparate socio-economic and cultural standpoints of the participants and myself. Reinharz and Chase (2002) describe these as one's "social location" (p. 230). Unmanaged, these can foster what Burman (1996) refers to as a "power base" (p. 51) that dissuades open disclosure. She adds the resulting morality-politics between the interviewer and participant not only skew the data, but exploit the interviewee. To avoid this, I fostered a sense of affinity with participants. I conveyed myself as a fellow male, a fellow father, a kiwi bloke, and where possible, someone who had connections with them. My intention was to develop reciprocity. Although there was a mighty socio-economic gulf between the participants and myself, I was quick to communicate our commonalities and my sincere interest in their lives.

My manner also dismantled and avoided the development of power based relationships. I engaged the participant with interest, humour, pathos, delight and concern. The impartial blank faced interviewing style, often employed to maintain standardization, exacerbates power differences and conveys unintended messages to participants (Oakley, 1981). I preferred a conversational style that did not cage my character. Having said that, I strived to make sure the participant's "testimony be elicited in as unobtrusive, non-direct manner as possible" (McCracken, 1988, p. 21). I did so by allowing the participants to tell their stories unhampered by my preconceptions.

I used a semi-structured in-depth interview schedule as defined by Burman, (1994). This operates as a guide rather than a pre-scripted questionnaire (see Appendix E). Given the topic was subjective and personal, I considered this the most effective means of facilitating participant dialogue. In unfamiliar circumstances a non-standardized schedule allows the interview to morph into a guided conversation. Although I had insights into fatherhood, I did not have "a detailed picture of [ ] respondents' beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of " fatherhood (Smith, 1995, p. 9). Rather than discuss issues I thought were salient, participants moved over issues salient to themselves, unhindered by a rigid a priori interview schedule. The schedule I used was therefore "organized around issues of particular interest, while still allowing considerable flexibility in scope and depth" (May, 1991, p.191).

The semi-structured interview guide was developed, without fixed wording, around a list of topics. Drawing on Blumer's (1969) theory of symbolic interactionism, these could be considered 'sensitizing concepts', unique properties associated with a set population or phenomenon. They offered a canvas on which participants could depict their experience. Although some researchers dispense with a fixed order, I used one because it focused the participants' biography on their experience of fatherhood and family life. The aim was to obtain at the outset, what Minichiello et al. label a "topical life history" (1995, p. 113). Although the substance was a matter of negotiation between myself and the participant, it was plotted around sensitizing concepts. The topics raised were pre-scripted but the specific questions and discussion reflected the idiographic experience of each participant. They were allowed to 'script in' their experience. This non-standardization is valuable when issues are as sensitive and complicated as fatherhood. It allowed me to advance and retreat according to the participant's response to the issue I had raised. Although it reduced the comparability of interviews within the study, it provided a more in-depth explication of the informant's experience than that supplied by a fully structured questionnaire.

The guide was developed around a list of key personal/fatherhood/family topics. It centered around what Spradley (1979) called "grand tour questions" (pp. 86-87), focusing on their childhood, adolescence, partnership and parenthood. Neutral probes were used to explore trenchant features of their account. When drafting the question guide, I was careful not to formulate it around a monolithic concept of 'good fatherhood'. My aim was to have participants discuss their experience and conception of fatherhood unhindered by popular conventions. Inquiries were presented as requests rather than questions, for example, "tell me about where you grew up?". This technique invited the participant to explore dimensions of his life he felt important with the help of probing questions and prompts from me. Their accounts were thereby able to morph into something conceptual, rather than factual. As the participants talked, their dialogues were funneled to ensure key issues were addressed. At certain junctures I drew on Askham's (1982) practice and invited the participant to 'tell stories' of their experience. For those inclined to generalize,

this required them to flesh out their account. Story telling was very effective in allowing the participant to be the authority with latitude to take the account where they wished. The point was not to trick the subject, but as Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2002) state, to “lead them to a place where they felt comfortable enough to unpack thoughts and feelings” (p. 215). Some issues were sensitive and I had to gauge their potential for “question threat” (Foddy, 1993, p. 112). Most participants felt comfortable engaging in the levels of self-reflection and self accounting the interview required. This allowed me to engage in intensive probing. According to Lareau (2002) this is particularly important when interviewing fathers because they tend to over-report their paternal involvement. Probing allowed me to distinguish between answers that were addressing the need for positive self-presentation and those that were their actual experience.

At the end of the first interview, all participants were given an honorarium of twenty dollars. Most participants declined the offer, including all Maori. They said they did not want to take my money and that they just enjoyed the opportunity to have someone listen to their talk. I explained this was a koha from the university, not from me, and it was for them as they could have spent the last two hours playing with their child or mowing the lawn. After a small amount of persuasion they took the honorium. I interpret this refusal as an endorsement of the enjoyment they got out of the interview. It can also indicate they did not want it to seem like a commercial engagement; it was about two men (participant and researcher) talking about important issues.

Due to the gravitas of our discussion, it was important to linger once the recorded interview was over. This was not a perfunctory act but a sensitive means of winding down not only the interview but my visit to the participant’s home. It made good sense technically but was also sensitive to the fraternity that had developed in the course of the interview. At the end of a lengthy discussion my connection with the participants was similar to the bonds formed in men’s groups: honest, profound, and sensitive to the vulnerability of combining maleness with emotion (Longstaff, 2000; Pudney, 2006).

### **Transcription and the second interview**

Most interviews lasted between one and one and a half hours. Afterwards, I transcribed the interview verbatim. Although transcription was a long and tedious process, it provided in-depth familiarization with the material, links between issues began to emerge. During transcription all identifying features were expunged from the participant's dialogue so as to maintain confidentiality. All participants and people/places they mentioned were allocated code names. I purposely chose code names which compared with the original names of the participants and their family. Comparable 'alternative' methods of spelling their code names were also used. I did this to preserve the socio-economic conventions of the participants. Using names popular amongst the middle class would have mis-represented them. For example, there were no participant partners called Caitlin, Sophie or Emma. There were partners with names akin to Chontelle, and Sue, spelt Sioux. And participants had names similar to Che, West and Jason.

Multiple readings of the text prompted a second set of questions unique to each participant. For example Henare described his dad as prone to violence and being emotionally remote, but Henare also talked of close times he and his father had together. In the second interview, I asked him to reconcile the two accounts he gave of his father. Gene spoke of his pre-family plans to travel overseas. In the second interview I asked him how he felt about those plans, now that family life had precluded him from pursuing them.

A second interview was convened where these questions were presented, issues clarified and topics explored in greater depth. The second interviews tended to be briefer than the first although the content was generally more profound as it built on the familiarity and trust generated in the first interview. It concluded when the participant had answered the second set of questions and I sensed the topic had been explored in full. The second interview was then transcribed and appended to the transcription of the first interview.



While transcribing the interview attention to tone and cadence provided greater analytical depth and reduced the possibility of ambiguity. I noted prosodics on the transcript if these were significant, for example changes in cadence, volume and voice intensity. Pauses, snapping and non-linguistic verbalizations (groans, snorts, sighs) were noted. Once transcription was completed and the interview transcript printed, para-linguistic communications were detailed on the transcript (gestures, frowning, blushing).

### **Interviewing low-skilled, low socio-economic status New Zealand men**

The pressure for men to self-present as rational and autonomous makes interviewing them about emotional issues problematic (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2002). Pudney (2006) has detailed the difficulty New Zealand men have giving emotional accounts and although strictures have relaxed somewhat, discussion of emotion is still off limits for many men. Sensitivity had to be exercised on my part to ensure the participant was not irked by questions which led him into emotional accounting. Asking about thoughts, then about feelings, reflectively referring to the sensation of an event; were tactics which led participants to understand they were open to give more than logical-rational reports.

Popular language disguised the emotional content of their experience, while allowing an insight into it. For example, rather than say they were overjoyed or elated, they said they were 'stoked'. Instead of being upset, hurt or disheartened, they were 'gutted'. An event wasn't moving, tearful or heartfelt; it was 'awesome'. This limited vocabulary was soon exhausted and quickly sounded clichéd. This poverty of discursive resources left participants ill-equipped to report their experience. To deal with their linguistic poverty I would probe their statements, asking them to flesh-out an event or provide examples. This allowed them to disguise their emotional expression because their account was focused on an event, not on their emotions. Semi-structured interviews facilitated self-reflective emotional disclosure. That disclosure was not solely about their father-child relationship. Discussion of their own childhood, their feelings for their own father, their feelings about their current circumstances – all of these were likely to provoke a degree of affect.

### **An ethnographic advantage**

The nomenclature describing interview styles is mixed but given the long standing acquaintance I had with many of the participants, my interviews can be considered ‘open ended ethnographic (in-depth) interviews’ (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 365). The pre-interview familiarity I had with many of the participants afforded the research some of the benefits enjoyed by family ethnographers such as Komarovsky (1962), Rubin (1976) and Hochschild (1997). Of the 23 participants, I had known 13 for at least seven years prior to their participation. I also knew the partners of five of these 13. Of the ten participants with whom I was previously unacquainted, I had known the partners of four for some time. Of the remaining six, I had known family members and family circumstances of two. Only four participants were total strangers.

When interviewing those with whom I had a connection, I was able to fill in details and make probes that capitalised on my familiarity. This facilitated their dialogue and reduced the need for clarification and explanations of places and people. It put participants at ease and made them freer with their disclosures and reflections. It also conveyed the impression I sought to foster, that of myself as just a ‘local Wairarapa bloke’ who was eager to hear them talk. This position secured deeper access to what Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) describe as the ‘subjective rules and meanings’ of the cultural life composing participant’s experience.

My long-standing acquaintance was particularly effective in bridging the gulf between my education level, financial position and race, and those of the participants. However, it was important to ensure familiarity was not used as an exploitative tool – “encouraging reciprocity and intimacy [but] fostering paternalism and exploitation” (Wise, 1987, p.66). This applied particularly in regard to participants who were going through difficult times. I endeavoured to ensure that my familiarity did not allow the participant-researcher relationships to reflect our disparate socio-political, cultural positions.

The ethnographic dimension extended beyond mere personal familiarity. In the course of their accounts, I was often able to corroborate details about places, people, events and

cliques we had in common. When Alistair spoke of his mother drinking at Morgan's Road pub, I knew who she drank with and that she was very much a regular. When he described her being forced to cycle from Howard's Flats to Kaiparoro after leaving his stepfather, I knew how far this was and the difficulty of such a task. Equally so, when Luke spoke of his neighbours smashing his tree hut, I could ask if that neighbour was Charlie 'Ha-ha' and his brother. Luke confirmed this and we laughed about Charlie Ha-ha's scallywag nature. These instances may seem trite but there was a substantial web of such shared knowledge, and it helped me to present as a companion – rather than as an academic intent on completing a PhD.

### **Being alert to distorted accounts**

The historical demographer Laslett (1977) decried the way in which an episode of family abuse could be recorded by the courts – leading to later generations' noting the abuse not as an aberration of common behaviour, but emblematic of it. Given that the subject matter of the research included difficult life histories, family breakdown and anti-social attitudes, there was potential for participants to depict what were single events as commonplace occurrences. Pudney (2007) notes how abusive incidents can dominate childhood memories. These have to be carefully peeled away, Pudney cautions, and the fuller nature of childhood explored. As I listened to participants' accounts, I sought to explore not just the arresting events in their childhood but, also, those in the background which remained constant and composed most of their experience.

I was similarly mindful of participants responding to questions with “the use of familiar narrative constructs” (Miller & Glassner, 2004, p. 127). This tended to occur with unfamiliar participants, who were unable to perceive me as a long-standing affiliate – although my tactics during the interview worked to reverse these tendencies. I was also cautious when participants detailed abuse and deprivation, because these features can have discursive capital. I suspected that participants might be tempted to garner kudos by embroidering events, giving them better listening impact. To my relief, participants raised these issues with a great deal of decorum and sensitivity. There was a common tendency to downplay abuse, serious neglect and tragedy by making merely cursory references to

them. This concurred with their view that their historical family lifestyle was little more than that, and their opinion that they had moved into a new chapter of their lives. It appeared little was served by deep-trawling through events that were better forgotten.

On occasions I sought to probe events by asking for more detailed accounts. This generally provoked a solemn, story-telling tone (akin to that detailed by Askham, 1982). The effects of the event on the participant were often palpable in the participant's voice and demeanor. For example, Jason was asked to explain his comment that his stepfather was “*hard*”. He gave the following illustration.

*It was...If it was noisy when he was home, he didn't like it. He would tell you to quieten down. If you didn't quieten down, your toys were smashed up and chucked in the bin. Yep. And also... Anything wrong? You'd be standing in front of his chair. Did anything wrong? And me and my brother were there, obviously. Standing there, hands behind our back, 'Now who did this?' And don't answer – get a hiding!*

While transcribing the interviews I became very familiar with participants' cadence, tone and rhythm of speech. As I became more familiar with individual styles, departures from the norm became fairly obvious. Only two participants seemed to make deviations from their normal speech pattern suggestive of their embellishing or fabricating events. The central topic of discussion (their practice as a father and family man) seemed to ground their accounts, constraining inclinations to embroidery. When, in the course of the second interview, they were pushed to clarify what I suspected to be an embellished account, they acknowledged they had engaged in ‘poetic licence’. Despite this, it is undeniable that research participants can be inclined to give “socially desirable responses” (Fielding, 1995, p. 145). According to Fielding, this is a common pitfall in social science research. However, my method of in-depth familiarization diminished any tendencies in this direction.

## **Analysis**

Analysis takes a fluid, desultory, rambling dialogue and codifies it into manageable concepts that communicate the meaning, perception and richness of the experience being reported. It could be said the analytic process of ‘digesting’ raw data – by dismantling and reassembling it – corrupts the experience that participants are trying to communicate. However, analysis is necessary to make the data manageable. Moreover, the ‘reassembly’ communicates the experience of a whole population, capturing commonalities across a cohort. Five key discourses emerged from the 23 interviews: these composed the typology of the participant fathers’ experience. Each discourse overlapped with other discourses, drawing on similar accounts and moving towards similar constructions. The distinctions made between them, while not arbitrary, are not hard and fast. Although the explication of the data delivers a somewhat ‘synthetic’ version of the dialogues provided, this appearance is inherent in all research findings.

Overall my analysis was akin to what Burman (1996) describes as ‘thematic discursive analysis’. I preferred to focus on the discourses dimension of this analysis, rather than themes, although the two facets of the analysis are similar. The key distinction between them is that discourses not only describe commonalities, they also construct them (Edwards & Potter, 1992: Potter & Wetherell, 1987). I was interested in how the participants in this research constructed their experience of fatherhood, not just common features, although these are significant. What I wished to examine were the discourses participants used, that is “a system of statements which construct[s] the object” (Parker, 1992, p.5), namely fatherhood. These were the systematic set of metaphors, accounts, analogies and rhetorical tools they used to construct themselves as fathers and their experience of fatherhood.

The analysis followed several steps as a reflexive and iterative process that accessed the meaning and experience of the participants. I transcribed the interviews in full myself. While doing this, I became very familiar with sections of the interview that had high emotional content and covered topics that provoked intense feelings for the participant. The associated prosodics were noted on the transcript. These incidents were recorded as

salient. When allocating data to budding discourses, I was mindful of them. The example below comes from Peter, discussing his childhood diet:

*We were brought up on... I was a skinny runt, we were all skinny. And savaloys, peas and potatoes. Was cheap, cheap, shitty meat and that. And I don't know why. I don't know why! Maybe they were just... Maybe it was, things were tough, I don't know!*

My notes detailing the prosodics of this account state, “cadence rushed, voice raised, slightly staccato at end”. As detailed above, para-linguistic and extra-linguistic communications were penciled onto the printed transcript. Participants had two interviews (the first generic, the second idiographic). The latter was appended to the first as an addendum. I immersed myself in the data provided, listening repeatedly to the tape recordings while reading over the transcripts.

While reading I would free-associate, make comparisons, shift the sequence and focus and transpose comments against others (as per Smith, 1995). Dey (1993) refers to this as ‘interactive reading’. He describes it as loosening the soil for analysis to take root. The further the analysis proceeds, the greater its potential to distance itself from what Jones (1985) calls the ‘gestalt’ of the account – that is, the broader, fuller experience communicated by the account as a whole (greater than the sum of its parts). To limit that distancing effect, I repeatedly returned to the relevant section of the account as spoken in the course of the interview. Although this was informative, I was mindful the audiotape recorded only disembodied voices, not participants, and I should not reify the recording. Repeated listening, combined with reference to notes taken during the interview, cemented the ‘gestalt’ of the participants’ accounts. This procedure maintained consistency between the participants’ concepts and the theoretical concepts generated.

Jones (1985) cautioned against the analysis process being so laborious and in-depth that it appeared like mysticism. Analysis of the assumptions underlying each stage wards off this criticism (Burman, 1994; Smith, 1995). In the course of iterative processing, I

developed key titles (codes) which communicated the features of the dialogue. This procedure has its practical roots in Grounded Theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Pidgeon, 1997). These codes embodied not only what the participant was saying but what he was addressing. Whenever possible, I used the terminology that participants used. This avoided filtering their experience through my own nomenclature. Some researchers, including Smith (1995), associate disparate discourses by identifying the key words, tropes or in-group/out-group distinctions made/used in the interview. At a broader level, key concepts or themes would appear in the dialogues. In my study, common features were identified by junctures in the life courses of respective participants. This might seem overly chronological, but participants used these junctures to define set periods in their life, periods in which new meanings began to underpin their self-concept. Ben for example, provided a chronicle of what he did when he learnt his girlfriend was pregnant. This addressed his concept of provision for his family. Meaning now sprang from this activity. Rather than focus on the juncture per se, I focused on the underlying intention or self-concept depicted in it. So Ben's description referred to his concept of provision.

I believed it was important not to allow a priori concepts to bear on the emerging codes. These not only pre-interpret the data, they "blind a researcher to novelty in familiar settings" (Mallroy, 2001, p.90). I had been particularly interested in participants' socio-economic political identities. This outlook was primed by a literature review which drew heavily on North American sources and research conducted during severe economic recessions. Only one participant discussed such issues and I was careful not to over-emphasize that. It was equally important to ensure the material was not "misinterpreted or over-interpreted, manipulated to produce meanings that were not originally there" (Burman, 1996, p. 64). In this regard, I would have been pleased to encounter discourse resonant of the political discourses that had occurred amongst similar populations in past eras, for example, those detailed by Trotter (2007). These were notably absent. Being alert to my preconceptions curtailed an inclination to read into the data discourses that were absent.

Codes were allocated according to the general discourse of the dialogue, not the nature of the question (prompt/probe) that they addressed. Paragraphs were broken up and sections filed under different codes according to their relevance. Codes were then broadened to achieve concord across the range of related data allocated to them. Ultimately, 42 codes were obtained. Transcriptions were then re-read in consideration of the code titles allocated. The data allocated to the codes was read and re-read to identify common discourses across the 42 codes. During this process, general discourses about fatherhood began to emerge from the text. They acted as ‘code magnets’ (a term used by Smith, 1995) for participants’ accounts. The codes were then allocated inclusively to these general discourses. Codes (and their allocated contents) were assigned to general discourses carefully to ensure the chronological order in which participants voiced them was maintained. This helped preserve the coherence of the accounts and helped avoid grafting one section and splicing it with another. As such, sections of each interview were allocated to over-arching general discourse. Smith (1995) calls these ‘identifiers of instances’. Some were directly relevant to the label of the general dialogue, others tangential. It was preferable to have an over-inclusive allocation. The five general discourses to emerge were: affective fathering, intergenerational repair, provision, the pro-socializing effects of fatherhood and domestic gender activity. They form the basis of the five analysis chapters.

As mentioned above, 23 participants were involved in this research. In the course of completing analysis, I began to reach data saturation, that is, a point at which new participants no longer added divergent material to the emerging discourses. Those participants did add valuable examples, nuanced differences and interesting digressions. Nevertheless, once data saturation was achieved, their contribution ceased to expand on the dominant discourses which had emerged. Data saturation began to emerge after the contribution of the 14<sup>th</sup> participant. I continued to complete interviews after that point as I wished to obtain a wide range of personal experiences from participants plus I did not wish to disappoint the men who had voiced a desire to participate in the research. Data saturation also acts as a guide to the researcher that their engagement with the data is reasonably reflective of it, and not their own preconceptions. Making links with extant



literature provides a greater reassurance this is the case. That reduces the need for “inter-rater collaboration”, or getting a second opinion.

Although this work is a qualitative project, and I do not seek to generate ‘universal findings’, reaching a data saturation point suggests the findings do convey the experience of a population. Generalising and applying the findings of the research to men in similar locales or populations, is possible providing this is done critically.

By translating the 23 participants’ dialogues into five codified discourses, the nature of the participants’ multiple experiences was preserved while commonalities were highlighted. It is not surprising that common discourses emerged in the dialogues of participants. They all came from similar echelons of society and followed similar developmental patterns in adolescence. Their family, educational and cohort circumstances meant that they entered adulthood and the workforce with a common set of resources and experiences. By encapsulating those experiences within five general discourses, their appraisal of fatherhood is made accessible and manageable. Other interpretations of the data are available making the analysis seem incomplete. That incompleteness and uncertainty is just part of the arbitrary limit imposed by writing (Burman, 1996).

### **Feedback to participants**

All participants were sent a personalized letter detailing the final outcomes of the research. The letters were personalized as I felt their individual contributions were unique and that my feedback should be also. I did not want to appear indifferent to their lives or to treat them as standardized objects (see Appendix F).

## Chapter 7: Affective Fathering

*Arh, na. It was just more...More love and stuff like that.*

(Ben).

The emotional dimension of fatherhood has received little academic attention. Lupton and Barclay (1997) state this is indicative of academic researchers' aversion to intra-psychic experiences. Personal emotions, like affection and passion, have generally been treated "as imprecise and pre-scientific as humoral understandings of health" (Game & Metcalf, 1996, p. 4). Emotional engagement was central in the accounts of fatherhood provided by participants; its multifarious forms permeated their accounts of being fathers.

Over the last century overt paternal affection has been overshadowed by other activities, such as breadwinning and gender modeling (Rotundo, 1985). Participants identified paternal love as the substratum of both their father-child relationship and their performance as a family man. Emotional engagement with their children was described as the most cherished feature of fathering and the feature most instrumental in their experience of fatherhood. Historically, detailing emotionality was restricted by clear gender codes. The relaxation of these codes allows young adult men to explain their emotional relationship with greater liberty. However, exploring the nature of this relationship was problematic because participants had a deficit of discursive resources.

Participants described how correct fathering ensured a child's emotional needs were met and his or her social capacities were developed appropriately. A child's character, they said, could be largely attributed to the quality of a father's parenting. By parenting positively they believed they ensured their children grew up well adjusted and unlikely to engage in anti-social or self-injurious behaviours. Loving parenting was generally conceived of as reducing a child's tendency for adjustment difficulties in adolescence and adulthood. Emotionally-engaged fatherhood was said to equip children for lifelong progress and it promoted their happiness both as children and future adults. Fathers

sought to manage parental acrimony carefully and preserve the integrity of their family to promote that happiness. Bonding with your children was described as a human instinct, but once established it required father-child engagement to facilitate its development. Participants described that bond as part of a nexus of relationships linking all family members; being a good father was about having a good co-parent relationship and nurturing the wellbeing of all family relationships.

This chapter discusses how participants described fathering as essentially an affective activity. It will detail the difficulty fathers had explaining this despite their conviction that fatherhood was overwhelmingly an emotional issue. This leads on to their accounts that the father-child bond had its genesis at their child's birth. This bond was sustained and expanded by spending quality time with their child and being accessible. This was described as "*being there*". The object of "*being there*" was to produce well-balanced happy children whose lives were not marred by the features that marred the lives of many of the fathers involved. Fathers took pride in raising their children to be well-adjusted, happy and with strong parental relationships. Fostering co-parental relationships was a core feature of ensuring children's healthy development although fathers did not report their connection with their child to be undermined by co-parental acrimony.

### **The father-child relationship provides an emotional domain for participants**

The bond between fathers and children was depicted by participants as an emotional connection. Emotional connection with one's children demonstrated genuine paternal performance and it dominated the accounts provided. Although hampered by limited linguistic resources and some cultural constraints, participants stated the heartfelt bond with their child was the foundation of their paternal identity. Associated identities such, as being a breadwinner or role model provided substance to this but they were secondary to it. Affection underpinned the multi-layered nexus of identities which constructed appropriate fathering.

Prior to fatherhood, participants reported a paucity of domains in which they could express the intimate side of their emotional selves. Lee-Roy was typical of participants

when he described his pre-fatherhood life as being involved in his “*own little world*”. He expanded on this saying it consisted of:

*Girls, drinking, smoking, going out all the time, staying up till the morning kind of thing. Just being free, more or less. In a way... Do little mischief stuff like the fighting thing and stuff like that. Yeah. That's, that's what my little world was about.*

Emotionality did not feature in their pre-parenthood accounts. There appeared to be no domains in which they might express tenderness or love. Their family of origin, which should have been a source of emotional nourishment, was more often reported to be a venue of distress and disagreement. Carter was typical of participants when he described his engagement with his father: “*Your dad will be like, ‘What you fucking do that for? Why the fuck? Have you got rocks in your head?’*”. As young men participants seemed to submerge their emotionality under a pre-occupation with hedonism and adventure.

This changed when they became fathers. Their accounts of their lives since fatherhood focused on emotional engagement. The opportunity to have a socially sanctioned reason for expressing love and passion seemed to fuel participants’ ascension to the role of father. They appeared to become more complete men because they were now engaging an emotional part of themselves that had been neglected. Carter described the momentous effect coming to family life had on him:

*Well family, you know? Its just the love. I don't know. Its hard to explain. And like, you know? I hardly ever crying but, when my daughter was born, its like... I don't know. Its so hard to explain that feeling you know? When, you know?*

The magnitude of engaging emotionally is indicated by its ineffableness. This contrasted with his account of pre-parenthood life which involved being young and reckless. Carter described this as “*having fun*” and he had no difficulty depicting it. Parenthood was not about fun, it was about an emotional bond.

A number of participants used a contrast between their current selves with what they considered they would have been, had they not become fathers. This highlighted the emotional domain they now enjoyed, contrasted with the lonely self-centeredness they suspect they would have faced had they not become fathers. Henare described his likely state had he not become a father. He depicted himself in the forecast unencumbered, pursuing single-man interests with no regard for anyone else:

*I just thought I [as an adult], would probably be one of these guys that never, never have a family. Never know what it is like to have a family... I probably would be working, but I would have been just going from, going to the pub, picking anyone up, and then, nah, don't want that, ay. Next weekend go some, find someone.*

Single men were depicted by participants as cut off from the delights of strong on-going emotional connection with others. Henare's account contrasted sharply with his current circumstance, in a loving family with a child he hastily admitted that he loved. Fatherhood provided an opportunity to be focused on the welfare of others, to be caring, to feel emotions long off-limits to young working-class men. Alistair made this self-assessment of himself prior becoming a father.

*I was a right little shit-head. And basically all I was in for was myself. As long as I was having a good time, that was it. And sort of...Didn't really think about much, how other people saw me or how I, they felt.*

The expansion of their identity to include an emotional inner realm generated a new self-concept for participants. This was a composite of themselves and their child. Alistair described this, saying “*they sort of, like, become one with me sort of. You know?*”. Past self-identities connected with anti-social behaviour and self-centered hedonism were discarded as this new composite self of father and child took hold. Participants regularly

referred to what they ‘used to do’ (“*smash up cars*” Te Huia) or who they ‘used to be’ (“*I was a lot more selfish*” Rawiri) and contrasted that with their current selves.

A number of researchers have argued working-class fathers are likely to be less affectionate with their children than middle-class fathers. They reason that the stresses associated with working-class life; namely financial pressure, poor working conditions and disorderly neighbourhoods, undermine a father’s propensity to be loving with his children (Lareau, 2003; Wilcox & Bartkowski, 2005; Wilson, 1996). Although one or two participants detailed neglecting their father-child input because they were pre-occupied with financial matters, this was not a notable feature of the accounts obtained and in their cases reflected co-parent stress. All other participants maintained a tender connection with their children regardless of the broader socio-economic issues around them. This could be explained by the vast difference between the social economies encountered by participants in this study, and participants in the North Americans studies detailed above. Indeed Cazenave (1979, 1984) found amongst marginalized communities in America, emotional connection was only prioritized once middle-class status was obtained. The dire nature of poverty in the United States obliges fathers to be pre-occupied with providing. The possibility of financial adversity did not mar the experience of fatherhood amongst participants in this study. Even those living just above the breadline did not prioritize it over emotional connection. Robert provides an example of the relaxed attitude to financial pressure, as indicated by his laughter:

Gareth: *Did you have enough money?*

Robert: *Never have enough money, ha ha ha ha. But yeah. We had enough to get by.*

Gareth: *How do you mean you never have enough?*

Robert: *Oh you can never have enough money. There is always something else to buy, always something else that you need. So, you know? There is always enough money for the stuff that you really, really, really need. Yeah*

Gareth: *What sort of things did you really, really need?*

Robert: *Like...Like nappies, that’s important. Wipes when they get onto formula.*

*That's...Those are the three most important things you know. Nappies, formula, wipes. As they get older, food.*

Gareth: *Did you do without stuff?*

Robert: *Yeah.*

Having very limited financial resources did not distress Robert. He was not worried by the constant need to provide. His family had sufficient to “*get by*” and he was comfortable doing only that.

### **Explaining the emotionality of the father-child relationship is very difficult**

Although the emotional connection fathers had with their children opened an experiential dimension within them, a dearth of linguistic resources left most participants challenged when required to provide a comprehensive description of their affect. Being low-skilled, low socio-economic status and male, participants were poorly-equipped to describe their emotional experience. Levant (1995) describes this male propensity as alexithymia, an incapacity to put emotions into words. In New Zealand this reflects participants’ cultural heritage, emerging from a succession of generations amongst whom emotions were downplayed (Phillips, 1996). What was notable, was participants’ clear comprehension of what was requested. When invited to account their emotional experience, they knew what that meant, that it referred to the powerful bond they had with their child. Although socio-cultural factors may have conspired to limit their capacity to account emotions, participants could account that bond in forms they were familiar with- anecdotes, stories, accounts, comparisons and contrasts. Possibly, emotional accounting is a cultural practice particular to other populations, for example mothers and members of other socio-economic strata. In the course of considering the experience of participating fathers, a technique which has greater socio-cultural appropriateness should be used. I deferred to that technique when I allowed fathers to talk liberally about their idea about what constituted an emotional bond, without actually discussing emotions.

Participants were able to account the breadth of their experience and report on the magnitude of their personal transformation but this was always qualified with statements

such as *“its hard to explain”* (Carter). Their attempts to express emotional experience, particularly the finer nuances of affect, were often rudimentary or mangled. Rawiri’s response to the request to “describe the bond between you and your children” encapsulates that difficulty:

*“Ummm... I don’t know how to answer that question. Yeah. It is just one of those things. Can’t explain... I mean when I look at them, I’ve got a...yeah”*

Luke gave an equally nebulous response:

Gareth: *What is the emotional connection you have with Daniel?*

Luke: *Ummm... arrr... Well, ummm... I will be, ummmm... It is not, I don’t feel good if he is crying.*

Gareth: *And how do you feel about him?*

Luke: *Yeah, ummm... I feel proud, of him. He’s like, ummm, a little man... Wandering around, getting good at stuff, um, yeah.*

Participants could describe the magnitude of their experience but were unable to depict its hue. This did not detract from their enthusiasm to report their new emotional selves. To compensate for their dearth of linguistic resources many supplied anecdotes. These allowed fathers to convey their experience while avoiding the still unfamiliar and uneasy task of emotional description. Jason gives the example below.

Gareth: *And when you come home and your son is there, how does he respond [to you]?*

Jason: *Most of the time, cause he can’t talk properly, he’s arr “dad, dad, dad, dad” [lifts his arms up, indicating request to be picked up].*

Gareth: *What’s it feel like for you, when he’s like that?*

Jason: *Arrrr, feels good, ay. Yeah, feels really good (closes eyes). Smile on your face, and you pick him up, and he’s even happier. Ha ha ha (nervous laugh).*



Jason communicates his deep bond with his son and his delight at being greeted by him but his account is clipped and repetitive rather than exploratory. He moves quickly and disjointedly from his emotional delight to his son's delight ("*you pick him up, and he's even happier*"). He is bashful recounting his emotions, detracting from them by closing his eyes and laughing nervously. Like most participants, Jason lacked the skills to describe his emotional experience, even though he took delight in it.

Although their expression of emotions was hampered by their limited linguistic resources, it was also limited by a gendered protocol surrounding emotional expression. Working-class 'kiwi' men are afforded few venues in which to express loving sensations. When they do so, they are liable to breach gender codes. The gravitas of the father-child bond was referred to with tremendous deference; in fact, fathers preferred to depict it as ineffable. Fathers conceded to a culturally constructed protocol for describing their emotional connection. That leaves most of the feeling content unsaid, in much the same way that sex and death would have been referenced to in Great Britain during the early to mid twentieth century (Abbott, 2003). This decorum communicated the depth of their feelings and the monumental importance of their child to them. The sanctions of that code were most pronounced when one or two participants departed from it. Asked to describe his relationship with his son, Nathan provided this response. His lucid and graphic portrayal of that relationship appears indecorous and forced:

*Umm yeah, he just started walking, said his first word which is ball, good All Black. Ummm so yeah I, brilliant relationship, brilliant dynamic with him at the moment.*

The positivity of this account suggests Nathan is preoccupied with presenting "socially acceptable responses" (Fielding, 1995, p.145), saying what is expected, not what he feels. As if he is treating emotionality as a commodity in which to excel. Carlson and McLanahan (2004) note there is substantial social pressure exerted on fathers to do this. Nathan's account contrasts with the stilted and muffled reports provided above by Rawiri, Carter, Jason and Luke.

### **The father-child connection is reported to be generated at the birth**

The euphoric effect of new fatherhood is well known in popular culture and documented in academic research (Bader, 1995; Greenberg & Morris, 1974). The nature of the almost instantaneous father-child bond at the time of birth has received much less examination. For nearly all participants this was reported as immediate and universal. No build up or induction was described for that connection to be cemented. The self-concept of fatherhood penetrated the man's identity with no resistance. This was the germ that seeded the numerous life transformations soon to follow. Their status as a father was reported as overshadowing all other self identities. Being a mate, a son, or a boyfriend was now secondary to being a father. None could explain the nature of that transformation, although they could detail it. Neither were they able to unpick the ineffable workings of that event on their self identity. It was described as part of human nature, something we are hardwired to do, to bond emotionally with our offspring.

The ecological value of father-child bonding was addressed by participants. Central in their discussion of this was the sudden realization their child "*depended totally*" (Alistair) on them. This reliance seemed enwound in the male provider pre-disposition. They reported because this was inherently hard-wired into males, the need for a fathering role-model was dispensed with. Nature, participants said, not nurture, would ensure fathers provided. Alistair, Gene, Kerry and Jason were all clear that, being a 'proper father' came naturally despite the absence of an adequate role model. Anxiety that they would not know what to do, or would find bonding difficult, was dispelled. As Alistair said, knowing your children depended on you made you take care of them, and loving them meant you wanted to. Explicating the nature of that innate drive generated convoluted reasoning about promoting their children's welfare and ensuring adult adjustment. Located within this was their reported euphoria at witnessing their children being happy and healthy. Unpicking the reasons for this involved scrutinizing the nature of love, a task which participants found onerous.

Many participants stated the mother-child bonds developed during gestation, Carter commented “*there’s that bond there you know, she carried the baby for nine months*”. In contrast none reported a pre-partum connection for themselves. That connection was generated in an emotional avalanche during their child’s birth. It was described by participants as instant, irreversible and overwhelming. When participants described the genesis of this bond they became emphatic and codes regarding male emotional expression were relaxed. For example, it was culturally legitimate to recount weeping. One of the most reserved participants, Peter, had no reservations detailing his emotions at the birth even if he was reserved in engaging them at the time:

Peter: *When he was out [of the womb] basically. Umm, yeah burst into tears and I couldn’t look at him, ummmm. I was crying and they handed him over to me and I couldn’t believe it. Here’s ...fuck! Hold on, hold on, here he is and he is looking at you. Didn’t cry much [the new-born]. I was just fascinated ay, fascinated. Yeah absolutely fascinated ay. Bloody hell, you got to be joking. Ha ha ha, loved it, ay. I was just, I remember I was holding him I was just, crying, I was ‘I can’t look at him, I can’t look at him’, look like this’ [turned his face away from imaginary baby cradled in his arms]*

Gareth: *You couldn’t look at him because?*

Peter: *I don’t know, don’t know just overwhelmed. Like holy crap, just the shock. And then if I looked at him I was like bloody hell, crying like a woman.*

Although he felt uncomfortable giving himself over to weeping, Peter was not uncomfortable relating his tears, even if he does note it breeched male gender codes (“*like a woman*”).

Che was aware he would be moved by the birth of his child. Uncomfortable at this prospect, he said he “*staunches myself up before I went in there [the birth room]*” to resist being overcome. He freely admitted how ineffectual this preparation had been as “*soon as he come out [his son] I just bawled, ay, I just cried, yeah*”. Johnson (2002) found most men were unprepared for the emotional effect of witnessing the birth. The

description of the effect as a '*jolt*', as noted by Palkowitz (2002) in chapter three was very apt. Participants were taken aback, unprepared, zapped, as it were, by the impact of becoming a father. That effect also extends to their rapid movement into the job market and adoption of pro-social and domestic codes (this is further discussed in chapter ten).

Being intensely moved was the initiation of father-child bond. Participants reported this as a momentous event on which their paternal relationship was founded. As Lee-Roy said in a very understated fashion "*ummm but it was like a new beginning kind of thing*". A very small amount of variety was reported but they were described as aberrations which required explanation. Accompanying the momentum of bonding was its indisputable immediacy. Men became fathers instantly. There was no self-reflection, musing or chronic identity development. You became a father the second your child was born. Kerry gives this account:

Gareth: *When Jazmin was born, did you feel an instant contact with her?*

Kerry: *Bond, yes, yes I did. Yep.*

Gareth: *Once she was born?*

Kerry: *Yep!*

Gareth: *Didn't take a couple of weeks or...*

Kerry: *No, no, soon as she was born. Yep*

Gareth: *Is that right, why was that?*

Kerry: *I don't know I just think it's just the thought of finally being a father kicking in. You know just yeah, yeah, yeah, it really happened now. And umm yeah.*

Gareth: *And when Jordhan was born was it the same instant snap?*

Kerry: *Yes, oh definitely, definitely, yep, definitely!*

The sensation of becoming a father was described as peerless, reported as "*best day of my life*" (Solli), "*best thing that ever happened to me*" (Che), made to feel like "*the greatest person ever*" (Robert). It marked a watershed in their lives. Although popular fatherhood literature might describe the birth of one's child as a beautiful event (Shapiro, Diamond

& Greenberg, 1995), for a portion of the participants the physiology of the birth was disturbing. This did not detract from the momentum of the event or their bond.

Gareth: *What was his birth like?*

Heta: *(Sigh, shaking head), disgusting, ha ha ha.*

Gareth: *Was it?*

Heta: *Disgusting.*

Gareth: *Ha ha ha. In what way?*

Heta: *Oh, it was just awful to see it, didn't want to be down that end while he was coming out.*

Heta was not alone, Gene found the event upsetting, referring to it as “horrible”. But he added “*I loved it still though*”. The power of the bonding connection was not undermined by the goriness of the birth. Having a “*weak stomach*” (Te Huia) did not interfere in the reported naturalness of father-child bonding Te Huia experienced. A very, very small number of participants did not report the birth as an intense bonding site. In doing so they seemed to sense they had a malady and were aware they had failed to make a connection considered mandatory in the course of fatherhood.

A notable feature for some participants was their anxiety about accidentally hurting their baby. Several stated they did not hold their child till he or she was at least six months old as they feared in the course of doing so they could accidentally harm the child.

Gareth: *And what was it like once Jazmin was cleaned up and you sort of held her?*

Kerry: *Oh I wouldn't hold her, too scared of dropping her. Even Jordhan, I never held him till he was about six months or something, just phobia of just dropping the kid.*

This fear of holding did not preclude instantaneous bonding and engrossment. It possibly reflects the lack of contact low-skilled, low- socio-economic status men have with babies

and their anxieties surrounding tenderness and vulnerability. Kerry's fear did not undermine his interest in his child or his pro-socialisation resulting from fatherhood. Henare's partner dealt with his phobia of hurting his child by impressing on him the need for connection to promote bonding. In hindsight, Henare lamented not having been fully "*hands on*" at the outset. Finding the birth objectionable and not handling one's child for several months after the birth did not prevent these fathers having an intense bond with their children.

### **Good fathering involves bonding and 'being there'**

Although the birth produced an intense father-child bond, participants described the bond as a platform on which their full father-child relationship was developed. Several took up to a month off work for that purpose. As the child got older, participants reported a need to maintain high paternal input so as to strengthen and nourish their relationship. This bond, according to Ben, was developed by spending "*quality time*" with the child. Te Huia provides this example with slightly older children. It needs be noted, he was not supplied with the word "*bonding*".

Te Huia: *But weekends I do heaps [with the children]. Go pick watercress, eeling, take them out eeling. I got a scooter, they jump in the middle we go for a ride around the block, school just round the road.*

Gareth: *So you do a lot of things like that.*

Te Huia: *Yeah, in the weekend though.*

Gareth: *Why is that important?*

Te Huia: *Ohhh 'coz, 'coz I don't do anything with them during the week cause I can't real, but ummm. Bonding I suppose, bonding. Bonding with them.*

Like Te Huia, most participants used the term 'bonding'. Spending time with the children was about bonding, getting to know their characters, noting their developmental milestones, having them connect with you. Unlike mothers who were described as having an advanced connection through gestation and breastfeeding, fathers had to develop their connection. Kerry summarized this by saying "*the mother carries the kid so they have*

*just got that intuition with the kid*". Also, no participants considered mothers required time to bond with their child. Although spending quality time with the children was very pleasurable for participants, they noted it had an upside for the child's development (see below). Good fathers took time to promote bonding with their children which ensured their healthy personality development and social progress. Drawing on his own childhood, Robert explains the importance of this (elsewhere he contrasted the relationship described below with that he had with his step-father).

Robert: *I want son to be proud of me, basically. And I want a good relationship with him. I want him to come up to me "hey dad this is what I done at school, cool ay" you know. "oh this is, me and my friends went and done this at lunchtime and it was really fun" that sort of thing. You know.*

Gareth: *Why is it important that you have that?*

Robert: *Ummm, I don't know it just is. Sort of like what me and my dad done I suppose, you know. "oh hey dad this is what I done today", made me feel good. I think it made him feel good too. We took our time out of our day to say "dad this is what we done" yeah.*

Bonding was about being close, being open and making your child feel good about them self. It was not an event, it was a developmental activity. The descriptions provided mirrored the principals of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1965, 1979). No participants used object-relations language but they did voice an understanding of child-parent attachment and its developmental ramifications.

The inherent naturalness of the father-child connection highlights the 'un-naturalness' of those for whom this bond was not forthcoming. This contrast was made between participants who had established a secure and palpable bond, and their own fathers whom they reported had not bonded with themselves. Participants who experienced paternal neglect as children reported their delight in not being hampered by a psychological incapacity to bond, in contrast with their perception of their own fathers. This seemed to vindicate their sense of well-being, despite being deprived of a positive father-son

relationship in their childhood. Because fatherhood was described as something you ‘just know how to do’, those unable to know it were positioned as abnormal. Gene detailed his father as “*he didn’t know how to be a good father*”.

Within the sample of 23 participants, one reported not bonding with his child. Carlyn was acutely aware his daughter brought him little delight and being a father neither elated nor interested him. He summed himself up saying “*to a certain degree I think I fail as a father*”. To a far lesser degree, Nathan spoke regularly of his love but did not refer to a bond with the child.

The term ‘being there’ was used by the majority of participants to encapsulate what makes a good father and over half used it without prompting. Fathers in similar populations elsewhere have used the same term to describe their operation (Allen & Conner, 1997; Hatter & Vinter, 2002; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005). White (1994) recorded its use amongst a population of Australian fathers in the early 1990s. Marsiglio, Roy and Litton Fox (2005) state the amorphousness of this phrase encapsulates the difficulty of defining the complexity of fatherhood. Participants used the term to refer to different levels of accessibility. At its most practical form it described “*being around all the time*” (Gene), where your children could see you, call for you and know you were present. As simplistic as this interpretation may appear, ‘being there’ meant being present as a family member, in contrast with the fathers of many participants, who were emotionally or geographically remote.

‘Being there’ was also used to refer to clipping other activities, no longer seeing old friends, reducing sport participation or working fewer hours if that was possible. Darryl describes this adjustment he made to ensure he was accessible to his son:

*Yeah, yeah cut down on that [drinking, smoking] and probably not seeing the people that I normally see. I mean I don’t, I used to hang out with people all the time, used to be always people at our house.*



Being there meant you had to be at home and were giving your children “*time*” (Che). It contrasted with bonding because bonding was building a connection through play or engagement. Being there was just about being a family member, a predictable, reliable and constant feature of the child’s surroundings.

### **The object of good fathering is to raise well-adjusted children**

Participants aspired to have open, healthy and honest relationships with their children and this was paramount in promoting their child’s welfare. None considered respect or duty to be salient features of their relationships; these were assigned to an historical period. Being a positive father was described as promoting a child’s moral development and ensured their wellbeing if they lived in hazardous environments. For a portion, it also promoted their child’s capacity for self-realization.

By being an involved and nurturing father, participants planned to foster their child’s moral development. They said a child’s character was indicative of the quality of parenting received. Good fathers, it was argued, produced good well balanced children. It was a father’s job to teach them right from wrong. Other tasks paled in significance:

*They are just all the little, the small things [providing food, paying the rent], I don’t see it as I’m, that’s my role as a father. Cause there is more, the way I see it there is more, right! There is teaching him right and wrong, ummm.*

(Henare).

Teaching your children right from wrong was the paramount activity of fatherhood, as Robert said, developing “*their morals and stuff*”. This activity prepared children for life beyond their home and beyond their childhood. It was depicted as fortifying them against the tendency to become anti-social. Solli described the purpose of paternal input to be “*just try and keep them, do positive things*”. This point was keenly felt by many. Their own anti-social history, they said, resulted from their fathers’ or step-fathers’ neglect and abuse. Being a positive father ensured your children did not repeat your own developmental patterns. “*I don’t want him to actually go what I went thru as I was*

*growing up, like being in trouble, getting into trouble”* stated Henare. In relatively recent historical periods in the English-speaking world, the central task of fatherhood was to instill morals for Christian salvation (Pollock, 1983). Participants in this research reported instilling morals for pro-social development. This was extended into a teleological forecast, each generation ridding itself of the detractions of the past and ensuring the welfare of future generations. Pohatu depicted this *“they make it better for their kids, and their kids make it better for their kids”*. Participants were aware that to secure their child’s moral development they had to be a positive role model. They could not afford to maintain illegal interests but also they had to model virtues and wholesome family living.

A moral character was viewed as an essential requirement for children to negotiate socially hazardous environments and periods. The teen years were the most risky, a period in which a father’s good work could easily be undone. Nourishing a deep relationship and fostering a moral character combined to fortify a child against anti-social corruption during adolescence. This was acutely so for those who felt they lived in socially unsafe environments. Low socio-economic suburbs, and for some participants, entire towns, were high risk places to raise children. They offered little hope for adolescents, so it was even more important participants said, that fathers shape their children’s characters to steer them away from anti-social groups and high risk conduct. Personally knowing the effects of paternal neglect seemed to fuel their commitment to be as involved with their children as possible. In contrast with Hofferth (2003) and Letiecq and Koblinsky (2004) who found working-class parents used forceful parenting techniques to preserve their child’s welfare in unsafe environments, participants preferred to use strong emotional connections. Open caring relationships were described as a tonic against threats to a child’s wellbeing, and participants engineered to have this sort of connection. Henare gives this account of the open relationship he was working towards with his parental style.

*...[my son] might come up and say “dad we went out to a party last night and so and so did this. Oh he wanted me to do this but I didn’t do it”. And then like “Oh*

*he passed me a joint and I tried it”, [I]said you know “did you like it?”. Rather than “don’t do it again” or be angry for doing it.*

Reason, caring and connection were described as the most effective means of ensuring a child’s welfare, not severe discipline.

A pre-occupation with moral development has been noted as a feature of parenting styles in lower socio-economic quarters (Kohn, 1979: Parcel & Menaghan, 1994). Although participants asserted it as central to their parenting operation, many had also adopted a middle-class concept of developing their child’s capacity for self-realization (Lareau, 2003). They said being actively involved with one’s child would assist them to develop their full potential at school and in the market place.

Participants believed father-child interaction would raise a child’s IQ, stimulate their language development, teach them self-confidence and boost their self-esteem. Enriching your child’s life by “*giving him opportunities*” (West) nourished his potential to achieve in the world. Discourse on this centred around children being self-empowered, able to do whatever they wanted in life, fulfilling their potential and reaching their life goals. Promoting your child’s success was also a means of making up for one’s own lack of achievement. Peter depicts this here:

*I do want to see them succeed, I don’t want to see them go down my track, I don’t want them to work in a Burger King and not go anywhere like my sister and brother. So for me let’s help them, let’s really try and help them and break the cycle kind of thing. I am not saying that cause you work here or there it’s a bad thing, but in this day and age yeah you sort of do want to push a bit harder....*

It was part of a father’s job to raise his child’s achievement levels, to push him as Peter says. This approach characterizes middle-class child-rearing techniques which have an “accent on individuality and self-development” (Verheyen, 1987, p. 37). That attitude was notable amongst participants who felt themselves to be in the upper section of the

working class, and gave a lot of their dialogue to distancing themselves from those in the lower socio-economic strata. Peter felt his father's disengaged parenting style left his potential undeveloped:

*Possibly, I mean it is a bold statement to make but possibly if my father was one of those typical fathers that I have seen, yeah he would have pushed me and I possibly would have achieved more.*

Despite the asserted value of paternal input, participants made a feature of self-agency. Paternal input fortified a child against untoward outcomes but once children struck their teen years their own self-agency could turn them in any direction. This was compounded by external agents who might distract them from “*the good path*” (Luke). Participants seemed resigned to the bearing external agents would have on their children at that time, and all they could do was their very best to ensure they maintained a strong relationship with their child during that period. Jason illustrated that forecast for his children:

*Jason: Just trying to steering them in the right direction really is the only answer I can think of. But that, even then is no guarantee, because the way I see it, is, you can try, try and not to lead them, down that path. But, in the end, there is no guarantee the way I see it, because, there are all, once they start getting into their teens and that, and start going to college with other influences, that, that becomes a major problem I think.*

*Gareth: When you say try, try and not make them go that path, what are the things you do, or are trying to do?*

*Jason: Ummm, really teaching them umm, proper health, ummm, proper ways really.*

Getting “*their own mind*” (Heta) was described as an inevitable part of growing up but the more input a parent had prior to their child turning 13 or 14 years of age, the better the outcome for the child. Control would be exerted not by force but by close caring relationships, although external to the child, that control would bear on the child's

internal sense of right and wrong. A sense fathers had instilled over the course of their child's development.

The object of good fathering was to build a positive relationship with one's children. From this platform, fathers could instill a moral code which promoted their child's pro-social development. Teaching your children 'right from wrong' was a tenet of good fathering. For some participants, being fully involved with one's children also nourished their mental and personal resources which assisted them to realize their potential. Fathers believed this development would allow their child to enjoy a higher standard of living than the one they currently lived in, once they were adults. Despite their best wishes, participants were aware children cannot be controlled forever; once they are teenagers they are free to exercise self-agency. The best way to ensure they use it to make positive choices is to maintain a caring and open relationship with them.

### **Participants obtained a great delight being fathers**

Fatherhood was a tremendous source of joy for participants and the greatest joy was found in knowing your children were happy. When describing this, participants detailed a deep sense of love and benevolence. They were aware they were responsible for their child's welfare and that welfare was expressed most obviously in their children's mood. Happy children indicated you were doing fatherhood correctly. Having obtained the status of 'father' was a source of delight, especially because this involved engaging with a child in a tender loving manner. West gave this example:

*[I get] a lot of enjoyment is just when he just calls me "dad" I think. When he acknowledges me that I am his father. Umm... He comes to me if he is hurt and that sort of thing. I enjoy it.*

While recounting these issues, participants became sentimental and their accounts became rather 'schmaltzy'. They were emotionally less restrained and indulged in a sense of satisfaction. This realm of fatherhood was the tender inner core, heartfelt joy of 'being a daddy'. It was an opportunity to engage their deeper emotional selves and delight in

their child's wellbeing. Che gave this report of the happiness he got knowing his children were well and safe:

*I even still wake up in the mornings now and go in an' check on them, just to make sure they have their blankets on them and they are still warm and dreaming well. Yeah*

For Darryl, knowing his children were “*safe and no one could hurt them*” indicated he was a success as a father, his children's welfare was ensured and he could be justifiably happy. Everyday parenting was a source of joy for fathers, engaging in the minutiae of family life and being around children. The delightful ritual of re-entering the home after a day at work frequently featured in participants' discourses. Alistair gave this description:

*...you know you could be in the grumpiest mood, absolutely tired from work and when that kid comes up to you and gives you a huge big hug, stands at the door, “daddy's home”, you sort of get a whole burst of energy.*

Being a father was an endless source of delight, watching your children reach milestones, teaching them things such as how to ride a bike or how to toilet themselves. They were simple activities which fathers relished because they were all predicated on the love they had for their children. Fatherhood had opened an emotional realm within participants that seemed to cheer them. Despite the children's demands, parenting was a joyous activity. Rawiri described his delight in his 18 month old by saying “*I don't want her to grow up, I don't want her to be two. I want her to stay like this*”.

Play and entertainment offered fathers another venue in which to delight in parenting. This was a primary component of being a father. As all participants were in their twenties, they all had significant energy to exhaust with their children and doing so delighted them.

Rawhiti: ... *oh we got a circus to go to this weekend. Yeah I, we try to get out as a family as much as possible, just good for us. Wellington and that, my kids just like the lights and the zing, zing, zing. They crack up at like, just being in another town, eh.*

Gareth: *And you see them being happy?*

Rawhiti: *Yeah!*

Gareth: *How does that feel for you?*

Rawhiti: *That's, that's, that's the feeling I want to last forever. Sort of thing, eh, I just want to keep doing it. And the more I can do it, die a happy man.*

It is unsurprising fathers reported their child being on “*centre stage*” (West). Family events were structured around providing children with pleasure. These served to delight not only the child but also the father as he witnessed this. Such activities often consumed large amounts of the father’s time but none reported begrudging it. It also propelled fathers into the consumer economy as they bought fun experiences for their children. In the current epoch (in contrast with their own childhoods), tagging along with dad as he went fishing or visiting was insufficient as father-child time. Peter gave the below example of that attitude to children, one he would not entertain:

*Like I say with dad in the hot rod club that was his thing but also because of that we got to go round the whole of New Zealand so ummmm, it wasn't... All really about him you know! No. Arrr its his hobby, his enjoyment.*

Children were the priority in father-child time, not fathers. That time had to be charged with excitement, it was purchased at movie theatres, pools, fast food restaurants and theme parks. Being emotionally connected was about connecting with them while they did fun things.

### **Good fatherhood is performed within a family**

Participants described fatherhood as best performed within a two parent family, a team in which the adults co-operated to establish a well-balanced loving home. Children, they

stated, required mothers and fathers and it was in their child's best interests if they were raised with constant access to both. Kerry detailed this saying "*I do think as a full package they will come out better off all round, um, just having that mother and father figure being there*". Good fatherhood was depicted as part of a nexus of relationships between oneself, one's partner, and their children. To support this argument participants drew on a notion Schwalbe describes as "loose essentialism" (1996, p. 64), a belief in an internal and unspecific range of differences between the genders. They maintained children in dual parent families were enriched by exposure to both forms of gendered parenting.

The family was depicted as an institution for their child's wellbeing, preserving a loving relationship with one's partner underpinned that. Participants were eager to detail the strong bonds between themselves and their partners. Although families were generally unplanned, a feature typical of low socio-economic families (Cabrera et al. 2000) together they had embarked on the task of raising children and a mutual parental identity was the most nourishing means of performing that. Whenever discussing their operation as a father, participants leavened their conversation with reference to their partner and her contribution to their role as a father. Being a good father obligated men to be good partners. This indirectly nourished one's child, a feature Luke aptly detailed "*loving the mum cause that bounces off to the kid as well, doesn't it*". A happy home made for happy children. Being 'the mother of my children' had enormously more status than being 'my girlfriend'. Maintaining the partnership was vastly more significant now that they were co-parents, Lee-Roy described this when he said it was essential he "*stay inside the circle [family]*". He explicated this: "*don't leave the circle. Never leave the circle meaning don't leave your family through whatever reason or whatever ummm*". He felt being a good father obligated him to be in the family.

For a period West and his partner separated. He was distressed not at being without his partner, but his son being without easy access to both parents. He described this "*there'd be nights where he would fall asleep on the couch, and it was only me and him, just look at him. Didn't feel right, his mother wasn't there*". His sensitivity to his son's needs



heightened his commitment to make the co-parental relationship work. Good fatherhood was best performed within a stable dual parent family. It was part of a “package deal” (Townsend, 2002b, p 30), composed of being a father, being a provider but also being a committed partner.

### **The father-child bond is independent of the co-parental bond**

A significant amount of research in the United States and Great Britain found breakdown in the father-mother relationship was followed by a breakdown in the father-child relationship (Belsky, Fish & Isabella, 1991; Belsky, Youngblade & Rovine, 1991; Carlson & McLanahan, 2004; Coley, 2001; Seltzer, 1991). These findings posit the father-child relationship to be moderated by the father-mother relationship. Even when the parental partnership remains in tact, Uhlmann (2006) found the father-child relationship is mediated by the child-mother-father relationship. Many participants addressed the issue of the independence of their father-child relationship in the course of discussing acrimony between themselves and their partner. Carter gave this issue considerable thought. A year earlier he and his partner had separated for some time. Carter was very clear this break-down had no bearing on his father-daughter relationship:

*It is always the same. Never ever changes. I'm never, you know. Never ever, it's just not, nothing to do with her [daughter], if me and Sandi are, at each other in any way. It's nothing to do with her at all. You know... why should she be punished for that?*

Father-child relationships were described as independent of father-mother relationships. The deeper parental bond mothers were reported to have with children did not eclipse that of fathers during times of co-parental acrimony. Neither were fathers prepared to have their relationship attenuated by co-parental acrimony. Many participants acknowledged the possibility of partnerships break-up. They all speculated their father-child bond would not be undermined were their partnership to break-down, and neither would their child's welfare. Kerry described this:

*But I do believe, if heaven forbid, we did break-up, I don't think they [their children] would ever fall short of anything because they would still have the both of us anyway.*

These findings may seem discordant with the assertion made above, that fatherhood was part of a nexus of relationships which promoted a child's wellbeing. That assertion though, refers to the micro-community formed around the child. Participants maintained if elements within that community were diminished (those between the mother and father), the father-child relationship would not be undermined. I posit it also reflects the high regard emotional bonds have as components of fatherhood. Although fathers have always had strong emotional bonds, the current social construction of fatherhood privileges those bonds and their expression (Lewis, 1985; Townsend, 2002b). Fathers therefore, feel maintaining those bonds through adversity is essential. It must be added, this is only speculation on their part. Despite the depth and strength of their father-child bond, for many men, separation and family break-up is often accompanied by attenuated father-child connections. It is not surprising fathers would pose their paternal bonds would remain uncompromised. Fatherhood was such a pervasive feature of their identity, the thought of it being attenuated was unimaginable.

## **Discussion**

In the early 1980s Bernard (1981) postulated the provider role no longer defined fatherhood but its replacement had yet to emerge. Jackson (1984) argued the nature of that emerging role was essentially nurturant, caring and occupied with child engagement. It was a reversal of the cultural alienation fathers had experienced during the twentieth century (Burgess & Ruxton, 1998). Participants in this study demonstrated their participation in that reversal, moving towards a nurturant fatherhood role, one in which emotional engagement was the paramount activity. Bjornberg and Kollind (1996) speculate that the rise of the nurturant father is constrained by a lack of role models. Participants described drawing on private role models to fortify their conception of good fathering techniques (ref. chap. eight), Bjornberg and Kollind possibly under-estimate the importance of this passive and private exposure. Participants did not discuss public

paternal role models and it is plausible no such role model is tenable. This absence seemed irrelevant to participants, they focused not on models but on the feel-good nature of their father-child interaction. Unbeknownst to them, many of the techniques they drew on were child-rearing practices advocated by authorities such as Biddulph (1988, 2003), Bowlby (1979), Spock (1974) and Parke (1981) amongst others. Exponents of emotional experience and a general culture that advocates the importance of emotional expression (Ehrenreich, 1983) have also validated a fathering approach that focuses on affectionate connections. This suggests the diffusion of these concepts from the middle class amongst whom these ideas are first dispersed, into the working class. Atkinson and Blackwelder (1993) found most child-rearing books are aimed at the middle class (for example, Biddulph, 2003; Burgess, 1997; Lancaster, Mooij & Korn, 2009; Parke, 1981); and members of the working class are likely to encounter them only through contact with middle-class professionals and in the popular media.

Members of the working class were able to encounter common discourses around gender and emotional expression in popular media and everyday life. The gender-revisioning detailed in chapter one and the popularization of overt emotional expression, such as that detailed in chapter two, have provided men with the opportunity to be emotional without being censured. Discussing emotional connections, prioritizing them, is no longer off-limits as the social conventions regarding emotional accounting have been reformulated. That reformulation has allowed them to put their emotional focus upon their children. It has also obliged them to do this if they wish to self-present as good fathers.

The techniques participating fathers used were firstly a powerful connection at the birth and time spent ‘bonding’ with the child thereafter. Clear, caring and open relationships were also prioritized as was respect for a child’s free will. Role modeling, pro-social behaviour and being a regular feature in the child’s life were also used. The goal of these techniques was to promote socially responsible, well adjusted and happy adults; sons and daughters with whom fathers could enjoy a stable caring adult relationship.

Popular discourses such as those detailed by Lupton and Barclay (1997) about the importance of fatherhood were evident in participants' dialogues. Salient in their talk was their conviction that they as fathers played a crucial role in the welfare and long term well-being of their child. They said their child's outcomes could largely be attributed to the nature of their fathering. Participants enacted the social expectation that fathers should be fully involved in the lives of their children (Russell & Bowman, 2000). Palkowitz (2002) notes it is quantity and quality of father-child time which promotes positive outcomes. Fathers demonstrated a commitment to both facets of parent-child contact with their discussion of open and free emotional connection. The importance of fathers was also demonstrated in accounts of mother-child-father interactions. Mothers were depicted as supporting the father-child relationship and unlike other studies (Betcher & Pollock, 1993; Everingham, 1995; Jordan, 1995; O'Hara, 1995) did not attempt to dominate child rearing and family relationships. Participants reported mothers treated paternal input as essential for family life and relinquished the traditional view that fathers were over-whelmingly little more than financial supporters (Bruce, Lloyd & Leonard, 1995).

Participants demonstrate a distinctly working-class form of nurturant fatherhood. Although it maintains what was a long-standing working-class preference for instilling moral codes (Bronfenbrenner, 1958) the means of doing so has changed. Participants prefer to maintain control and instill codes by means of a strong caring relationship, as well as role modeling. The didactic and physical methods noted by past researchers (Bloom-Feshbach, 1981; Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Humphries & Gordon, 1993; Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Mosley & Thomson, 1995) were not advocated by participants. There was a move towards what De Singly (1995) described as a more democratized family; one in which members were treated as equals and the paternal authority overshadowed by paternal love.

Whereas men in higher socio-economic stratum have been described as adopting the nurturant fatherhood model as a means of distancing themselves from anachronistic and politically incorrect male stereotypes (Griswold, 1993), the working-class participants in

this study adopted it as a form of self development which gave them a sense of purpose, well-being and importance. Their form of paternal involvement can be viewed as a calculated use of paternal resources which Coleman (1988) assessed took three different forms: financial, human and social capital. Lacking access to the two former features, fathers in this study concentrated on providing their child with the only resources they had, social capital. They did this by building a loving and strong connection with their child. It is evident in the priority they give “*being there*”, a distinctly working-class concept of paternal input (Waller, 2002). Venkatesh (2006) reasoned as working-class fathers live in hazardous environments and are generally involved in low satisfaction work, they invest heavily in their families because it is the only venue which has potential to provide a positive return. Participants in this study demonstrated this. Their emotional identity was invested in their family and most had no other venues in which to develop their self-identity such as career, civic life or asset management.

Fatherhood allowed an emotional domain to develop within participants, a domain social strictures had made inaccessible to young, working-class, childless males. The experience of paternal affection prompted them to re-construct their internal self-concept, incorporating within it the activity of loving a child. This fuelled the re-scripting of their broader social identity into fathers and members of a family unit. The breadth of this change was evident in the scope of their concerns for their child. They promoted their child’s intra-psychic well-being by forming strong loving bonds with that child. An object of these was to nurture within that child a strong sense of self-value, something participants reasoned would fortify them against nefarious influences. They nourished in their child a sense of right and wrong so as to ensure their social adjustment in later adolescence. In this regard, fatherhood prompted a relationship between themselves and their child, but it also provoked an equally substantial relationship they would experience with themselves. They came to know themselves as emotional agents, able to experience love, concern, caring, tenderness and with a strong sense of their importance in the lives of others.

## Chapter 8: Intergenerational Repair

*I try and give my kids a better life than what I had, anyway.*

(Heta).

For several generations it has been common for fathers to approach parenthood with the intention of improving on the fathering they received (Lewis, 1986). Daly (1993) described this as 'fatherhood self-construction', in this case set against the background of one's own received fathering. The distinguishing characteristic for most participants in this research was their use of their fathers (and some mothers) as parenting anti-models rather than parenting models. Their own parenting practice was a reaction to the negligent or abusive parenting they felt they had received.

For most participants, being a good father involved not merely tinkering with family practices but totally reformulating their family's approach to raising children. They wanted to ensure that the childhood of the next generation was not marred by the abuse and neglect which had marred their own. This mainly involved addressing the conduct of their fathers and ensuring that they resisted a conditioning to parent the way they had. Typically, the participant reported his father had failed to ensure that the children's physical and emotional needs were met. The participants felt that their father's lack of attention to the quality of family life caused their (the participant's) adolescence to be blighted by anti-social adjustment and a lack of personal achievement. By turning around the fathering style of a previous generation, the participants hoped to rid their family of harmful features and ensure their children grew up happy and well-adjusted. This was an attempt to reverse the "intergenerational transmission" of parenting styles that some researchers have noted (Holden & Zambarano, 1992, p. 143). Although middle-class fathers report a similar propensity to intergenerational repair, their 'repair work' tends to focus on tinkering, not totally re-scripting family models (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). Participants in this study centred their parenting operation around re-scripting their fathers' styles. Creating physical and psychological distance between their new family and their family of origin was a means of securing these changes, although many

participants continued to pine for a warm relationship with their father and/or birth family. However, despite their commitment to their children's wellbeing, stress was sometimes able to threaten their good intentions regarding their own parenting style.

### **Fathers were mostly to blame for childhood unhappiness**

Participants held their fathers responsible for most of the unhappiness, poverty and/or abuse they experienced as children. This was not an attribution of blame, more a personal critique. Fathers were reported to have been preoccupied with their own pursuits and to have neglected their children's needs. Participants' criticisms of their fathers were personal and ad hominem. Fathers were described as, among other things, 'selfish' (Kerry), 'brutal' (Heta), 'preoccupied' (Peter), 'weak' (Gene), 'a piss-head wannabe tough guy' (Rawhiti) and 'lazy' (Ben). These criticisms were all tinged with resentment. When explaining them, participants spoke easily, as if telling an oft-repeated story. A participant would eagerly illustrate his father's abuse or neglect with examples that communicated the hurt he had felt as a child. Gene's account below is typical of this. He directly criticises his father for failing to do the right thing. Interestingly, Gene makes no criticism of his father's girlfriend. He supplements his criticism of his father with reference to his own status as a father and his inherent knowledge of how fathers should behave:

*Orh well, when my parents broke up and he was in other relationships and that, he was very easily influenced by what, you know, his partners would say. And I'd, being a father now, specially myself, I know what is more important. My kids are more important than anything else. So, you know, having a partner say "don't go pick up the kids this weekend"... I believe that is quite a dirty thing for a father to do. Not seeing our father for six months at a time. That's just 'coz his girlfriend told him to.*

Typically, a participant would depict his father as a dark figure in his background. Although he himself was now an adult man with a partner and children, when recounting

his childhood experience of his father, it was clear he still carried injuries received as a child.

In contrast, when discussing their mothers' negligence or abuse, participants were forgiving and gracious. Her bad conduct would be ascribed to an affliction such as depression (Rawiri and Sam), stress (Alistair) cultural tradition (Che), an abusive partner (Alistair, Jason) or their own father's lack of support for her (Rawiri, Carlyn). This example is typical:

*She did her best. But, arrr... to a certain extent she didn't know how to handle me.*  
(Carlyn).

Mothers were always described as having done their best. They appeared to be off-limits for harsh censure. Despite the very damaging maternal behaviour that many participants reported (deserting the family, berating the children regularly, using extreme physical punishment, locking children outside for long periods), participants were restrained when critiquing their mothers. When participants spoke of repairing their birth family's behaviour, it was the father's conduct that required re-scripting, not the mother's conduct.

'Reprehensible fathers' and 'pardonable mothers' could be considered a New Zealand cultural motif – although it does appear in other English-speaking societies. Barack Obama invoked it in his 2008 Father's Day speech. Alan Duff drew on it in all of his major works, particularly in "One Night out Stealing" (1992)<sup>1</sup>. During research interviews, the public/private divide became evident when parental negligence or abuse was being discussed. Openly decrying one's father was a legitimate activity which participants engaged in with no sense of shame. Had they chosen to censure their mothers, however, they would have done so in a privacy more secure than could be guaranteed in the research interview situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Jube is conversing with Bill, a member of the Skull Riders biker gang: "His old man hated him, hardly any of 'em hated their mums. Even when she was a bitch, it just ne'er got said" (pp. 149-150)].



All participants expressed a desire to provide their offspring with a higher standard of living than the one they had experienced as children. This has been a common feature of family life since the end of World War II – that is, “giving our children a better life” (Schwartz, 1998, p. 101). However, for the participants in this study, providing a higher standard of living was more than just following a societal trend. It was a reaction to poverty they had experienced as children – a poverty that had, in their belief, resulted from their fathers’ failure to properly care for them.

Growing up in poverty was not reported as being inherently harmful. For Lee-Roy, poverty was merely a stage he experienced while his family coped on one income. Heta spoke fondly of the impoverished conditions he lived in as a little boy. His memories contained highly valued motifs of family connections and making-do with little. Incidentally, all this changed when his father was made unemployed and his family fell apart:

*Ummm... hardly any TV up there [in the northern Tai Tokerau]. All depends where you are, actually. We’d spend most of our time in the bush. That’s where we’d live, bush. My grandmother out there raised me as well. So, yeah. It’s right beside the marae there, by Waitahu Bay. Showered in the, orrr... bathed in the creek. All totally different.*

Poverty resulting from one’s father’s neglect was injurious. Rather than spending his income on his children, he spent it on other things, for example, alcohol:

*But I’d see him drinking every night. Even after work he’d come back home – he’d have a couple of beers, which was all right. He deserved to. He earned a couple of beers after work but in the weekend he was just peeling back, God! At least 24 [750ml bottles]. Dozen a day. He... he was a heavy drinker.*

(Henare).

Or he spent his wages on cigarettes:

*...there was no money for the treats. Arh... my parents were smokers, pack a day man. So most of the money went on smokes. Arh... you know we would get our lunch bought for us every now and then, and lollies every now and then but, other than that, no.*

(Darryl).

Some fathers spent family money on hobbies such as boating:

*Yeah, he loves his luxuries. Like, bought a boat. Ummm... He already had a boat. Didn't really need a new boat but he bought a boat just to try and up-grade himself.*

(Kerry).

Other participants reported their fathers spending the family money on cars and other indulgences. They stated that pursuing these selfish interests had resulted in them and their siblings going without good clothes, good food, toys and domestic necessities. It had also compelled sons to witness their mothers enduring hardship. Participants always held fathers responsible for this negligence. Even though some mothers were reported to have behaved in similar ways, participants preferred not to hold them accountable. For example, Alistair maligned his father and step-father for contributing nothing to his childhood. He gave lengthy accounts of the abuse his mother suffered at their hands. When he described his mother's drinking problem, and the negative effect this had upon him, he did so without making her appear abusive. He tells us that he "*missed my mum*", communicating she was a good person, one whom he loved and missed.

*She had a bit of a drinking problem as well, since she was off to the pub and stuff like that. And I sort of missed my mum. So I started playing up and stuff like that. And then...*

His mother's drinking had contributed to his childhood poverty. Because she was his mother and he missed her, he preferred to focus on his response to missing her. This is understandable given the respect participants awarded mothers.

Participants' accounts of such poverty were heartfelt. Their descriptions of this were animated and detailed. Participants ensured I understood the gravity of these circumstances and the impact on them as children. The key point repeated was that this poverty had resulted from their fathers' not thinking enough about them. Kerry provides the snippet below, typical of the second rate standard of provision these sons reported:

*Dad being as cheap as what he was, like, he'd go to the clothing bin to get us clothes. And so, like, as kids, if we were passing clothing bins, he'd chuck one of us inside and we'd grab hold of clothes and bring them home.*

Recounting such events, participants were prone to express bitterness towards their fathers. Recollection of their fathers' inappropriate priorities was reported as spurring their own commitment to provide for their own children as well as they could. Unlike their own fathers, they ensured their children's needs/wants were met before their own. Doing this went some way towards assuaging the hurt that had resulted from the inadequate provision they had themselves received as children. It was also reported as 'doing what was right'. Good fathers delay their self-interest until their children's needs are met. Rawiri, for example, described viewing expensive car-parts on the internet. He repeats the phrase "one day", indicating he knows he cannot have these precious things at this stage of his life – because he must first meet the needs of his family:

*Pretty much I just go sit on the computer and go eye up all the Falcons and Mustangs there and all the classic cars that I would really love to do up one day. And I look at motor parts and I think to myself, 'one day'. One day I am going to get to do that. One day I am going to have that four forty head sitting in the shed – type of thing. I remember the days when she used to not be able to hold her*

*bottle. And I used to love it. And now she is up. You try to give her, her bottle and she's, "nah, piss off".*

Rawiri refers to his daughter's growing up and developing independence. What this implies is the impermanence of his present total financial commitment to her. One day he would be able to buy these recreational items but for the time being his income had to be spent on his children. Unlike their own fathers, these fathers would prioritise the next generation.

### **Prioritising spending time with your children**

Insufficient provision was not the only kind of neglect that participants reported they had endured as a result of their fathers' parenting style. Participants reported that, as children, they had spent very little time with their fathers – who were preoccupied pursuing their own interests. Peter's father, for example, devoted all his spare time to working on cars and pursuing car interests:

*Ummm... Yes. Yeah, he... he... he... was always home and working hard on his cars. He'd work all day. He'd work all day on his cars, obviously, at work. And doing that, you know, do perk jobs after work. By doing perk jobs, you know, that helped to pay for his new garage, his trip overseas. So ended going, got enough money to go, to America. But yeah... No, we weren't pretty close. He does his thing, we done our thing. He done his, he did what he want to do, in the garage with cars and hot rod clubs.*

He gave a telling account of a family photograph taken when he was a little boy. It shows him and his brother running around a car playing a game, while his father was underneath working on the engine. This epitomized his father's attitude to family life: he would play with his cars and his children would have to play without him.

Other participants told similar stories. Kerry's father would go fishing and shooting, Rawhiti's spent his time at the pub, and Darryl's father mostly watched television. Their

fathers did not allocate time to their children for child-focused activities. They also failed to include their children into their own interests. Kerry explained the only time his father had taken him fishing was when he had “*bawled his eyes out*” in protest at being left behind. Darryl reported with some bitterness his father’s selfish control of the family television “*...and the old man used to, in the lounge, and watch his TV, on his channels which is Channel One. And no teenager wants to watch Channel One*”. He never allowed the children to have their choice, nor would he do anything other than watch television. Participants reported that it seemed their fathers made no accommodation for their children; and that children seemed unimportant features of their lifestyle.

In contrast, participants involved themselves in child-focused activities. Each ensured that he came down to his child’s level to enjoy play activities of the child’s choice. Participants sidelined their own hobbies such as cars, socializing with friends or sport.

*I used to do, ummmm... recreational things like waka-ama, and that sort of thing. Waka-ama, which is like dragon boating, we used to do that. Ummm... with a team. And then you could do it by yourself. Ummm... in... I don’t do it anymore. ‘Coz I just didn’t have enough time.*

(West).

Such pastimes, it was reasoned, could wait until their child was older. When they were resumed, it would be with their child and for the purpose of their mutual pleasure. Participants were delighted to have their child engaging with them in fun activities. Attending child sport was not a chore but a joy. When Peter played ‘Sergeant Slaughter’ with his children it was as much for his enjoyment as for the children’s.

As with their providing quality food, toys, clothes and treats, their centering family life on their children also seemed to heal the pain of the neglect they had suffered as children. It also cemented a strong bond between them and their offspring – a bond that contrasted markedly with the loose connection their own father had had with them. Promoting that

bond was reported as being essential to being a father. Kerry describes this father/child relationship:

*...yeah, just seems to be everything just feels right. And yeah, doesn't remind me anything to do with the past, anything like that. Just, everything is bang on.*

(Kerry).

As participants engaged in active parenting, the potential scope of fatherhood became broader for them. Many hopeful possibilities of father/child relationships began to appear. This highlighted their own fathers' negligent style.

Many participants grew up with no paternal input whatsoever. For them, repairing their fathers' parenting style simply involved being present in their child's life. They all wanted to achieve the same quality of father/child relationship that their co-participants wanted. What distinguished those with no experience of being fathered was their lack of a role model – even a negative role model to react against. Whereas participants who had had fathers could reference their conduct to specific behaviours their father had performed, those without fathers had no reference point. For them, fatherhood was a blank slate. They reported that the absence of a father in their own lives was what had provoked their commitment to their family. Alistair explained this in terms of something he had learnt from his own father, a man whom he had only met once:

*...but the main thing he taught me by not being there was, you know, that I wanted to be there for my kids. And I was gonna be there, hell or high water. I was gonna be there no matter what.*

These fathers displayed as much commitment as those who had grown up with co-resident fathers, albeit, unlike them, they communicated a sense of breaking new ground as fathers.

Osherson(1992) speculated that becoming a father sensitises a man to the emotional wounds he experienced as a child. For the participants in this study, during their mid-to-late teens the childhood wounds were covered over. Parenthood, which Osherson states touches the most tender of human emotions, re-opened these wounds. This is evident in the deep emotional connections with their children that participants describe, in chapter seven, as re-acquainting them with their own childhoods. According to Shapiro et al. (1995), a father sees in his child an image of himself. This 'seeing-as' will highlight any neglect or abuse the father himself sustained. This "father wound" (Pleck, 1995, p. 210) affords men the opportunity to see the preciousness of their charge and to ensure their child suffers no such injury.

### **The effect on a son of neglect by his father**

The participants' commitment to repairing their birth family's poor parenting was partially fuelled by a belief that their own lives had been compromised, and were continuing to be compromised, by that parenting style. Participants identified two major effects their fathers' negligent style had had on their lives. Firstly, they had failed to take opportunities. They wasted time at school and obtained no job qualifications. Secondly, they had wasted much of their youth and early adulthood in anti-social activity. Participants' dialogues were tinged with regret that they could have achieved so much more. Carter knew he was intelligent and that he was capable of university study. His efforts to use his intelligence productively had been thwarted by his bitterness towards his father. His father had deserted his mother twice:

*Carter: And at 16 I should of really been thinking about that sort of stuff, my future. But, na, didn't. Fucking hell!*

*Gareth: Has he[his father] some responsibility for where you are today [in a low-paid job]?*

*Carter: Yep.*

*Gareth: In what way?*

*Carter: Well, in leaving my mum. Fucked me up.*

Gareth: *Okay. How old were you when that happened?*

Carter: *I was seven and fourteen.*

Gareth: *Okay. So he left and came back?*

Carter: *And left again, and came back. Fourteen the last time and that's fucking... Really screwed me over, 'coz mum was just fucking... a mess man! You know? And just sucks, seeing your mum like that. And I don't know, 'coz I was getting goldies [tokens for good behaviour] and everything at school. And then, from then on man, it was just wooorrrr... [makes an arc with a pointed finger moving from above his head towards the floor].*

Reflecting on his wasted time at school and what school could have led to had he tried, Carter says:

*But then, ten years down the track, it's like, "orrr fuck! Why did I waste it?". You know, that was only four years of my life, and I could of, in that four years, I could be...*

Peter also felt he could have had academic success and professional achievement. But his father's unsupportive attitude left him with no direction in life. "*Yeah, my guidance really was none, when I was growing up. Ha ha ha*", he commented, somewhat bitterly. Peter reported that, had his father taken any interest in his school achievements, he would have continued working hard at school and possibly gone on to university. The greatest loss was sustained by Henare. He had gained a professional sports contract while in his teens but forfeited it by emulating his father's irresponsible behaviour.

As well as wanting their children to enjoy academic and social achievement, participants developed a parenting style that, they believed, would steer their children away from anti-social activities. For many, their own youth had been characterized by anti-social conduct and they did not want their children following that path. Many reported acting out their father's behaviour. Like their fathers before them, Henare became a street thug,



Jason became a petty criminal, West became a heavy drinker and Carlyn became a gang associate. Henare gave this account:

*Me mum would tell me “Your father used to go to the pub, get shit-faced, had a fight”. And then, when I first started going to the pub, I got shit-faced and had a fight. Told father stole cars – we’d go steal cars.*

What distinguished every participant from his own father was the swift move out of the anti-social role once he became a parent. Although he did not concede he had modeled himself on his father, he was aware that his own child would model his or her behaviour on his. Fathers of boys were particularly alert to the role model they would provide their sons.

### **Exposure to positive parenting models**

Lamb (1997) found that many men, particularly middle-class men, consciously adopt parenting styles reminiscent of their own father’s style. In contrast, participants in this study generally sought to dispense with their fathers’ parenting style. By doing this they deprived themselves of a viable fathering model. Many reported finding an alternative positive model in the styles enacted by the fathers of friends or relations. Generally, exposure to the alternative father model persisted throughout their childhood and adolescence. They reported that, when they became parents, they drew on these alternative father models. Other participants, with no access whatsoever to a plausible father model, tended to use their mother as a model. However, as Daly (1993) reminds us, motherhood is not a good model for fatherhood.

Gene reported that, as a teenager, he had been envious of a particular friend whose parents were “*very active in their kid’s life*”. As an adult father, he modeled himself on his friend’s parents – and aspired to have a family like theirs. That early exposure attuned him to what he wanted in a family. Henare told a similar story. Below, he describes one father/son relationship he witnessed:

*Yeah. I'd a friend of mine, we used to go, like, his father would do, like, just say "Dad, my bike's broken", "Okay, I'll show you how to fix it". Show him how to fix it.*

Below is another example provided by Henare. It stemmed from a friend's having told him about his father's helping him to make a kite:

*I would see that and be real jealous. And then I go back and, like, used to be "orhh, my dad can do this, you know? My dad can do that". But I could only have a limited say, and saying "orhh, my dad does this". But when I got, as I got older and I had..., my mate goes, "orh, my dad's got this bloody car". [I] used to make up lies. Like, I'd say, "my dad gonna get this big flash car". But he wasn't. Or, "my dad, ummm... gave five guys a hiding the other night". Just stupid stuff like that. But I was only saying it so I didn't feel jealous of everyone else's life; like, their fathers, they were doing cool stuff.*

Once he became a father, Henare attempted to engage with his son in a manner similar to that exemplified by his friend's father. He had totally rejected his own father's style.

Some participants reported growing up in very deprived social environments. These milieux provided little exposure to positive fathering models. Their own family's lifestyle limited exposure to positive role models – both passively, for example, through contact with neighbours or friends, and actively, in church communities, marae, social gatherings and suchlike. The men who came into their homes were reported to have been abusive and disengaged. Participants with such backgrounds were unable to identify themselves with positive models. There was no uncle or friend's father that they could use as a template for well-adjusted fathering. Jason provides a case in point. His father was a career petty criminal, his stepfathers were physically abusive. None of them had a job. His natural uncles were unavailable as they had fallen out with his mother. Uncles who had married into the family were drunks. His older brother was mentally unwell. Jason misbehaved at school and developed no positive relationships with any of his teachers.

He grew up in a depressed rural town that had a disproportionately large number of welfare beneficiaries, particularly mothers without partners. Most had re-located to the area when market rates for state houses had increased the cost of rental accommodation in larger urban centres (Waldegrave & Stuart, 1997). In his family and in the wider social environment, the likelihood of Jason's engaging with positive adult male role models was greatly reduced.

Some reported using their father-in-law as a model. Alistair was clear about his father-in-law's importance for his own parenting:

*I want to be... mmm... just not, just... I don't know... how do you say, successful? Not only financially successful, ummm... Just to be that person people look up to, my kids look up to, and go, "hey wow", you know, like I said before, "dad worked all his life" and stuff like that. 'Coz you see, ummm... Dad, or Heather's dad, who I'm really super-close with now. He, ummm... probably filled that gap. You know, all dads are there, we do everything together. We go fishing, ummm... have heaps of fun and we are just really, really close. And probably more 'mates' than father and son-in-laws, sort of thing.*

His father-in-law welcomed Alistair into his family and provided a father model for him.

The most deprived participants were those, as mentioned above, who had grown up with no exposure to positive role models in any form and whose partner's family afforded them none. Acrimonious in-law relationships could also produce this situation. Rawiri fell into this most-deprived category (he grew up in the same town as Jason and came from the same extended family). He was very much alone in his efforts to be a good father. As determined as he was to re-draft his family script, the resources with which he attempted that task were very limited – due to his social isolation.

Mothers offered participants a potential parenting role model. Most participants reported their mothers were committed parents who prioritised their children and maintained

loving relationships with them. However, that role model was not portable across gender. It could be used as a guide for parenting generally – including such tasks as cooking or changing nappies – but not as a guide for the gender-specific activity of fathering. Doing ‘fatherhood’ was thought of as being quite different from doing ‘motherhood’. Nathan’s mother, realising this, arranged for him to spend time with local father figures:

*I never knew what it was like to have a father. My mother went out of the way to find other people to contribute little pieces to my life. Like a few friends, family friends, that would take me hunting or fishing – do the guy things.*

As beneficial as that input was, it never covered the paternal deficit that Nathan reported. A father’s omissions were more memorable than a mother’s commissions. Darryl, for example, spoke bitterly of his father’s failure to attend any of the sporting or cultural activities he participated in.

*He never came to any of our school things or anything like that. He didn’t really care about, teachers or parent teacher evenings or, I can. ‘Coz my sister and I had quite a bit to do with the school shows. He never came to those. I think the only school thing that he came to was our leaving ceremonies and that was about it. And even at primary school, intermediate, he didn’t come to anything of those either.*

Probing revealed that his mother had attended everything. Despite her having (typically) a loving and measured parenting style, an active mother never seemed to compensate for the lack of an active, engaged father. This attitude of the participants preserves the gendered construction of the industrial/nuclear family. Demands are made of the parent according to his or her gender, not according to the needs of the child.

### **How participants explained their fathers’ parenting styles**

Participants attributed their respective father’s style to three factors – character, ignorance or tradition. Most attributed the parenting style to character – to the father’s selfishness or meanness of spirit. Kerry described his father as ‘always wanting to be number one’. On

the other hand, Gene thought of his father as simply ignorant: “*he just didn’t know how to be a father*” he said. The third criticism could be interpreted as being a ‘sociological’ criticism. Effectively, participants were identifying their fathers’ parenting style as a socio-cultural artifact, a historical activity. The child-rearing techniques the father used were, participants said, typical of family practices employed in the 1970s and 80s. Participants maintained, however, that society had moved on since then, so those techniques needed to be discarded and new, more socially appropriate ones formulated. Children had now become the focus of the family. The identification of the father’s parenting style as a cultural artifact was most common in connection with the use of physical discipline and the viewing of children as tag-ons.

Physical discipline was depicted as an artifact of a bygone era. Pohatu encapsulated this point by saying, “*Orhh... I, sort of, when I grew up... still in the times with ‘we get a boot up the arse’, ay?’*”. By describing this practice as belonging to a past era, he was categorising it as no longer tenable. He thus avoided interpreting this form of discipline as malicious. Fathers in those times did not intend harm. They merely enacted a behavioural code that was legitimate in that period. Although all participants admitted using small measured doses of physical discipline themselves, their preferred techniques were behavioural. A sizable number reported watching the television programme “The Nanny” (Powell, 2004) as a means of learning behavioural parenting techniques. Good behaviour, they said, would also be promoted by a warm loving relationship with their child. On the rare occasions behavioural methods were supplemented by physical techniques, the latter were restrained. For example, Heta had smacked his children but, he stated, unlike his father, “*never with a closed hand*”.

The concept of children being mere appendages to the father’s identity was also considered to be a social anachronism. The participants had certainly not felt they had been central in the father’s lifestyle. It was a matter of the children tagging along when he went to his hot rod meet, or to his jet boat race – not him taking them to see the hot rods or watch the jet boat races. Gene said:

*My father was always... If he was, if we were home, if we went out doing something he wanted to do, like, I was never into fishing or hunting... That's all we ever did. Only 'father only' time we had was if he'd take us fishing or hunting. Doing his own thing. And if we ever were home, not doing that, he was always home out the back doing, once again, his own thing – building something, or building something in the shed, or off hunting with mates and we'd be at home with mum.*

In contrast, participants sought to engage with their children in activities of the children's choice. Homes were described as child-centered, weekends were planned around occupying children, and surplus money was spent on entertaining them or equipping them with practical skills, such as swimming or cycling. Rawhiti explains why he spends time with his children:

*Rawhiti: 'Coz my dad was never there for me. I just, you know, I just wanna try and do things that I wish my dad could have done... when, when he was fit enough.*

*Gareth: And why did he not?*

*Rawhiti: 'Coz he had mates that come before his family.*

This move to child-centered homes and child-centered fatherhood was described as an appropriate adjustment to modern parenting. It promoted the child's welfare and improved family life. Engaging with children was also described as a great source of enjoyment – not only because it was the right thing to do but because it felt good. Sam explains why he liked watching children's movies with his two children.

*It's bonding time. I enjoy it and you're sitting there and you got one here and one there. It is just nice and relaxing. It just good bonding time I guess.*

Children were not described as impinging on a father's free time. Participants reported preferring, when they were not working, to be with their children doing things their children wanted. Henare summarized this attitude.

*I... only time I ever spent time with my father is doing things he liked to do. And so it is just, I suppose, I always wanted to be a good parent. And Cherryl is a very good parent. And together we just try and keep them [the children] happy and entertained.*

Giving one's children full attention and arranging one's life style around them was the modern approach to fatherhood. Participants rejected styles they considered to be anachronistic. Those styles had proved ineffectual. They developed and shaped their parenting style to suit modern beliefs.

### **Atavism**

It is important to note these turnarounds in behaviour were not decisive. Participants voiced their ideals of appropriate family life and appropriate fathering but admitted they failed to maintain them at times. At times they reverted to their father's inappropriate behaviour. Although they were psychologically committed to repairing their family's parenting style, when stressed by financial pressures, partnership difficulties or domestic demands, participants were liable to regress to parenting practices they had thought they had discarded. This unplanned appearance of a trait thought eliminated can be called an atavism. When they de-compensated, their father's idiographic style was the default position. Participants stressed that these atavisms were aberrations from their newly-adopted parenting practice. A sense of déjà vu struck participants when they found themselves enacting paternal behaviour they had consciously rejected. Alistair noted this:

*I was stressed out and stuff like that. I was getting grumpy. Grumpy at them [children]. Grumpy at Heather. And stuff like that, which was part I had to work on. Ummm, because, sort of... In reflection I seen, could see I was being... Things I would say would remind me of Bob [stepfather]. And stuff like that, which would*

*not, not... No physical harm. I'd say something and it would be like, 'I've heard that before somewhere'.*

Alistair realized it was his stepfather's derisive mantra he was repeating to his children.

To manage this tendency, participants employed coping strategies. For example, Heta left the house whenever he felt the urge to use violence. When participants found their resolve weakening they sought to make amends and acknowledge their behaviour had been objectionable. Kerry sometimes found himself the pawn of his father's unpleasant parenting style but he always sought to make amends.

*A lot of things I do now, I think back and 'Shit, did my dad do this? Did I like it?'.  
No, no I didn't like it. I go up and I definitely apologise to Jazmin or Jordhan.  
And just try and move on and do something different.*

With time and practice, however, they eliminated their atavistic propensities. For Rawhiti, absconding to the pub with his friends was something he had done when he was young and stressed. Nearly seven years of stable family life since then had enabled him to fully re-script the code he had learnt from his father.

As Alistair states above, atavism was strongly associated with stress. McLeod, Kruttschnitt and Dornfield (1994) found stress increases the likelihood of severe discipline and authoritarian parenting. For participants, their self-formulated styles were overridden by a method they had learned very early in their life. A novel parenting style increases the stressfulness of parenthood (Olsson, Jannsson & Norberg, 1998). While formulating their own style of parenting, participants had to simultaneously dispense with another. But participants had the advantage of tackling these tasks early in their lives. Main, Kaplan and Cassidy (1985) found that attempts to re-script relationship styles in late adolescence or early adulthood were far more successful than attempts to do so in later life. With that in mind, the typical working class practice of early child rearing can



be seen as an adaptive pro-family activity. It can greatly assist parents with re-scripting and securing adaptive child-rearing techniques.

### **Distancing the birth family to limit intergenerational transmission**

It has been a longstanding tradition for men to gravitate towards their partner's family and clip contact with their birth family (Uhlmann, 2006). This process was intensified by a technique many participants adopted. Having formulated a novel parenting style, participants avoided factors that would threaten it, particularly input from their family of origin, if that input was seen to be destructive. Participants sought to limit contact with their birth family by creating either psychological or physical distance. Despite this recourse, most still pined for a warm and supportive relationship with the birth family, nevertheless sensing they could never have it.

Physical distance was easily achieved. Several participants re-located from other regions to be away from deleterious family connections. Several Maori participants left one tribal area for another as they considered family practices in that destination to be more child-friendly and pro-family. This was despite the importance Maori place on whanau (Walker, 2006). West described the nature of his northern family connections: *"It's not right. It's not right to bring kids up round those days (of boozing, fighting, abuse of women)"*. By moving to an area where he could blend into his partner's family, he diminished the risk of his own negligent upbringing harming his family. Heta made a similar assessment of child-rearing practices in his tribal homeland: *"Up there they are hard, down here you pretty much get away with anything down here"*.

When Rawiri's birth family relocated to Taranaki, Rawiri made little effort to maintain contact:

*Arrh no, and I just... Yeah. So I go and see them every now and then. Let her... Like, we are going up there next week. We were supposed to go up there this week, but they are up in Taranaki. Yeah, good. Bit of distance. Yeah, ummm... and, yeah, it is just added stress that I don't want to cope with. You know? It is*

*just added things. You know? Me and Sharleen, we are making our life here and we don't want... I mean, yeah, it is a bit rude. It's a bit unsympathetic to say, "Orrh, we want nothing to do with your fellas' problems". But we don't! You know? I mean... I don't want my kids going [makes 'crazy' sign by turning finger next to temple].*

Although his children would be deprived of a grandmother and aunties, Rawiri felt they would have a more balanced childhood overall. Rawiri's object was to ensure not only that he did not impart his birth family's propensity for family crisis; but that his mother and siblings were unable to impart it. For many participants, the birth family offered them few reasons for contact.

Participants also promoted psychological distance from their family of origin. This involved limiting contact which would normally be considered customary in better-adjusted families. Visits at birthdays, Christmases and anniversaries were all limited, with the intention of reducing parental influence. Contact was rare and excuses were often found to explain why family members would be unavailable for a visit. Peter gave this explanation of his lack of contact:

*Gareth: Do you see your parents much?*

*Peter: My own parents? No, not a lot. 'Coz my dad's wife, new wife, she has got kids coming out of her bloody ears. There is about 15, 16 grandchildren, yeah. There is just kids everywhere. We don't go to there, Christmases. It is just so... It is just too intense. We like... We like family – her [his wife's] side of the family.*

Kerry gave a similar account of his intended relationship with his father:

*Kerry: I am slowly pushing him away.*

*Gareth: Are you?*

*Kerry: Slowly pushing him away.*

The family became a “haven in a heartless world” (Lasch, 1977, p. 1), a haven from outside society but also from one’s original family.

Despite their intentions to create and maintain distance from their family of origin, participants lamented being unable to call on it for support and also for the pleasure of familiar company. They knew this kind of contact was not possible. The powerlessness they had experienced as children had persisted into adulthood: they could not change their father’s (or mother’s) nature. Nathan fostered a relationship with his absent father’s sisters and mother but continued to lament his father’s omission from his family life. As scathing as Rawiri was of his own father, saying, “*My father is just a fuck’n useless cunt*”, he also mulled over the prospect of visiting his father in an effort to develop a relationship with him:

*Yeah. Umm... I’ve been saying it to [gestures towards partner]... I’ve actually been saying it quite a bit lately. We should show up there, just show up there, bowl up round. But, yeah, it’s just one of those things. I mean, if it... It would be quite amusing. I could see a lot of amusing things happening.*

Participants knew the value of a father’s input. They seemed to continue to lament the absence of a loving and caring father.

## **Discussion**

Intergenerational repair was described by participants as a means of removing deleterious parenting styles from their family dynamic. Its object was to promote the developmental welfare of their children and preserve the wellbeing of their own and partners’ co-parental relationships. Participants intended to improve upon the parenting they themselves had received. It was clear that participants had given considerable thought to this issue. They felt a primary task of their parenting was to shield their own children from the negativity of a previous generation, a negativity they had known only too well. The tangible aspects of intergenerational repair were easy to effect. Prioritising domestic needs over personal wishes and time spent with one’s children was relatively simple and

required little personal effort to maintain. Meeting the psychological demands of parenting was more difficult – hence the tendency to atavism in regard to father-child interactions. Participants’ attempts to formulate pro-child parenting techniques were hampered by their limited parenting repertoire. They had limited means of expanding that repertoire. Erickson and Gecas (1991) found that education had a very liberalizing effect on parents. Not only does a high level of education encourage parents to relax strict parenting codes and behavioural demands, it also provides greater access to pro-social parenting discourses. Participants’ eagerness to adopt effective alternatives to their birth family’s style was evident in the large portion who watched the television series ‘The Nanny’ in order to acquire new parenting techniques. But it continues to be those in higher socio-economic stratum who, on account of their higher education level, have the greatest exposure and access to effective and innovative parenting practices (ibid). That advantage is increased given that most child-rearing material is aimed at middle-class consumers (Atkinson & Blackwelder, 1993). Participants were conscious of parenting techniques they believed would promote their child’s social development. A number had adopted the “project of the child” (Verheyen, 1987) as a means of securing that development. This adoption of an originally middle-class parenting technique, demonstrates Young and Willmot’s (1973) principal of Stratified Diffusion; the diffusion of personal conduct styles from the upper socio-economic strata downwards to the lower socio-economic strata. Those participants who demonstrated it conveyed the belief nourishing their child’s sense of achievement would ensure they made greater use of their capacities. This was particularly so for those who felt their own lack of achievement could be attributed to their father’s neglectful parenting style.

Daly (1993) proposed that parental self-concepts are formulated using two types of social exposure. Primary exposure was via ‘vertical linkage’ (p. 209) to one’s father. I propose this vertical linkage concept can plausibly be expanded to include fathering practices amongst uncles, grandparents, fathers of friends and fathering-type behaviour amongst adult men (for example, teachers, church people, employers, kaumatua). The other type of exposure, according to Daly, is ‘horizontal linkage’ (p. 209) with peers who are parents, with one’s partner, with siblings who are parents and with the social construction

of parenting at that time. A number of participants drew on their exposure to alternative models but, overall, there were few references to this. For many participants, their father's style was part of a generalized family attitude. Uncles and older cousins were unlikely to provide viable models. Horizontal linkages were limited as, once they became fathers, many participants chose to limit association with peers. Generally fathering did not originate as a cohort activity. No participant spoke of making connections with other fathers at kindergartens or at childcare centres. Whereas women are prone to cement connections with other mothers (Torr, 2003), the fathers in this research project did not connect with other fathers. This combination of circumstances severely hampered participants' exposure to positive fathering. Thus their techniques of choice were largely self-formulated. This lack of exposure to desirable models could be indicative of the decline of social life and community exchange in first world nations (Lane, 2000; Perry, 2002; Putnam, 2000). As families and family members reduce their engagement with institutions and societies outside of the home, so their level of inter-personal contact with non-family members decreases. Children raised in such homes are less likely to be exposed to comparable and contrasting parenting styles. This lack of exposure can limit their ability to self-formulate a parenting style which is a viable alternative to the one their parents enacted.

Creating psychological distance from one's birth family served to encourage the new father's identity formation. It also curtailed their children's exposure to negative and harmful family practices. There was a downside to this. Working-class families have been noted for their high level of kin contact (Lamont, 2000; Lareau: 2003; Newsome et al. 2008; Rubin, 1994; Wilmott, 1963). This is particularly so for Maori, who place great importance on whanau connections (Walker, 2006). Frequent contact compensates for deficits in material resources. Family members can provide childcare assistance, contributions in kind and moral support. This support leads to a greater capacity to deal with stressful events (Koeske & Koeske, 1990; Newsome et al. 2008) and leads to lower levels of psychological stress all round (Pierce, Sarason & Sarason, 1996). Positive support is associated with reduced likelihood of harsh parenting and increased incidence of nurturing behaviour (Belsky & Vondra, 1989). Although the curtailing of contact with

one's birth family limits exposure to stressful relationships, it also deprives these young families of an important support network. As a result, the new family becomes increasingly nuclear. In times of stress they have few long-standing bonds to call on. This course of action can be viewed as a gender-specific response. Uhlmann (2006) argues that women, having more refined and sensitive relationship skills, are able to repair, maintain and nourish relationships with family members, thereby maintaining them over time. Being males, our participants tended to lack such skills and many just terminated contact as a means of coping with relationship difficulties and limiting exposure to harmful family practices.

Horizontal linkage (Daly, 1993) also includes access to the social construction of childhood. Participants' intentions to improve on their birth family's parenting style can be partly attributed to the changing status of children. Children's social standing has progressively increased over the last 100 years (Zelizer, 1985). According to Nippert-Eng (1996), the falling birth rate has concentrated the personal resources that parents put into their children, including the amount of emotional energy that they focus on each child. Lewis (2000) reasons that, as men are now expected to approach fathering with the intention of doing the best they can for their children, both self-critiquing and rigorous critiquing of one's birth family are necessary. Participants alluded to the changes that had occurred in their own lifetimes, in children's cultural importance. Whereas they themselves had been add-ons to the previous generation's leisure pursuits, their own children were integral in family leisure activities.

A distinction must be made between the child-centred approach that participants in this study adopted and the parenting practices that Doherty describes as a "consumer culture of childhood" (cited in Aird, 2002, p. 22). Under the latter regime, money and consumer purchases substitute for parent-child time. Parents are free to pursue their adult interests. Aird suggests this is generally a professional career. She criticises this consumer-substitution regime as obviating the teaching of morals and socialisation. The satiating of children's material wishes is inadequate compensation for having had their emotional needs neglected. However, research participants did engage their children in consumer

culture. They did this not in order to occupy the children but to witness their delight. This seemed to somehow ameliorate the neglect and abuse they had themselves experienced as children.

Intergenerational repair was a means by which participants promoted the welfare of the next generation. A substantial amount of research and media attention has focused on family cycles of abuse and neglect. In contrast, father-initiated attempts to expunge deleterious practices from a family repertoire have received little consideration. The depth of emotional connection with their children was the focal reason participants set about improving their parenting styles. Factors which promote the expression and performance of that connection are, therefore, crucial in helping men become committed and effective fathers.

## Chapter 9: Good fathers provide for their family

*Probably just being there for them is probably more important but, in saying that, it's no use being there for them if you are living in a tent, or a cardboard box. It's sort of hard one. I wouldn't say it's first but it is probably first equal sort of thing.*  
(Alistair).

Participants described fatherhood as primarily an emotional connection with their child. A corollary of that connection was the obligation to provide for their family. This has been a dominant discourse of male parenting for all of the twentieth century (Townsend, 2002b; Warin, Solomon, Lewis & Langford, 1999). Although some researchers argue its importance has decreased (Bernard, 1981; Creighton, 1999) others argue that it remains the most visible means by which men can demonstrate their commitment to being a good father (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998). Although it was not the core element of our participants' accounts— that was the emotional relationship – providing was part and parcel of their concept of good fatherhood. In the early period of a child's life, it was the counterpart to a mother's fulltime care-giving. When participants learnt they were to be a father, it was the 'provider' discourse they took up. As potential fathers, this was the most accessible and demonstrable social discourse they could espouse. Participants felt that, to be a good father, they had to establish an independent family household, one that they could sustain by their own efforts. Because of their limited skills and low wages, financial hardship was always a concern and often a reality. Providing for them has a particular meaningfulness. Low-skilled, low socio-economic status men have a propensity to display a strong sense that their providing underpins the material well-being of their family (Sayers & Fox, 2005; Nelson & Smith, 1999). Financial difficulty had the potential to compromise their sense of being a good provider although they were clear about its not compromising how they felt about their child. Participants did not feel it was necessary to achieve a middle-class lifestyle in order to qualify as a good provider. They were comfortable with their socio-economic status. What was most important was their emotional relationship with their child. Being a good provider was a public



demonstration of their commitment to their child's welfare. As well, their ability to provide contributed substantially to their self-assessment as fathers.

### **Good fathers provide for their family**

Providing for your family was described as a means of expressing love and commitment. Although 'loving' was prioritized by participants, providing was considered by them to be a requirement. Being the provider made them feel more successful as fathers. For example:

*Yeah that's...[being the provider]. I reckon that is an important role. Now that I am earning an income, yeah. It makes me feel a bit better.*

(Robert).

It was a social demonstration of one's commitment to one's family. Henare said what distinguished a father from other adults in a child's life, was the fact that a father provides. But he makes a point of adding that, although this may be what a father does, it is not identical with the father role:

*Gareth: What does a father do that is different from, say, what an uncle or an aunty or grandfather might do?*

*Henare: Umm... provide for him. But now I know I gotta provide for his life as well as mine and Cherryl. I'm having to go to work, to, bring in, you know... put food on the table. Ummm... put clothes on his back. They are just all the little, the small things. I don't see it as... I'm... that's my role as a father. 'Coz there is more, the way I see it, there is more, right? There is teaching him right and wrong.*

Participants found it very difficult to unpack the relationship between loving one's children and providing for them. Work was described as a symbolic performance of their parental duty – it was a counter-part to their partner's domestic care-giving. Motherhood was a passive status that women were accorded regardless of how they cared for their

child. By contrast, fatherhood was performative, something men had to ‘enact’ – and providing was part of that enactment. For a father, the act of loving was complemented, but not defined, by providing. Rawiri described this by saying, “*Yeah it is just one of those things. Ummm... Can’t explain... I mean, when I look at them I’ve gotta... I know it’s my job to make sure they are healthy, they are fed, they are happy*”. There was an undeniable material dimension to being a loving father and it was expressed in work. Work ensured provision and provision demonstrated love and commitment.

Whenever they described the importance of providing, participants qualified it with reference to emotional engagement. We see this above in Rawiri’s reference to his children being ‘happy’. For all participants, to describe fatherhood solely in terms of provision would be a misconception.

Gareth: *You seem to have had a strong feeling that providing is a big part of being a dad. Is that correct?*

Pohatu: *Yeah. I know there is other areas to focus on as well but, you know, I am trying to do those sorts of things as well, too. Like interacting with the kids themselves, at the same time be really tired [from work] and try to do it yeah.*

Despite being essential to the family’s welfare, providing was reported as a ‘colourless background’ to the act of fathering. Specific acts of provision were a source of pride but being the provider warranted little kudos per se. It was detailed as the natural course of action participants took once their partner conceived. That naturalness meant it deserved no special consideration or accolade.

Jason described his sense of being the family provider as “*feels like nothing*” – a reflection typical of the participants. Although it dominated their accounts of preparation for fatherhood, once their child was a year old, being the breadwinner quickly merged into the tapestry of their lives. Fathers seemed to treat providing as an activity tangential to their father status yet, paradoxically, still important to it. This feature could be specific to this population’s circumstances. All had jobs with low or nil status. None had any

formal qualifications and their work offered them little or nothing in terms of fraternity. None spoke of any sense of job satisfaction. Possibly, their disregard for the activity of providing was reflected in their disregard for their jobs.

Participants were nevertheless proud of their ability to support their family by supplying the domestic necessities. It was common for them to detail these. Pohatu's list was typical: *"...bloody roof over their head, full tummy, ummm... good clothes and good, good school bags and that to go to school with"*. Che expanded on this, with: *"...getting the kai and the petrol to last to the next pay. And just the income, ay, just getting enough to pay the food and power and stuff, and just keeping a roof over our head"*. Providing such things was described as an on-going accomplishment. This was not hubris but rather a personal and internal sense of doing the right thing. Rudimentary as it seemed to them, meeting the needs of their family was a substantial achievement for these men. Kerry reported that his providing *"...makes me feel like a father should feel, in aspects of supporting your family and just having everything there"*. It also demonstrated to the wider world that he was a capable provider. It was a legitimate source of pride:

*Gareth: Are there limitations on your ability to provide right now?*

*West: Ummm... probably not to some scale. I mean, if he wanted to fly to the moon, it's something I couldn't do for him. But if it's buying raffle tickets for his playcentre, yeah, we can do that for him. I feel proud of that. Umm... yeah.*

*Probably not... We can take to the doctor if he falls ill and that sort of thing. We can buy him a pair of shoes if he wants them. Not that he wants them but, if he needs them... I feel comfortable. Mmm...*

Although supplying utilities was essential, buying one's children lollies or toys gave fathers instant and memorable delight. Sam illustrates this:

*I went to The Warehouse on Friday to get a bike pump, end up getting a bike pump and two matchbox cars. Taken Kaylyn with me and he chose a car and he wanted to get a car for Chelsea, so that was two cars. That's another five bucks...*

*It does feel good, though. Take them out and let them choose a car and he's all happy. And he is real well behaved and that. And he takes it up and pays for it and that.*

Being a good provider involved ensuring that one's children had all their basic needs met. It also meant being sometimes able to splash out on treats and then connecting with the children as they expressed delight.

### **Fathers provide, mothers care**

Providing was considered a gendered activity. Just as Peel (2003) found in working class Australian communities and Sayers and Fox (2005) noted amongst American truck drivers, being the family provider was primarily a male discourse. The gendered nature of that discourse had a strong bearing upon how a large number of the participants conceived of their practical contribution to domestic routines and household chores. This feature is discussed in chapter eleven. Financial pragmatics promoted the male-provider/female-caregiver dichotomy. Although participants were largely unskilled and held low-level jobs, they reported their earning power to be greater than their partner's. The construct of a genderised labour force, established in the early part of the Industrial Revolution (Nichols & Oxley, 1994) was maintained in this lower stratum of society. Even if the couple were to place their child in child-care so that the mother could work, her limited income would barely offset child-care costs. Earlier generations had used family members as substitute caregivers while mothers worked (Wilmott, 1963). A handful of participants in the present study had in-laws who lived locally. In some cases, where relations with these relatives were positive, the latter provided child-care, enabling the participant's partner to work. Overall, however, the possibility of such arrangements has been greatly reduced. Nowadays, the older women relatives most competent to provide childcare are more likely to be working themselves. Increased family relocation and less goodwill across extended family both mean that such arrangements with relations are less likely. Generally speaking, it made best economic sense for mothers to remain at home until their children had been at school for some time. Below, Pohatu compares the value of his labour to that of his partner's labour.

Gareth: *Why does it fall on your shoulders to provide?*

Pohatu: *Well, 'coz I was of a higher pay rate, I suppose.*

Gareth: *Is that it?*

Pohatu: *Well, I knew my limits were probably... probably higher than hers in the work force. Hers is probably higher in the kitchen. But, yeah... I, I was able to do more overtime, and I did.*

This earning advantage was increased when a father improved his skill level and received a minor promotion. There were more work opportunities for low-skilled males than for low-skilled females. Participants also reported themselves to be more physically capable than women of doing taxing shift-work which, although exhausting, paid higher rates. Four participants worked graveyard shifts from six PM to six AM. This work regime paid a twenty percent premium. To participants, it seemed only natural that men should adopt 'providing' as the mainstay of their paternal identity.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, working-class mothers have worked. Because of the prosperity in the post-World War II period their income was more often considered to 'provide jam for the bread' (Yudkin & Holme, 1963, p. 45) rather than family sustenance. In contrast, middle-class women at that time were likely to stay at home (Gerson, 1993; Wandersee, 1981; Yudkin & Holme, 1963). Participants indicated that this arrangement had altered. While their children were young, most participants preferred a traditional family format, with a non-earning mother. This offered them greater family stability despite their forfeiting the second income. Te Huia explains why his partner did not work:

Te Huia: *Arh... Nah... Nah... they got everything they need and want. Georgina, like she said, she spoils them rotten. Yeah. No, they wouldn't benefit from that, ay? Like... 'coz we could have more money easily.*

Gareth: *How?*

Te Huia: *Georgina working, for starters. I told her to stay home. She wants to go*

*and work but I would rather her stay home and have a nice hot tea when I get home from work.*

The traditional family arrangement offered participants a well known security. It required no self-formulation. Its roles were prescribed and obvious. Lee-Roy expressed his preference for this traditional structure. He provided strong gender-based reasoning to legitimize it:

*Ummm... Just feel like that's the motherly/fatherly thing does. You know, father goes out, he does the work, kind of thing. Gets the income while the wife stays at home – cleans the house, looks after the house. That's her job, kind of thing – you know, the kids.*

Most participants involved their partner in the 'providing' activity by enacting the "whole-wage-packet system" (Pahl, 1989, p. 51). That is, they handed their entire wage packet over to their partner for her to manage. This displayed their commitment to working as a partnership.

### **Kick-starting the provider role**

The standard response to being informed that one's partner was pregnant was to set about providing for the expected baby. The providing relationship therefore preceded a physical or emotional relationship with the child. Ben describes this:

Gareth: *When you were told you were going to be a dad, how did that feel?*

Ben: *Ummm... is that at first? Probably more of a shock. 'Coz at the time I didn't have a job. Just for a couple of months.*

Gareth: *Why is that important?*

Ben: *You got to feed them and... yeah.*

Ben's obligation to provide was taken up immediately. This was the most accessible fatherhood discourse he could draw on. Later, emotional issues would dominate his

experience of fatherhood but, at the pre-partum stage, the participant focused on the practical activity of providing. 'Providing' meant providing for both the baby and their domiciled partner. Even before discussing it with their partner, participants envisaged themselves working and their partner remaining at home with the baby. Darryl makes a point of stating he would support his partner 'all the way':

*Gareth: How did it feel when Kristin told you she was pregnant?*

*Darryl: It was a bit of a shock. But arrh... yeah, I wasn't going to go anywhere in a hurry. I said that I would support her all the way so, arrh, to me it did, yeah... And also financially and emotionally and all that. I mean, it wasn't that, just because she told me she was pregnant, I wasn't gonna go, 'oh, okay, see you later'.*

No other options were mooted by participants. Being the sole provider was depicted as a natural family arrangement. West summarizes this:

*Gareth: Why doesn't she work full time and you stay around the house?*

*West: Ummm... never thought of it in that way. Yeah.*

*Gareth: How come?*

*West: Ummm... don't actually know, to be honest. I suppose it comes down to just, yeah, 'the male's always got to work'. It is not always the main factor. That's the way we feel.*

Procuring necessities for the expected baby was the first opportunity that participants had to demonstrate themselves as providers. Being involved in buying, for example, a pram, cot, capsule or clothing, indicated an expectant father's sense of responsibility. It was also a public statement of commitment, one which was not unmanly:

*Gareth: Were you involved in getting all those things ready for your family?*

*Darryl: Very much so.*

Gareth: *Did you enjoy it?*

Darryl: *Yep, yep.*

Darryl went on to detail what he wanted in a pram. Being involved afforded fathers an opportunity to create the circumstances they wanted for their child. Lee-Roy describes this, referring specifically to “*matching stuff*” but also his wish to be extravagant and indulgent:

Lee-Roy: *And we just more or less splashed out on my first daughter. A pram and all this, the clothes and.. Orh, we had everything. You know? Matching stuff and, yeah.*

Gareth: *So you were involved in all that?*

Lee-Roy: *Yeah, yeah... buying her all this stuff and getting her all this stuff. We weren't even saving. We were just, get paid and bang, splash it out, kind of thing. And it was good. It was good at the time. But I don't know, it just made me feel like I was on top of the world, more or less.*

The significance of nest-building as part of the provider discourse was most obvious when limited income precluded it. When Henare's partner told him she was pregnant he reported thinking, “*We gotta get this, we gotta get that, you know, that, that, that*”. However, financial hardship had prevented him from doing this. His child's equipment needs had to be met by his partner's parents:

*Yeah I just, as I think, I wish that I, arrr, did actually, you know, buy. Tried to. Even made a, you know, an effort to, ummm... you know, to get our new-born son something.*

Financial hardship meant he had been excluded from a process he considered part and parcel of being a good father-provider. Simply obtaining the baby's requirements was insufficient. As a father, the onus was on oneself to purchase them.



Supporting one's partner and child communicated to the partner and to the wider community that one was in a committed relationship and had established a family unit. Providing was therefore both a practical and a symbolic practice. For a majority of the participants, this feature was significant as their child had been unplanned and their partnership unformulated prior to the pregnancy. Interestingly, no participant reported having reflected, at the time of their partner's unplanned pregnancy, on their psychological suitability as a couple. This concept did not feature in the recipe for family formation. It was duty that was important:

Gareth: *Did you feel responsible?*

Robert: *Yeah, yeah, I felt responsible. I mean, I put it there. Ha ha ha ha ha. I put the child there, so yeah.*

Gareth: *So you were aware that you had a duty?*

Robert: *Yeah, yeah. Course you do. You know you got a girl up the duff, you know you got to do something. You got to look after them. If you don't, you know, it's just not right.*

The family role that participants enacted had a powerful sense of social convention. They invoked a family culture that was ubiquitous in the post-World War II period (Abbott 2003). Some participants referred directly to this historical precedent, to their sense they were enacting a traditional family format embodying social convention and good conduct. Being the good provider boosted their self-esteem by making them feel they were living 'appropriately'. Alistair details this:

*I felt really, really good because that's the stereotypical way things are supposed to be. You know, the guy goes out, makes the money, comes back. The wife looks after the house and stuff like that, you know? Its really 1960s of me to say, but, you know?*

Family-observance had a wholesome, feel-good atmosphere. These discourses and motifs familiar from a previous generation were welcomed into participants' dialogues. This

retreat into social conventions is actually common (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Hout & Wilde, 1999). Participants found security and stability in their conventionality as they entered an important new phase in their lives. Although many had reported rejecting social conventions during their youth, parenthood had markedly increased the riskiness of unconventional behaviour.

### **Good fathers provide an independent home for their family**

Living in an independent household with one's partner and child/children was described as essential to being a good provider. This feature was common for all participants, Maori and non-Maori. Despite the opportunity to save on rent, lower domestic costs and, for some, the convenience of free childcare, participants preferred to live independently, sensing that it was important they not rely on their birth families. Te Huia describes this:

Gareth: *And when you had your son, you were living with your mum and dad.*

Te Huia: *For a little while, I suppose. We moved out when we found out we were pregnant with him.*

Gareth: *Why was that?*

Te Huia: *Didn't want to rely on parents. They already had a housefull with my sister.*

Gareth: *Were you paying a cheap board when you were staying with your mum?*

Te Huia: *Cheap as... thirty bucks.*

Gareth: *For everything?*

Te Huia: *Yeah.*

Living independently validated a man as a legitimate and functional father. West saw having his own home as part of being a legitimate family man, despite the severe economic hardship it incurred:

Gareth: *How did it feel, you working, Aroha at home, Tyler at play centre, you getting a wage, coming home, family life? How did it feel?*

West: *It felt good that we were independent – our own little family.*

'Independence' is central to his concept of good fatherhood. Even assistance in the form of subsidies from family members was accepted with reservations. For example, Henare was uncomfortable that his aunt had let a house to him and his family at a discounted rent. When his daughter was born, Gene had endured severe financial stress. Recounting this, it was the shame of having to receive charity that stuck in his mind: *"...actually it was really awful, actually. We've come a long way, I think. We had family giving us money every week and they would stop off and give us meals..."*. Gene made a point of stating that his being in receipt of charity was well in the past. What had made that situation morally difficult was his family's having had to rely on others.

Occasional assistance was not objectionable. Numerous participants had turned to their parents or in-laws when they had run out of money. There was no shame associated with irregular requests for help. As Darryl put it: *"But if we got nothing, she will go to her mum or something, or I'll go to my mum, 'gizza loan, five bucks – something for tea and that...'."*

Nor was a participant's self-concept as a good provider undermined by his receiving a government supplement. All participants qualified for Work and Income's 'Working for Families' scheme and none considered the income supplement that the scheme provided to detract from their status as the family provider. This government scheme raised many of them – Rawiri, Robert, Jason, Ben, Solli, Rawhiti, Che, Gene – above the breadline. Gene had fed his family of five on *"thirty dollars a week"* prior to the scheme's introduction. The scheme enabled his family to survive. The Working-for-Families supplement was considered to be a wage for stay-at-home mothers. It was her 'housekeeping' money:

*...that is her job, so really, and she's not getting paid for it. Well... well, she is.*

*'Coz we get that Working-for-Families payment. Which... basically that buys our food, because all my money goes on bills.*

(Jason).

No participants considered Working for Families anything more than an income. They did not see it as indicative of a benevolent society. None voiced gratitude that the State should prioritize their family's welfare. Several maligned the payment as a paltry hand-out from a cold-hearted government:

*Gareth: Did Working for Families help you in any way?*

*Carter: Nah! Fuck! Seventy bucks a fortnight. Fuck. That's might as well just go and fucking get mum [his partner] on the DPB and you just work and shaft the system. What's the point?*

A good father provided a self-sufficient home for his family. This was the criterion according to which participants defined their paternal role. They had to provide 'food, warmth and shelter' for their partner and offspring. Having an autonomous family evidenced a man's status as a father.

### **The stress of providing for a family**

Some researchers have stated that relatively young unmarried fathers, with limited earning capacity, are likely to feel disconnected from their children because of their developmental and socio-economic limitations (Achatz & MacAllum, 1994; Kiselica, 1995). Although many of the participants in the present study were in this situation, only one expressed such sentiments. He attributed the disconnection with his child to his inexperience as a family member. The others reported that their lack of life-skills and financial preparation had had no bearing on their capacity to feel deep love for their children. Marsiglio and Cohan (1997) emphasize the relevance that a man's socio-economic capacity has on his paternal enactment. Amongst our participants, this did not feature: their father-child bond was independent of their capacity to support the family.

Having said that, the working conditions that participants endured did severely limit the time and energy they had available for family life. This was a physical limitation, not a psychological and emotional one. This is a common predicament for fathers in a variety

of socio-economic strata (Pattaro, 2000, cited in Fine-Davis, Fagnani, Giovannini, Hojgaard & Clarke, 2004 ). However, the effects of exhaustion due to prolonged hard physical work are possibly the most debilitating. As wage-workers, they could not work harder, only longer. Solli describes his physical condition after a ten-hour day in a lumber yard:

Gareth: *Do your long work hours make you tired?*

Solli: *Sometimes. But sometimes I come home and I sit down. I am knackered!*

Gareth: *What time would you go to bed?*

Solli: *Nine-thirty.*

Gareth: *What time does work start?*

Solli: *Six in morning*

Solli regretted the way exhaustion was limiting the time and energy he had available for playing with his children. Being tired could cause fathers to be short-tempered with their children (Russell & Hwang, 2004). Kerry gave this example: “*When I have been on my job I get very sleep-deprived. And that makes me moody. Like, I don’t deal well with sleep-deprivation and I get a bit jumpy and snappy there*”. Participants’ limited capacity to provide did not compromise how they felt about fatherhood or how they felt about their children. However, the need to work long hours did compromise the interaction itself.

Surprisingly, only one of the participants complained about the nature of his work. All the others passively accepted the wages and conditions offered them. Their obligation was to support their respective families and they expressed no disquiet that so much time and energy was required to do so. Although their jobs were either repetitive, physically tiring or in noisy or otherwise unpleasant environments, none complained. Work, it seemed, was work. It did not need to be enjoyable. Unlike the middle-class men that Townsend (2002b) studied, they did not consider their work to be a venue for self-realisation or expression of their identity. Below, Che details his working conditions. His decision to change jobs was prompted by his partner and his de facto father-in-law

encouraging him to “*get out of the bush*”. To him, “*breaking your arse*” was just what had to be done to support a family. He even saw his job’s requirements (rising at 5.30AM) as complementing his contribution as a father – allowing him to tend the baby in the early morning.

Gareth: *How was it, having to take care of baby with those night feeds?*

Che: *Orhh.... Ha ha ha ha. I guess I was lucky, like. I started half-past-five in the mornings. So I was sort of ready to get up and, yeah, by the time baby was already up anyway. Yeah.*

Gareth: *So it wasn’t as tiring as it might have been for some?*

Che: *Yeah. But I used to sleep as soon as I got home from work – so.*

Gareth: *What were you doing?*

Che: *Forestry, pruning. I was working for myself. Pruning for a fella named Gavin, out Nireaha there.*

Gareth: *And did you develop any plans for the future, while you had Ann and your child?*

Che: *I guess so. My only plan was just to get out of the bush. To get out of the forestry – ‘coz I knew, she told me, Ann told me, that there is... there is way better things than blimmin pruning ay? Breaking your arse in the bush, yeah. Like... I took her dad out there to work for a day. And even he said, “shit, boy, this is hard yakka”. No... But it’s got to be done, ay?*

Participants resigned themselves to their working conditions. Despite its limiting their family time, it was what they had to do to provide.

Providing for one’s family became particularly difficult at Christmas time and birthdays. Fathers wanted to indulge their children and step-children with expensive toys. To do this, many worked very long hours – especially leading up to Christmas. Rawiri worked twelve-hour long graveyard shifts (six PM to six AM) to finance Christmas.

*Ummm... Well, I mean, right now it's a little... We've got a few added extras 'coz we got to go to... for Christmas. So we are in the process of trying to pay for that – as well as have enough money for the food and the rent and everything else. But umm... That's just a few extra days' work. Every day, as I said. I am nailing out seven graveyards this week. And I am knackered at the end of it. But next pay day we ain't gonna regret it. We are gonna be quite happy next payday, you know. Ummm, it will be pretty... pretty cruise-y.*

Stress levels would increase when unplanned events used up savings. Rawiri was aware this work regime had a considerable impact on his good naturedness at home.

*Well, what stresses me out the most is, you know... In my mind I can work out "Oh yeah, this will work". But you can't count all the little added extras that come in. Like 'Oh no, the doctors visit! Got to go to the doctors'. Or you got to pay for a prescription for one of the kids, and things like that. Those things, they pop up. And when you spend the money and you sit there and you go, 'Orh, now I've got to do an extra day's work'. And what stresses me out the most is having to do that extra work and get really tired. 'Coz I get extremely tired doing graveyards, it's just 'tsk'. But at the same time, I know I have to.*

(Rawiri).

A strong sense of duty permeated accounts of working long hours. Duty was referred to in an understated, dignified and taken-for-granted manner similar to that which Komarovsky (1962) encountered and which Sayers and Fox (2005) noted amongst long-distance truck drivers. The latter researchers found the father's nurturing role was undermined by long working hours. Participants in this study did not mention this. They may have been exhausted, but they still prioritised their emotional bonds. Unlike the American fathers that Shapiro (1995) interviewed, participants were not dominated by the financial obligation to support a family. That obligation was quietly accepted as part of their family duty, as Carter demonstrates:

*It's pretty hard out job. It's probably one of the riskiest jobs you can do in this country, being an arborist. And, arrh, just got on with it. Had to be done. Had to support the family. Had to keep the bills paid, the house running. You know? Fighting a losing battle, it's what I felt like.*

The pressure of ongoing financial stress did not bode well for these families. Stressed economic circumstances are strongly associated with partnership failure (Bradshaw, Stimson, Skinner & Williams, 1999; Coley, 2001). As we have seen, the participants' limited work opportunities obliged them to take up invidious work regimes such as shift work, also closely associated with high rates of family disruption (James, 1985) and family breakdown (Russell & Bowman, 2000).

Many participants were deeply concerned about their child/children's life being compromised by a cash shortfall. When discussing this, participants were solemn. It was a serious issue referring directly to their family's wellbeing. Despite the 'Working for Families' allowance, many participants said their family remained just above the breadline:

*Jason: What are we doing without? All sorts really.*

*Gareth: Yeah.*

*Jason: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, the way I see it, it is the food. There should be more food in the cupboards. We're not getting proper nutritional, really high nutrition, food either. Because we have to go so low-price, so that we can manage to do everything.*

Those circumstances were easily exacerbated by untoward events. Both Carter's and Gene's partners were unable to breastfeed. Carter and Gene had to work longer hours to pay for baby formula. It frustrated fathers' sense of being a good provider that their child/children would suffer due to their family's limited means. West explained his disappointment that his son could not receive treats and how he compensated for this. He himself did not care if his family was "dirt broke":



West: ...it felt wrong not having enough money for him. I didn't... wasn't always a luxury to have it. I didn't worry if we were dirt broke or... It was always wrong that he would miss out. And arrh... that is what always used to get to me.

Gareth: Did it affect your bond with him.

West: Arrh... not really, no. Probably made me a little bit closer to him.

Gareth: Why?

West: I just didn't feel like... Money is not supposed to be everything, but...

Ummm... If he was missing out on something because of it, it made me... Wanted to be closer, just to make him feel, make me feel like we were trying to do it for him.

Seeing his son go without things actually made West want to be closer to his son, it had the capacity to increase the intimacy between the two of them.

Some participants overcame financial stress by unlawful means. Several couples were putatively separated so that the female partner could receive the DPB (Domestic Purposes Benefit) while the male partner worked. The appearance was cultivated that the couple were living apart. Some participants continued to work full-time while receiving a government sickness benefit. These measures were depicted as reasonable efforts to sustain the family during periods of financial adversity. One participant sold marijuana to supplement the family income. Participants' ready disclosure of such potentially damaging information shows up their belief that their moral duty to provide for family should override (some) legal rights and wrongs. It also indicates the confidence they put in me as a confidante.

### **The pressure to provide consumer goods**

Participants drew contrasts between their own minimalist childhoods and the consumerist childhoods they felt pressured to provide. Although fathers knew that consumer items could not guarantee a happy childhood, Rawiri pointed out that a failure to provide them could mean that one's child was in 'the out-crowd'. Although Luke had made the

statement, “...as long as your family survives, your children will be all right”, he qualified it by saying that, if the children are perceived as being poor:

*...like, to other kids, then they will also be treated differently too. Kind of looked down... then that can, that can also kind of hurt them, hurt them in their mind. Think that they are not as good as other kids or, yeah, not...*

Consumer goods were cheaper now than when participants had been growing up but Sam explained that this counted for little – as there was so much more to procure and so much more that was considered essential. Children, responding to peer pressure, compelled their parents to spend even when this was not a sensible course of action. Darryl bought his ten year-old stepson a cell-phone for his birthday although he knew he was going to be made redundant two weeks later. He explained his choice saying, “*He’s been whiney-bagging about it, and all his friends have one*”.

The irony of not needing ‘things’ to have a happy family, juxtaposed with the perceived obligation to provide them, was often mentioned. Alistair quoted a Warehouse slogan to illustrate this: “*The best thing you can spend on your kids is your time*”. This was ironical given the pressure that The Warehouse puts on parents to satisfy their child’s wants. He was bitter that the social pressure to consume undermined his capacity to be the good family provider. Providing the basics was insufficient:

*You know, if people didn’t have to worry about, you know, the old saying ‘keeping up with the Jones’ and stuff like that... Who cares if people got flasher stuff?*

(Alistair).

When fathers were financially incapable of providing ‘extras’, as Alistair was when he made the above statement, that kind of insight was a consolation. The standards of ‘good provision’ were described as being out of participants’ control. Market forces, or advertisers, determined what counted as being a good provider and fathers were alert to, and alarmed by, the never-ending compulsion to provide more. As Seabrook (1978) had

observed in a similar population of British men, the pressure for working-class men to adopt primarily consumer identities undermined their capacity to have broader identities.

A significant number of participants experienced at least one severe financial crisis. This involved, amongst other things, being made redundant, being declared bankrupt, having a mental breakdown and therefore being unable to work or having insufficient money to support their family. Participants generally ascribed the failure to their own incapacities. As they had been responsible for providing for their family, they held themselves accountable for the failure. Economic adversity had the potential to be an emotional issue but it also impacted upon morale. It was more than just a practical one – touching as it did on the heart of good fathering. Che demonstrated his sensitivity in this area by saying, *“I wanted to give him what he wanted. It was annoying the shit out of me when I couldn’t.”*

Gene expressed comparable feelings of shame and annoyance when he found himself unable to support his wife and children. His wife was obliged to go back to work when their infant was two months old.

*It definitely made me feel bit of a... kind of a failure, in a sense. Because I couldn’t buy enough... as much as I... Was trying to get another job and, in the end, Shavaughn had to go back to work when Stacie was two months. And that was the worst feeling for me, ever. I don’t feel any mother should have to go back to work.*

Rawiri expressed similar feelings when he had to go on a benefit because of mental illness. This illness was partly a result of his working very long hours with little sleep, although he had experienced a drug-induced psychosis as a teenager.

Rawiri: *...and then I just had to go back on the benefit, which was really ‘kicked me in the guts’ type thing.*

Gareth: *How come?*

Rawiri: *How come it kicked me in the guts?*

Gareth: *Yeah*

Rawiri: *Just felt like a loser. Just felt, 'fuck!'*

For participants 'being there' as a father was paramount but providing for your family was also hugely important. The pressure to meet consumer demands exacerbated their financial stress. That pressure was 'resisted', by an inclination many of the participants expressed, to live a relatively simple life. As Te Huia said "*we just simple people*".

### **The participants' view of their long term economic prospects**

Most parents with a baby experience some financial stress (Cowan & Cowan, 1992). What distinguished this population from higher socio-economic groups was their long term economic prospects. No participants considered themselves able to raise their socio-economic status. They expected to always earn low wages in low value jobs. They expected their family's economic future to look much like its present. There was very little opportunity to save or to indulge oneself. This could sometimes be very dispiriting. As Solli said, "*But sometimes, get paid everything and have no money for myself. Feels like working for nothing*".

Some participants looked for better financial opportunities. Carter planned to emigrate to Australia. Pohatu was going to move to a rural area with lower living costs. Generally, participants' long-term economic prospects seemed very modest.

Most participants assessed their low socio-economic circumstances with a self-depiction reminiscent of Peel's (2003) label, 'the respectable poor'. Many said they did not need access to expensive consumer goods or an opulent lifestyle. Their needs and pleasures were simple. What was most important was how they raised their children. This attitude was most common amongst, but not exclusive to, Maori. Real pleasure, they said, lay in the companionship of whanau/family and friends. Work was a means of providing for the family's material necessities but, beyond that, there was little need for consumer goods. Te Huia illustrates this:

Gareth: *So you... what about owning more stuff, buying a boat and all that?[we had discussed his neighbour owning one]*

Te Huia: *Nah, hate the sea.*

Gareth: *A Jacuzzi and that? [there had been an advertisement for one on the television when I arrived at his home]*

Te Huia: *What's a 'Jacuzzi'?*

Gareth: *You know, a big spa pool and all that.*

Te Huia: *Nah, we just simple people. No need. We don't need all that stuff. We got everything we want, apart from our house.*

This attitude was sincere and well thought through. They reasoned that more money would just complicate their lifestyle. As long as they stayed above the breadline, they had no need for 'stuff'. Te Huia elaborates:

Gareth: *Your kids – would they benefit if you had more money?*

Te Huia: *Arrh, nah. Nah, they got everything they need and want. Georgina, like she said, she spoils them rotten. Yeah. No, they wouldn't benefit from that, ay.*

These participants, including Maori and non-Maori, believed that their children's lives would not be compromised by their low socio-economic status. The important thing was the moral lessons they received at home and the relationships they had with their family. Even subsisting just above the breadline was sustainable for the likes of Rawhiti and Rawiri, providing family life was happy. West simply said, "*I don't care if we are dirt poor*". Alistair echoed this insouciance – although it had taken severe economic hardship and bankruptcy for him to achieve it:

*I sort of had to re-learn that... And, umm... Probably best thing I ever learnt, you know? I can't, I can't give them everything, I'd love to- but they love everything I give them, so...*

There was no discourse of social advancement and long-term wealth-acquisition in their repertoires. They were the respectable poor, content with their place in society and undisturbed by the thought they would never be wealthy. As Pohatu said, “*All parents are the same, it’s just the size of the bill that is bigger*”.

## **Discussion**

For participants, providing was just part of ‘being there’ for their families, it was not an alternative discourse. Most had entered the workforce only a short time prior to their becoming fathers and it was the impending fatherhood that had compelled them to get a job. Thus, being a worker and provider was a sub-feature or corollary of fatherhood. In contrast with Johnson (2000), being the provider was not thought to underpin or ‘justify’ paternity.

This purely instrumental attitude to work was not exclusively due to their desire to be at home with their family. The nature of the work and the work regimes available to participants discouraged commitment to an identity as a ‘worker’. Participants described their workplaces with indifference and expressed no affinity with their workmates. In contrast with fathers two generations earlier, participants had access to only low-quality, prospectless jobs. Nelson and Smith (1999) describe these jobs as offering no training and little assurance of long term employment. The changes in employment regimes as detailed by Gillies (2000) and Dench (1996) meant participants held jobs which offered them little but monetary remuneration. A sense of identity, a sense of fraternity, a sense of common purpose, were unavailable in the new regimes. Investing energy into one’s workplace was pointless because an intellectual or moral commitment to a job was unlikely to be reciprocated by the employer.

For men in higher socio-economic strata, investment in a career is part of self-realization (Lamont, 2000). Breadwinning duties are essentially secondary to wealth-acquisition (Hyde, Essex & Horton, 1993). As Gini (2000) points out, middle-class men can afford to equate manliness with wealth. For the participants in this study, to adhere to this model – in a job market offering them no prospects for advancement – was a recipe for failure.

Naturally, our participants disengaged from the middle-class position and focused on a domain in which success was more probable – namely, their emotional bond with their children. Kalmijn (1999) found this family-based attitude bodes well for family life: mothers report greater happiness in homes where fathers focus on family values. Our participants' concept of the relation between family and earning is perhaps best approximated by the findings of Warin et al. (1999). The subjects in that study describe fatherhood as 'giving meaning to a job'. This was the case amongst our participants, although the 'meaning' remained utilitarian, restricted to the practical support it provided the family.

Simultaneous with the workforce's ceasing to offer working-class men (such as the participants) an avenue of self-expression or self-realisation, changing domestic roles and gender codes have allowed them to find self-realisation in family life. Work and family had been separate worlds in the past (Kanter, 1977) but, now, work was a mere consequence of the primary concern – being a father. West reveals this attitude:

*I just wanted to be at home, with boy, with Aroha. Umm... Yeah. I would say, ninety percent or eighty percent of our weekends is... our weekends at Pedersen Crescent is just being at home together. It was good. That is what I enjoyed. If it... could do it more, I would of. It is always that money factor. It was always the money. You had to pay the rent. You had to. That was the big thing. It was... Yeah. But if I didn't have to work, that is what I would do. Be at home.*

The post-modern family format offers the participants a domain in which to express themselves now that the neo-liberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s have lowered the workplace's value as a venue for low-skilled, low socio-economic status male self-expression. Russell et al (1999) noted that, during the neo-liberal period, fewer men reported providing to be the central feature of fatherhood.

Providing is reported to be a significant feature of fatherhood only in economic climates which make it very difficult. Thus, participants' attitudes partly reflected the prosperous

socio-economic environment they enjoyed. This environment offered numerous employment opportunities for unskilled workers, putting 'being a good provider' at a low premium. Obtaining that identity was relatively easy. Past research with New Zealand men has indicated a dominant role for providing within fatherhood. However, this research was done during a period of economic difficulty (Leibrich et al. 1995). If the working-class 'good provider' role is studied only in periods when fathers have limited access to work (Cazenave, 1979; Komarovsky, 1940; Shelton & John, 1993), good providing could be expected to dominate the concept of fatherhood. It seems that when providing is not a problem, working-class fathers are indifferent to it. This would explain the high priority that some researchers give to providing (Warin et al. 1999) in contrast to the priority our participating fathers give to 'being there'.

Amongst participants the male/provider link was not as strong as reported in other communities (Becker, 1991; Fine-Davie et al. 2004; Nock, 1998). Providing distinguished a father from other males but it did not define the fathering role. What a father 'did' was connect emotionally with his children. Participants' propensity to draw on the provider discourse is indicative of its cultural dominance (Dowd, 2000; Lewis, 2002) and its easy access (Hatter et al. 2002). Participants deferred to this discourse, even as they loosened the discourse's ties to masculinity.

Participants' accounts of their efforts to provide for their families and of their socio-economic circumstances, were self-centred. They reported themselves to be totally responsible for their economic condition, working conditions and financial demands. There was no form of class dialogue such as has appeared in the dialogues of workers in the past (Terkel, 1974; Trotter, 2008; Seabrook, 1978). They seemed to instead operate as fathers and as consumers, an observation Seabrook made in Great Britain in the late 1970s. Although one or two made reference to the government, participants generally saw themselves as economic islands, operating independently of wider society and totally responsible for their families' economic fortunes. Discussion of class identities were absent. Success or failure rested solely on them. When Pohatu spoke of wanting to earn more, he referred to his lack of application at school, his idle youth and his poor



preparation for adulthood. He made no mention of the wage rates at his industrial plant or the unavailability of overtime work. Employment regimes were portrayed as cast in stone. If providing was difficult, it was because they personally lacked talent or self-restraint, made poor decisions, or did not work hard enough at school. They did not consider that the difficulty might be due to invidious working hours, lack of government assistance, high charges for public utilities, weak labour laws, high inflation, high charges for food staples, or whatever. Participants believed their social position was exclusively a result of their own free will.

In periods of national economic adversity, working class men often attribute their position to social and political factors (Bakke, 1940; Terkel, 1986). In contrast, while participants attributed elements of their personal state to their father's parenting style or to their family history, their socio-economic circumstances were thought to result entirely from their own doing. Participants did suffer financial stress as a result of the wider economy, but the stress was subtle, passive, insidious and, to a degree, modulated by the market – for example, the persistent slow rise in public utility charges. Other stress was possibly due to the dismantling of the low-skilled workplace as a venue for social contact and the establishment of social identities. The progressive de-unionization of the labour force, especially the Employment Contracts Act (1991), has eroded the working class's concept of labour and capital (Trotter, 2008). Participants had no concept of discourses which attributed their financial predicament to far larger social issues – as discussed, for example, by Pool et al. (2007):

The much vaunted move to deregulated labour markets and workplace flexibility has for many resulted in working long hours, for low wages with job insecurity and a decrease in the quality of working conditions (for example, holidays, pensions, overtime) (Ibid., p. 412).

High employee turnover thwarted the development of social networks based on workplace identity. Providing is merely incidental, in these men's lives, to their family lives, it does not define them personally. This contrasts with Rubin's finding that, for the

American working-class man, “...going to work isn’t just what he does, it is deeply linked to who he is” (Rubin, 2004, p. 291).

Participants were comfortable with their socio-economic status even though low wages and long hours hampered their involvement with their children. Many aspired to owning their own home. Those aspirations were very modest. A number of them stated hopefully that they could one day buy the house in which they currently lived. A number hoped to buy homes in a low socio-economic state housing area known as ‘the block’ so they could be close to family and whanau. Owning your own house was considered something beyond just an economic acquisition. It was an extension of family life. A family house was truly a home, an emotional anchor.

Although the attitude participants adopted is a socially adaptive one, Dex (2003) claims it is undermined by market forces that promote material values and consumerism. Fathers are compelled to work long hours – not in order to provide the basics, but to satisfy fabricated wants. As Darryl said, “*the basics are no longer enough*”. Peel (2003) mentions that the media constantly remind fathers they are not providing well, deliberately undermining their confidence as providers. These powerful forces preclude the development of a legitimate working-class identity, one in which fathers and families could construct their modest levels of material provision as sufficient for family welfare. Townsend (2002a) argued that, in America, the middle-class lifestyle has come to represent success. By default, working class families are positioned as aberrant and somehow sub-standard venues in which to raise children. However, Caplovitz (1979) found that working-class families can be fortified by economic privation and, so long as the privation is not extreme, this does not impact on children’s assessments of their parents.

Two specifically New Zealand features emerged in the data. Amongst participants, family life was not considered “a display case for the success of the good provider” (Bernard, 1981, p. 4). Participants did not equate their material wealth with their social status or their kudos as a father. This contrasted with numerous North American studies

in which the hegemony of the male-breadwinner family format has been conflated with materialism and affluence (Kimmel, 1996). Parke and Brott (1999) maintain that this equation puts tremendous stress on males. It means they risk failure as fathers and as men if they fail to be good providers. Marsiglio and Cohan's (1997) assessment that "the breadwinner role is so inextricably linked to adult masculinity" may hold true in the US. In New Zealand that link is not nearly as strong. Participants just did not communicate a sense that it was necessary, or even good, to be wealthy.

Participants' accounts of providing suggest they were not preoccupied with averting financial disaster. This may result from the availability of welfare support. I suggest it also reflects the attitude many Maori participants brought to the study. Most of them desired very little other than basic food, shelter and clothing requirements. Neither Heta, Che, West, Rawhiti nor Te Huia voiced any interest in consumer goods or possessions. None felt a need to provide his family with non-essential consumables. They indicated that their sense of wellbeing lay in the fellowship of whanau and friends. Participants' partners seemed to feel this way also. In contrast, numerous American and British researchers have noted that women will not partner with a man with limited earning capacity, even if he is the father of their child (Edin, 2000; Huinink & Mayer, 1995; Sorenson, 1995). No participant reported such considerations as a feature of their pre-parental discussion, despite many of them being unemployed at the time of the partner's pregnancy. Provision did not rank as a dominant concern.

Economic stress did worry participant fathers. However, there was no identifiable pattern regarding the effect of the stress. For some fathers it compromised their father-child relationship (for example, Henare) for others it improved it (West, Gene). For others still, it left the father-child relationship unaffected (Carter, Pohatu). The findings of Komarovsky (1940/1973) and Brody et al. (1994) – to the effect that good marital relationships were improved by economic stress and poor ones undermined by it – were unable to be assessed because in-depth information regarding this was not obtained from participants.

Hochschild (1989) warned, and warned working-class people particularly, against “equating money with manhood” (p. 130). The ‘nurturant father’ model offers a viable alternative. For the research participants, although providing was an important aspect of fatherhood, it was no longer under the hegemony of historical models which gave it priority over fatherhood. Providing was now an ancillary. As Alistair said, “*I wouldn’t say it’s first, but it is probably ‘first equal’, sort of thing*”. This nuanced description positions providing as subsidiary to the primary and overarching responsibility of being emotionally committed to one’s children.

## Chapter 10: The Pro-socialising Effects of Fatherhood

*Gangster life won't put bread on the table.*

(Che).

Fatherhood had a pro-socialising effect on participants. It moved them out of an anti-social peer group environment and into a pro-social community role. Many participants also reduced or dispensed with high risk and self-injurious behaviours such as heavy drinking, drug use and criminal activity. This transformation was not a rupture from the past but a gradual process during which they adopted the conventions of adaptive, pro-social family life. Whatever their socio-economic status or background, family life is associated with conservative social conventions (Jackson, 1984) including increased religious observance (Hout & Wilde, 1999). Gavanas (2004) argues that this demonstrates the common belief that fatherhood 'whips men into shape'. What distinguishes the participants in this study from the general population of fathers is the magnitude of the change effected. Despite its being for many of the participants unplanned and ill-prepared-for, fatherhood comprehensively re-orientes their lives.

The significance of this transformation lies in the contrast between these young men before parenthood and their subsequent performance as committed fathers. Before parenthood they had little concept of being a father and the constraints this would place on their disposable income and personal freedom. Opportunities that would have improved their later performance as fathers and providers were discarded. It was only pending fatherhood that encouraged them to re-script their lives. This prompts the question: why were these fathers prepared to do for their children what they were not prepared to do for themselves?

### **The causes of participants' anti-social youth and early adulthood**

For the majority of participants, late adolescence and early adulthood were periods of anti-social and high-risk behaviour. This was not just a period of being a larrikin before they settled down, although that course is common for many young working-class men (Metcalf, 1988, cited in Uhlmann, 2006). It was akin to what Connell (1995) describes as protest masculinity, stemming from a sense of powerlessness and purposelessness. It involved a disregard for the future, high risk behavior and anti-social conduct. They seemed to move towards to the sub-population Abbott (2002) and Venkatesh, cited in Levitt & Dubner (2005), described as having a “fuck you” attitude to society. For this majority, the participant's propensity for such conduct was in each case attributed to one or more of a variety of factors; his own father, his childhood living circumstances, his peer group and his own misguided self-image. It was only the necessities of partnership and parenthood that awoke him to his ‘true self’.

In adolescence and early adulthood the behaviour of these participants tended to mirror that of their fathers/step-fathers. Although participants reported there had been substantial acrimony between themselves and their fathers/step-fathers, this did not preclude participants from mimicking the father/step-father's lifestyle. During adolescence, Rawhiti, Carlyn and Henare had all been heavy-drinking thugs, just as their fathers had been. Jason's father was a life-long criminal ‘hard-man’. Jason began adulthood as a petty criminal and substance-abuser. Others also inferred causal connections between their home environment and their anti-social conduct. Alistair grew up in very economically-deprived circumstances. As a young adult he became a fraudster. This afforded him the ‘toys’ he had never had as a child. Che, Rawiri, Kerry, Heta and Carter were all involved in crime and substance-abuse during adolescence and early adulthood. They attributed this to a lack of guidance and to hurt inflicted on them by their respective fathers. Here, Carter describes how his father's preoccupation with work, along with his marital infidelities, arrested his development:

Gareth: *You said you got lost along the way. Along the way to what?*

Carter: *Well 'coz what my dad done [being unfaithful to his wife] and the way he brought me up and that. He's going out and working and doing up a house and shit.*

Neighbourhoods and school peer groups were considered by participants to promote anti-social behaviour. 'Falling in with the wrong crowd' could turn 'good kids from good homes' into offenders. Te Huia is a case in point. He reported coming from a loving family but having his peer group lead him into drug abuse and anti-social activities. He describes the drug abuse:

Te Huia: *Through school I did ['get pissed and stoned'], yeah, I hated getting stoned but, I don't know, I just kept doing it. Nah. All the year. I used to do it all the time at school. But I never liked it, I just kept doing it, I suppose.*

Gareth: *And that was because you were hanging around with mates?*

Te Huia: *I only did it 'coz everyone else was. I used to hate it.*

At a broader level, socialisation into a deleterious lifestyle was fostered by the participants' construction of adolescence/early-adulthood as a period of rebellion and hedonism. Forgoing schooling opportunities, drinking to excess, using drugs, crime and fighting, were all depicted as features of being a young kiwi male. This was compounded by a limited sense of future opportunities, given the economic recession the country was experiencing when these participants were at high school. Participants reported that their self-destructive and wasteful lifestyles prior to partnership and parenthood were inconsistent with their true identities. They said they were essentially good-natured men who had been led astray by external factors. Becoming a dad had awoken them to their true selves. Their real identities were revealed in the course of their becoming fathers.

Participants preferred to understate their pre-fatherhood anti-social conduct. They described it only superficially and in vague and generalized terms. Only when pushed would they elaborate. For example, Jason referred to this period as one of ‘mischief’. When pressed to expand on this, he said:

*Oh, smoking marijuana, yep, orrr, a few popping pills. Obviously parties and what not. And umm, then of course to pay for that it was, bur., burgling. Yeah, burgling cars, houses.*

Carlyn referred to his early adult years as a time when he “*got into a little bit of trouble*”. When asked to explain, he said this had involved street fighting, theft, time in jail, association with gang members and heavy drug and alcohol abuse. The propensity to downplay their past is understandable given that, as family men now, the participants sought to distance themselves from a lifestyle that was anathema to their current values. They now eschewed the ‘macho’ image of the rebellious young man.

### **Participants’ lack of preparation for adulthood**

Salient in their accounts of early adulthood was a total disregard for the possibility of one day having to support a family. This contrasted with the middle-class maturational process – which Townsend (2002b) describes as centred around the expectation that, in adulthood, one would provide for a family. Inquiry regarding this point provoked definite responses. Participants reported that as young adults they had given no consideration to their future. They made no preparation for the inevitable demands of adulthood. Nor did they consider the long-term effects of their current conduct. Kerry provides this example:

*Gareth: As an adolescent, did you make any preparation for adult life?*

*Kerry: Hell no! Hell no! No. I, the best way I can describe it is, arrr, when I grew up I though I was just never going to grow up. I was never going to have any*



*adult problems, I was just going to do what I wanted, whenever I wanted and that was just the way it was going to be.*

Kerry's comment illustrates an attitude and lifestyle that he developed as a teenager and maintained until he became a father. As adolescents, participants had perceived their rebelliousness and non-conformity extending indefinitely into adult life. Preparing for a period beyond rebellion was contrary to their pursuit of hedonism and indolence. Rawiri illustrates this point:

Gareth: *When you were a teenager, did you ever think about the future, and..?*

Rawiri: (Snort). *Yeah I thought about what I was going to have for lunch, mmm, and maybe dinner.*

Gareth: *So you never gave any thought to the future...*

Rawiri: *No. I always lived in the now, you know, and, I, right now I am hungry, I will eat. Right now, things like that. I didn't really think, "ohhll, what am I going to do tomorrow, what am I going to do next week?" I mean everything was pretty random when I was a teenager, "I think I might go to Auckland!"*

Gareth: *And did you ever at any stage think, 'one day I am going to be a father'?*

Rawiri: *Nah, honestly, I didn't think I would live that long. When I was a teenager I honestly thought I was gonna be dead by the time I was bloody twenty.*

Rawiri's account reveals the typical failure of participants to lay developmental groundwork during adolescence and early adulthood. No attempt was made to acquire job skills and no consideration was given to the consequences of actions – for example, the negative implications of a criminal record were not considered. No effort was made to prepare for the highly probable event of their one day having a family. Anything suggesting a life beyond the current hedonistic period was disregarded, so none committed themselves to job training. Given an apprenticeship, Alistair soon abandoned it. He did so, he said, because *"hard work was hard work, so didn't want to do that"*.

Carter's account of his young adult years gives a fuller picture of disregard for the future. His narrative is tinged with regret, a sentiment uncommon in the life histories provided by participants.

*Naa, there was never anything like that [at school], there was sex education and don't get a chick knocked up. It was never 'what if?' or 'if this happens this is what you should do', or 'think ten years down the track guys you gonna be a father, most of you is gonna be fathers and you got to provide so the best thing is to probably get your head down arse up'. Its school, you know, it's sort of expected of you [to misbehave]. People sort of expect you to go there and strive. You get people like me, fuck. I didn't give a fuck man! I'm on the wrong rails and getting away with it. I'm sweet, I was happy, it was fun. I was young, why not? I was young, I was cheeky. I thought I had a pretty good sense of humour back then, you know, was invincible. But then ten years down the track it's like 'orrrr fuck! Why did I waste it?' You know that was only four years of my life, and I could of, in that four years I could be...*

While the relationship between income, skill and autonomy might appear commonsensical to most young men (Marsiglio, 1998), participants reported that as young men they had no idea that early life-skill acquisition might have a bearing on their adult welfare. Numerous participants depicted themselves as goal-less and direction-less during their early adult years. This was not a matter of failure to choose options: rather, adulthood was seen to hold no prospects. This could be partly ascribed to participants' perception of their socio-economic environment. Williams and Kornblum (1985) studied the effects of Reaganomics on similar working-class communities in the United States. They summarised the effects of economic circumstances on working class men: "...every day, potentially valuable minds are being wasted in hedonistic escapes because more constructive and challenging opportunities are vanishing from the communities in which they work" (p. xvi). Participants were clear that the reason they gave no regard to the

future was because the future appeared to hold nothing for them. They preferred to seek a good time. Lee-Roy's self-assessment, when asked about his preparation for the future, echoes this widespread indifference, "*I didn't really think about that, ay. Nah, never thought about it. The future, nah. I was stuck in my own little world. And I think only just didn't, I, normal teenage thing*". The pervasiveness of "teenage" culture undermined any attempts to prepare for adulthood. For many, the indolent and hedonistic teenage identity was so dominant that an identity beyond it was inconceivable. Its rituals were seen to extend into adulthood and there was no reason to consider other life options.

The prospect of fatherhood compelled participants towards pro-socialisation. They began to adopt conventional values, primarily, to help ensure and promote their child's welfare. The idea of how to support a family was not considered until the necessity arose. Asked if he had prepared himself for the demands of being a family man and provider, Kerry said, "*No that wasn't until basically Charlotte [partner] was pregnant when I finally thought, 'shit, I better do something with my life'. That is when all that started kicking in, then*". This attitude contrasts with the conventional approach to child-bearing, an approach that Lupton and Barclay (1997) describe in terms of 'the project of the child' (p. 20). The adjustment process begins, they say:

Well before birth [of children], when individuals have to decide whether or not they even want a child, whether their relationship is stable enough, whether their economic resources are robust enough or whether they feel emotionally ready for the demands of parenthood" (pp. 20-21).

Participants in this study considered no such questions. Their actions were essentially unrelated to any idea of a planned life-course. The need to be economically ready to bear children, an idea Huinink (1995) argues is primary in any responsible man, was not considered by our participants prior to parenthood. Neither were other preconditions of family life, preconditions that Western et al. (2004) claim are considered standard. These

include travel, education, asset accumulation and personal growth. The kiwi tradition of 'OE' (Overseas Experience) prior to family life did not feature in any of the participants' pre-parental lives.

The possibility of being either “*dead or in jail*” (Rawiri) prior to adulthood had a powerful bearing on some participants. The likelihood of either outcome seemed to fuel disregard for any prospect of a life beyond their early twenties. This subset of participants had been very ‘angry with the world’. They expressed deep resentment with how they had been treated by their families and by government agencies such as ‘Social Welfare’, CYFS (Child Youth and Family Services), the police, the education system and the justice system. For these particular participants, life beyond one’s early twenties seemed not to be worth living. Some mentioned this past pessimism specifically to highlight the value of their current life with a partner, children and home. This pessimism was the backdrop to their entry into parenthood. Henare gave the following comment on this:

Gareth: *Why did you want to get away from it [street gangs, heavy drug and alcohol use]?*

Henare: *Because I knew if I would’ve stayed there I would’ve either been dead or I would’ve been in jail. And I thought to myself, I didn’t want that.*

Their lack of preparation for adult life could be partly explained by the lack of support available to them as they made that preparation. It has become a standard practice for parents to support their children while they moved from being socially independent to economically independent (Uhlmann, 2006). For most of the participants, acrimonious relationships with their parents, step-parents, or a lack of family finances precluded them obtaining such assistance. Many participants were compelled to be economically self-sufficient at a time when they lacked the skills and resources to be so. As a means of coping they took very low paying jobs, or adopted lifestyles which were unviable in the

long term. Whereas their peers in more stable homes would ‘assert’ their independence by forming a family, many participants had independence prematurely thrust upon them.

Moreover, most of the participants had few reasons to prepare for life beyond early adulthood, so made no preparation for it. They risked their own welfare, forfeited opportunities and gave little regard for the long-term consequences of their actions. Only parenthood, once it arrived, gave them substantial reasons to prepare for adult life.

### **The effect of unplanned family formation on participants**

The prospect of fatherhood transformed participants. In the long term, they disengaged from antisocial peer groups, obtained work, procured the necessities of a home and provided for their partner and child. It would be easy to describe the effects on the new father’s character as ‘revolutionary’, but this implies a full, complete and rapid change whereas, in fact, personal transformation was gradual, piecemeal and at times fragile. In most cases, complete transformation was effected only after one or two years.

The speed of the transformation seemed to be fuelled by the unforeseen nature of the respective pregnancies. Of the 23 participants, 14 reported their partner’s pregnancy was unplanned and a sizable number reported that conception had resulted from a casual relationship. The idea of using contraception to “make a decision to become [or not become] a father” (Van Balen, 1995, p. 85) did not feature. In effect, not only was the child unplanned, so was the relationship. Axinn, Barber and Thornton (1998) found such circumstances augured poorly for the resulting children. No participants voiced reservations about the circumstances of his impending fatherhood. None thought his child’s well-being would be compromised because of it. Neither did it discourage participants from swiftly cementing a family partnership, usually by setting up house with the pregnant partner, although some got married. This formalisation of the parental relationship was the first step in the adoption of social conventions. It needs to be noted,

however, that the pro-socialisation trajectory was not limited to this sub-group of 14. Of the remaining nine participants, over half also commenced similar pro-socialisation at this time. Those who did not were those who already had a formalised relationship with their partner – based on either religious conviction or the extended length of time they had been in a partnership.

Robert provided an insightful account of the family morality code he drew on when he learnt that his partner was “*up the duff*”. According to his family tradition, one formed a family unit on conception - and conception was the most common reason for doing so. In-depth psychological compatibility was considered irrelevant. While it may seem reckless to begin a family by default rather than by active planning, this was customary in this section of society. Robert said that one ‘just has to take the consequences’ of getting a girl pregnant: “*in our family once you get a girl pregnant, that is it. You know you mucked up mate*”. This was a longstanding family practice.

Robert: *Yeah, yeah course you do, you know you got a girl up the duff you know you got to do something. You got to look after them. If you don't, you know, it's just not right.*

Gareth: *Where did you get that notion from?*

Robert: *It has always been in our family.*

Gareth: *Has it?*

Robert: *You don't go get a chick pregnant and then run off. That is not the way. Not in our family it's not.*

Robert's de-facto partnership has a great deal in common with the traditional ‘shotgun wedding’, although it lacked the moral censure. Middle-class morality may question the durability of such a partnership, given the lack of overt planning in the family formation. However, Robert did not consider it remarkable that his family unit had been determined by chance and expressed no regret in relation to this. Middle-class family planning occurs

within a well-planned lifestyle – one which, Jacobs (1995) reminds us, is filled with opportunities and advantages. For low-skilled, low socio-economic status men, unplanned parenthood and family formation is unlikely to interfere with opportunities, since the latter hardly exist. The frequent lack of deliberate partner selection contrasts with the protracted middle-class practice involving extended familiarisation between the couple prior to family formation (Dienhart, 1998). Our participants did not approach marriage and family formation as part of a 'project of the self' (Verheyen, 1987, p. 37). Their narratives were not underwritten by a strong self-realisation agenda.

It seems as if participants entered into a permanent family unit with little regard for its long term implications and the effect these might have on their lifestyle. However, the problem with this assessment is its focus on preparational deficit. Fatherhood and family life, however unplanned, offered these unskilled, previously directionless men an opportunity to dispense with self-injurious behaviours and acquire social status as supportive working fathers. It gave them more-or-less instant life-focus, coupled with direction and kudos as family men. When reflecting on their pre-parental lifestyle, participants spoke of the mindless and injurious activities they had engaged in. In hindsight, it seems they were, in fact, well aware of the long-term prospects of such conduct and, despite their later reflections, they had at the time wanted an option other than 'dead or in jail'. Responsibility for a pregnancy had offered that third option. Having a family gave you a good reason to exit the negatively-oriented peer group and settle down. Henare makes the contrast between some of his 'old hood mates' and others with families:

*Like some of them now, they got job and they got family so they are sort of settled down. Some of them, still thinking that they are still at college, still drinking at a park [at 23 years of age].*

Fatherhood offered Henare an exit from a feckless cohort. It also gave him instant status as a legitimate member of society. He could suddenly draw on the long-standing tradition of fathers supporting their families. He was now a regular family man, not a young, directionless bloke with little future.

### **Fatherhood prompts participants to cease self-injurious behaviour**

In the course of adopting pro-family practices, participants quickly reduced the amount of alcohol and drugs they consumed. Substance abuse appeared to be rapidly outgrown as they assumed their status as fathers. It was depicted as something ‘youngsters’ did, incompatible with supporting a family or being an emotionally active father. Pohatu makes this assessment:

*And I knew I had to get a job, some reason, somehow. So I gave it all up, gave up the drinking, gave up the weed. Gave it all up. Knowing, knowing that I wouldn't be able to get a job unless I gave all of that stuff up. And it used to, when I was smoking, it used to piss me off when we'd, like, have a debate, wanna call it, I'd forget.... Not only that, I wanted to remember Nadine [partner] giving birth to George [son].*

Not all participants completely dispensed with drug or alcohol use. Some merely reduced their consumption, in the belief that moderate consumption would not affect their child while he/she was very young. Sam believed this till he witnessed his child mimic him using a ‘bong’.

*Sam: We had that incident, couple of years ago, so ummmm. A bucket bong anyway. And Kaylyn [son] went over to it. It was empty. But he was pulling it up and he had seen the motion, anyway, yeah.*



Gareth: *Yeah*

Sam: *'Coz, you know, you have your lighter, you pull it up, you inhale on the way down. Well, he was pulling it up without the lid on it but still he was, he was imitating. Yeah. And he was not even two, was he? [turns to partner].*

Sam and his partner had then ceased smoking marijuana, having become aware of the imprinting effect this was having on their son. The significance of this account is Sam's discarding marijuana consumption, albeit belatedly, for the benefit of his children's development.

### **Fatherhood causes a pro-social self-concept to emerge**

The swift adoption of pro-social mores associated with fatherhood signals the terminus of participants' search for a social identity with high social status and low risk value. During their youth participants had engaged in high risk behaviours and anti-social conduct. Fatherhood offered a meaningful and long term alternative to that lifestyle. Ascension to parental status was accompanied by progressive adoption of conventional social codes, including increased respect for state agencies, civil standards and work regimes. Under the mantle of fatherhood, each participant could become the person he felt he should be. As well as being delighted to learn he was to be a parent as such, each participant also expressed delight that his life would now have direction and purpose. He could shift out of a cohort that had fostered in him a self-identity discordant with his 'real' self. Fatherhood offered him the opportunity to exit the restrictive peer group. Henare gave this example of having been "*someone that he wasn't*":

*Like being what I was when I was growing up. I was someone that I wasn't. Like, I'd go out at night with mates. I'd be all, you know, shoulders high in the air, head held back high. With family, like with grandparents, I was polite as hell. And I'm still a polite guy. Umm, I had respect for old people at that time. But when I*

*was with my mates I was completely different. Like, if I... I could be by myself walking down a road and I might see an old lady walking down and I might say "gidday, nice day, yep it is". Might see the same person next day, but I would be with two of my mates. Wouldn't say nothing. I wouldn't even bother to look, wouldn't even say hello. Just walk straight past them.*

Parenthood provided a good reason to exit the bad crowd one had fallen in with. One was able to become the person one really was. Che called this "*having two voices*". As a father, one had good reasons for listening to the better voice.

The emergence of a fully committed and pro-social performance was not immediate or unidirectional. Many participants moved into the process before their child was born. Ben, for example, had ceased mixing with an anti-social peer group, stopped using marijuana, ceased offending and obtained a job – all in the period between being told that his partner was to have a child and that child's birth. Others were not so hasty or so comprehensive in the changes they made. They either delayed their adoption of pro-social norms till after their child was born or they failed to stick with changes they had made. Kerry gives an example of the former:

*No, it wasn't till just after Jazmin was born that I actually thought, I actually woke up and thought, "Shit, I've got to change". Not only just bringing up kids around dope or just excessive alcohol or anything like that... It's just having nothing there.*

These sorts of delayed and stalled entries into the league of pro-social fathers are natural. They are part of a full transition to a new self-identity as fathers. They do not belie the reality of the transformative process. Exterior factors helped overcome any initial hesitancy. For example, at that time, an abundance of work opportunities facilitated entry

into the league of ‘good fathers/providers’. The moral guidance provided by partners also assisted the transformation.

### **Female partners provide fathers impetus to change**

A sizable number of participants attributed their transformation into a ‘pro-social family-centered father’ largely to their partner's influence. Women were described as more virtuous than men. They were able to exert a moral influence on men, extracting them from anti-social peer groups and helping them give up self-injurious behaviours. This womanly influence could commence even before their child was conceived. It was felt that, like fatherhood per se, ‘a good woman’ held out to a man the opportunity to discard features of his character discordant with his true identity.

This concept of women as morally superior agents has high narrative capital. It fits the familiar narrative of the roughneck outlaw man salvaged by the love of a virtuous woman. The woman brings him to an appreciation of his own dignity, gently nudging him away from his darker side. As clichéd and sentimental as this narrative may sound, numerous participants invoked it in their life account. Alistair drew heavily on this discourse, describing his wife as his “*queen*”. Under her loving influence, he was both enabled and compelled to “*grow up*”:

*Ummm... but sorry to sound, probably, corny, but I believe it was sort of fate that I was supposed to meet Heather [partner]. That was how I was supposed to start my family. As I's saying to Heather, because she's so perfect, that makes our marriage perfect, which makes our children perfect. And I think that combination just obviously worked and umm... that is when I decided, well, I definitely had to grow up.*

The virtuousness of a woman extended to her comforting her man and assuaging the pain in his childhood. Having resolved his childhood hurt, a man could dispense with casual and futile pursuits and engage in a full relationship. Kerry described his life prior to his meeting his partner as, “...*basically just trying to forget everything [about his childhood]. Then I met Charlotte [partner], arrrrrm... and I learnt to start having a good time*”. Women were described as being patient, able to wait while their partners coped with personal tragedy or overcame their need for rebellion. Rawhiti illustrates this:

Rawhiti: *Marlena [partner], she changed my life.*

Gareth: *She seems to have.*

Rawhiti: *Yeah, must have seen the good in me that no one else could see.*

Partners provided men with moral guidance, facilitating their adopting of pro-social and pro-family conventions. Although participants may have moved into a pro-social cohort, most were not active members of a community, as such. For many of them, it was their partner who provided a link with the broader normalized community. And she, for many, was the primary, if not exclusive, adult with whom they co-created a pro-social self-concept. This reflected the propensity for working-class women to maintain social and family contacts (Uhlmann, 2006)

Clinical studies bear out the value of a loving partner in assisting adults to re-formulate negative self-concepts and to rise above the negative relational styles these self-concepts engendered (Herrenkohl, Herrenkohl & Egalf, 1983). It should not be overlooked, however, that the women had a vested interest in their partners’ being pro-social and stable. They needed their men to meet the responsibilities of providing for the family.

### **The ‘off the shelf’ male provider role**

‘Providing’ as a primary fatherhood discourse has been discussed at length in chapter nine. The most obvious and public means by which participants demonstrated their new

identity was their performance as a working male provider. To sign up to their new identity, participants simply adopted this ‘prefabricated’ or ‘off the shelf’ role, which came with significant cultural and social status already attached. Making the transition from an indolent anti-social male, to a working father, was mainly about performing this script correctly and convincingly. Although fathers downplayed their provider role (see chapter nine), it was the core feature of their pro-socialisation.

Being a working man sanctioned participants’ self-concept as fathers/providers and accelerated their pro-socialisation. Given their life experience, employment opportunities for participants were limited. Most found work in processing plants, mills, and road and forestry gangs. The menial nature of the work meant employers were indifferent to participants’ poor employment history and/or criminal records. Despite the work’s repetitive and/or physically exhausting nature, only one participant complained about his job. The great majority of participants were content to just be working and had little regard for long-term employment prospects or training opportunities. Concepts of career and skill-development were absent, as was the middle-class notion of progressive wealth accumulation (James, 2007). Overall, participants were just thankful to have a job that promoted their pro-social position as fathers/providers.

Thus, participants encountered few obstacles moving from an indolent anti-social position to a pro-social worker/provider position. The ease of this transition could explain their lack of comment on the issue. Its huge importance in enabling the transition to the father/provider role is highlighted only when our participants’ situation is contrasted with that of similar populations with no work opportunities (Newman, 1999: Rubin, 1994: Ruxton, 2002). If no work is available, family formation is hampered and the process of male pro-socialisation greatly impeded.

### **Once they became fathers, participants discarded old peer groups**

To secure their new identity as a pro-social father/provider, participants felt compelled to discard friends who resisted their transformation into focused fathers. Distressed to see

their ‘mates’ no longer available, many of these erstwhile friends had pressured participants to maintain their pre-fatherhood identity and activities. Some of the participants’ breaks from old peer groups were swift and complete. Rawiri gives this assessment of a cohort he once belonged to:

*They’re bums. They are useless, abso-fucking-lutely useless. They would sit at home and they’d smoke pot and then bitch and moan that their benefit has been cut off. And I’d sit there and go “why don’t you get a job?”. And it was like speaking a foreign language to them. They’d be like “orh, I can’t get a job”.*

Contrasting themselves with ex-peers accentuated the pro-social changes that participants had effected. Having abandoned the company and the activities of their old cohort, participants were now preoccupied with fatherhood and providing, and could distance themselves socially from their erstwhile ‘mates’.

The more involved a participant was with a cohort, the more difficult the separation was. Rawhiti experienced great difficulty disengaging from his peer group. He describes his quandary and how he dealt with it:

*Rawhiti: My mates, they were still fucking hanging around and that. But they were turning up, bang on my pay day. My kids were like, crying, fucking hungry and that. Dad has just got home and they want my attention and that. And my mates are walking in, “it’s payday, what are we doing? Over to the pub?” And I just started to see the picture, what was going on. Then, then, I just started to, ‘coz I knew what time they would turn up – on my payday. And I just started feeling rat-shit, like these cunts aren’t my mates. And when they, I just got to the point, payday, bang! I got all the kids cleaned up, ready, let’s go. And we just shot off and went out for the night, Pizza Hut or something. Walk down the park. And that is how it slowly became my, the park became my...*

Gareth: *Escape?*

Rawhiti: *Escape, yeah.*

Distancing the anti-social cohort was more difficult when the cohort contained close family members. To negotiate this circumstance, Che had to make some subtle changes of attitude:

*It, it's all right, it's all right to, to, to hang out with them [relations that were gang members], but it is different to know that that is your family. It is good to know that that is my uncle, and it is better than you know, "yeh, dat's moy unkil, I hang out wiff him evri-dei".*

Establishing a distinction between 'knowing' and 'hanging with' gang-related whanau members, who he could not avoid meeting, provided Che with a means of ensuring that neither his new family role nor his continuing whanau membership was undermined by his previous anti-social history.

This propensity, to break away from old peer groups, might help explain why some researchers in similar English-speaking nations have noted many working-class males report having very few friends (Edgar, 1997; Allan, 1969; Uhlmann, 2006). The friendships they developed over the course of an anti-social youth and early adulthood are ditched so they do not undermine their new family. This can leave them vulnerable to social isolation beyond their immediate family.

### **A small sub-group of pro-social participants**

A number of participants had been very pro-social all their lives. For these participants, fatherhood did not involve a new process of pro-socialisation but was a planned event that followed courtship and marriage (or the setting up of a family home). Rather than compelling them into a course of pro-social conduct, fatherhood was simply an extension of their existing pro-social and conventional family orientation. Parenthood still distinguished these participants from their respective youthful cohorts, however, because having children was considered to be indicative of adult status. Nathan provides this illustration:

Nathan: *We both said we wanted to have children young. Right from an early age I said I want to get married young. So did my wife, coincidentally.*

Gareth: *And how old was she when you got married?*

Nathan: *She would have been 19 as well.*

Gareth: *Okay.*

Nathan: *I turned 20 a month later. Ummm... it was just our goals in life. It was, ummm... we very quickly as individuals and as a couple, outgrew the whole partying scene. Ummm... and at that age we actually identified a lot more easier with people and still do, ten years our senior.*

Despite entering fatherhood from a pro-social platform, this cohort were just as likely to report having a menial 'go-nowhere' job. Economic adversity also featured regularly in their dialogues.

### **Pro-socialisation can be incremental and reversible**

It would be tempting to say that the lifestyle turn-around that participants reported was swift and complete. Participants fostered this impression by using terms like 'never looked back'. For example Alistair said, "*...then got out of there [jail] just before my twentieth birthday, and never looked back*". But most participants' personal



transformations were in reality gradual and plastic. As much as they wished to provide plausible one-step accounts of their pro-socialisation, their transformations were desultory and reversible. Only for a few was it a case of a swift, unhindered revolution. More usually, the transformation was to be drawn out, fractious, and fraught with obstacles and setbacks. For some it took up to three years. Although the participants' narratives of the transition tend to imply a single watershed event, analysis of the texts reveals numerous occasions and aspects of transition. There were no sudden, major, and/or irreversible changes in character. For example, Carter parsed his progressive pro-socialisation in terms of the following junctures: the chance encounter with his partner, his relocation to the Manawatu, his partner joining him there, her getting pregnant, their returning to the Wairarapa, her having the baby, his securing a fulltime job, their planning to emigrate to Australia. Each juncture ratcheted up Carter's pro-socialisation. Generally, setbacks such as the loss of a job or inter-partner acrimony could reverse such increments.

Alistair's account of his self-transformation implied a conclusiveness hardly justified by the facts. Alistair was, at age 19, imprisoned for two years for fraud. He reports that, on being discharged from prison, he "*never looked back*". This event, he said, signified the beginning of a new way of life for him, a new way of life cemented by the birth of his daughter soon afterwards. However, five months prior to the research interview, Alistair had been served with a warning by WINZ for falsely obtaining a benefit. At the time of the interview Alistair was registered on a sickness benefit and, when it was explained to him that (because he was not working) he would therefore not meet the criteria for participation in the research project, he disclosed he was "*helping his cousin out*". This was a euphemism for working illegally in the shearing sheds. His self-transformation chronicle made discharge from jail the key event but, clearly, some increments in pro-socialisation were at that time, and at the time of the research interview were still, yet to be accomplished.

Notwithstanding the frequent inconsistencies and false starts, the pro-socialisation process accompanying fatherhood was, for the participants, generally successful. Participants intended to, and did, move towards a lifestyle which promoted their family's wellbeing and which secured their own status as a functioning father/provider.

## **Discussion**

Since the 1970s, marriage rates have fallen and the age of child-bearing has progressively risen throughout the developed world (MacLean & Eekelaar, 1997) including New Zealand (Pool, Dharmalingam & Sceats, 2007). Discourses promoting later child-bearing have re-formulated accepted ideas of good parenting. An extended prior work history is now considered a necessary financial pre-requisite for subsequent parenting (Parcel & Menaghan, 1994). The power of discourses validating this attitude portrays early, unplanned, ill-prepared child-bearing, such as that of the participants involved in this research, as maladaptive. In academic literature, emphasis on financial preparedness for parenthood may be increased, given researchers' preoccupation with economic resources (Cooney et al. 1993).

An ethological appraisal of fathering in the sample population diminishes the 'deficit focus' that this economics-based analysis implies. An ethological perspective also provides an answer to the question I posed in the introduction to this chapter: why were participants prepared to do for their child (reduce high risk behaviour, adopt pro-social norms) what they were unprepared to do for themselves? When responsible only for their own lives, the participant disregarded his well-being and ignored his future prospects. Finding himself responsible for another's (his child's) life and well-being, each rapidly adopted conventions which promoted his child's welfare and that of his partner and himself. The answer to the question why, may lie in the contrast between the participants' social status as young, single men with limited education, few employment skills and anti-social propensities and the status afforded them as fathers and providers.

Let us begin by considering their circumstances prior to parenthood. Most of the participants had experienced a large amount of failure and disappointment during their

childhood and adolescence. As detailed in chapter eight, over half of them had absent fathers and two had fathers die while they were quite young. Only eight of the participants grew up in homes with their biological mother and father (and half of them reported there was serious marital acrimony in their birth family). None had any formal qualifications and a significant portion (fourty percent) had been excluded from high school. For most (not all), school life had been unpleasant, vitiated by failure and behavioural issues. Many had unsupportive or non-existent relationships with their father and for some this was also the case with their mother. A number reported having very few family connections because of long standing ill-feeling within the family – often compounded by family break-up. Some participants were bitter at how they had been treated by state agencies when they were children. For example Rawiri and Che had both been removed from their homes by Social Welfare officers because of a third party's apparent unjustified interference. Prior to fatherhood, participants had very little social status, little access to social resources and limited support networks. Their lives were marked by disappointment, a sense of abandonment and failure – exacerbated by a lack of money. Fatherhood offered them a direct route to status and social legitimacy, re-directing their life's trajectory, previously marked by misfortune. Fatherhood instilled or restored within them a pro-social identity and purpose which assured them of their own importance, countering the low self-esteem their childhood and adolescence had instilled in them. Becoming a father was, despite insufficient preparation, an ethological adaptation to an environment that offered few routes to success for low-skilled, low socio-economic status, ill-supported and impoverished men.

Middle class routes to status tend to go via tertiary education, professional accomplishment and wealth acquisition. These are all part of the conventional project of the self (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). For men at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, there are very few such pathways. Fatherhood combined with family life was one of them. Being responsible for the welfare of a vulnerable child provides a sense of self-importance. A father's life takes on meaning. He no longer spends his time in hedonistic pursuits but in acquiring the necessities for his baby and partner. A parallel

transformation occurs in the home. The young man is no longer a flatmate or daughter's boyfriend. He has become a co-parent and a de-facto son-in-law. Glick (1989) notes that, as early child rearing is the cultural practice of this socio-economic cohort, men who delay partnership are less likely to find a partner. Parenthood is also an expression of adult status in a community where there are limited opportunities to achieve this economically (Gillies, 2000). Early parenthood has been traditional in this cohort since the post-World War II period, even though the wider socio-political factors that produced the practice no longer operate.

Becoming a father and family man moves these men into a community of conventional and 'decent' New Zealanders. Being a father working to support his family has a status unthinkable to a relatively young, single, low-skilled, low socio-economic status man with anti-social propensities. The latter kind of person is more likely to receive social attention as either an offender or a victim. The relationship that fathers have with their children, and the *raison d'être* this provides, are seminal in their self-transformations. Carter illustrates this when he says:

*Well, I wasn't really looking after myself or anything you know [before becoming a father]. And now I've got this little life to take care of. I've got to bring it up the best I can. And, you know, a lot of her, her worldly skills and everything, are going to be due to me. So I got to be seen as a good image and stuff. Just a buzz, man, well, you know world is meaningful now, you know.*

As Carter says, his world is now meaningful. Fatherhood offers these men a rapid route to meaningful lives that wider society had failed to provide. Fatherhood is a ladder by which residents of this demimonde can ascend into the ranks of conventional pro-social citizens. The most surprising feature is the speed with which these men move from a subculture to mainstream society despite the apparent difficulty of the process.

Fatherhood is predicated on one central emotional relationship, but it is important not to lose sight of the multi-layered roles and responsibilities arising out of it. For the men in this study, fatherhood offered access to a variety of social identities and kinds of kudos inaccessible to them as single, low-skilled, low socio-economic status males. This highlights the nature of fatherhood; it is a nexus of subjectivities played out in the workplace, marketplace, home and broader society. If social conditions conspire to restrict access to these ancillary sites, the pro-socializing effect of fatherhood can be hampered. Limiting factors include high unemployment rates, exorbitant rental charges restricting ability to establish an independent household, rising living costs (which could encourage fathers to maintain illegal activities to sustain their family) and constricted social horizons limiting the capacity to break away from deleterious peer groups. Viewing individuals as atomized units precludes us from accounting for the multiple forces affecting young men as they attempt to adopt the precepts of pro-social family life.

## **Chapter 11: Fathers' Contribution at Home**

Participants' fathering was not limited to maintaining emotional connection with the family and providing. Fatherhood was constructed as also involving attention to practical domestic routines, such as cooking, cleaning, childcare and shopping. Being a good father involved contributing one's labour at home and ensuring that the family home operated effectively. Participants described a process best labeled 'family de-genderisation'. This involved movement from the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver paradigm towards a de-gendered family arrangement in which housework and childcare were gender-neutral and both parents were breadwinners. This pragmatic attitude reduced family stress by spreading the domestic workload. Participants who resisted de-genderisation were more likely to report acrimony with their partner. Those partners were reportedly bitter about the amount of housework they had to complete unaided.

Those participants with de-gendered family formats became quite involved in housework and childcare. These activities were considered to be integral in family life and fatherhood. Although domestic chores restricted recreational activities, it reduced stress and afforded the family greater flexibility. That flexibility was essential for the family to cope with the demands of childcare and of both parents being in paid work. All participants had anticipated their partner's obtaining paid work once the demands of childcare had abated. Only those with a de-gendered family format seemed capable of meeting the demands of such arrangements without the female partner being overwhelmed by the dual demands of housework and paid employment.

De-genderisation can be represented as a continuum with the traditional family format as one pole and an egalitarian domestic de-gendered format as the other pole. Participants in this research can be positioned on such a continuum. Because the traditional male-breadwinner family format is familiar, and a substantial amount of research has been published about it, most of the discussion here will focus on the novel and emerging form of family arrangement, the de-gendered family format and the dual income family. Let us

first begin, however, by examining the traditional family form, the male-breadwinner family format.

### **The male-breadwinner/female care-giver family format**

Hayge (1990) argued that there is no typical family form in regard to home structure and employment. I agree, although participants generally followed clear patterns. About half of the participants enacted the traditional family format of a male breadwinner and a female caregiver. This format had all the features of the archetypal 1950s family (Weiss, 2000). Mothers stayed home and took care of the children. They ensured that dinner was on the table when their partner returned from work. Mothers also ensured fathers would not be obliged to do housework. Fathers contributed to the household by breadwinning. This arrangement was described as a family tradition. As Rawhiti puts it: “*she does what her mum has always done, I do what my dad’s always done, sort of thing*”.

These clear gender roles and precise duties provided a very stable domestic arrangement. It was taken for granted by the participants and required no role negotiation. Although other aspects of their father’s conduct may have been jettisoned as part of inter-generational repair (see chapter eight), participants maintained their fathers’ domestic role. The traditional format was common amongst those whose adolescence had been severely marred by antisocial behaviour. It offered a recognizable and robust family model that seemed to anchor them against their anti-social history. It contrasted with the chaos that had marked their adolescence. Those who enacted this model were also more likely to state their lives had been salvaged by family life. The well-defined roles it offered were taken on board without alteration. Participants appeared to have focused on developing a pro-social identity and the off-the-shelf male-breadwinner family/female-caregiver model delivered that without a need for reflection. Given the circumstances, attempting to develop a new family format was a bridge too far. Participants voiced a great deal of respect for the role their partner took. Mothers were described as the family’s emotional centre, motherhood described as a fulltime career, albeit a short-lived one:

*She's the mother of that child. I see it as... I see it as, sort of an occupation really. They are a house-maker. You know, she... I'd come home and tea's on the table. Not being sexist.*

(Carter).

Carter understood his contribution to the family operation to have been made in the form of completing a day's work, that is, providing. Although he did not equate that with fathering, he considered it to be his full domestic contribution. Housework and childcare were the natural domain of his partner. Carter believed his remarks were not sexist since he was merely commenting on naturally occurring gender roles. His attitude also conveyed the respect he had for his partner's identity as a mother. Although the status and value of motherhood and mothercraft may have declined since the 1970s, (Uhlmann, 2006), participants considered it a meritorious duty, one which was not inferior to paid work. As Carter stated, it was like an "*occupation*".

Participants who enacted the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver family format even provided biological reasons for this arrangement. Although none reported themselves to be hardwired for breadwinning, they described women as purpose-built for childcare and housework. The female's special suitability for domestic work began with gestation. Most participants who cleaved to the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver format gave enormous significance to their partner's act of "*carrying the child*" (Carter). The early parent-child bond created by the mother's carrying of the child was strengthened by subsequent breastfeeding. Both activities led to a mother-child bond which dwarfed the father-child bond. Mothers were naturally positioned to be the prime caregivers – they could supply more comfort to the child. Nathan gives an example:

*If he hurts himself, I cannot comfort him. I try. Hug him into me and he will pull away – until he gets his mother. So. Putting him to sleep is a comfort thing, with his mother.*



Some participants drew on constructions of women as inherently more morally aware and virtuous than men. They were described as more “*patient*” and “*caring*”. Participants reasoned that it was only natural for men to hand all domestic duties over to the woman.

Women were also described as having better skills for the more mundane tasks. This positioned them as better housekeepers. Alistair postulates an inherent female ability to clean:

*Women just got this magic touch, and everything sparkles. You can be there for hours trying to scrub things. And it just doesn't.*

For this section of participants, the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver format was a manifestation of inherent gender differences. It provided the natural, ideal and socially appropriate format in which to raise children and sustain a family. However, its naturalness did not mean it was flawless. Most of the participants who enacted it reported considerable family stress and/or considerable personal constraints on their partner. Although the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver family provided stability and clear role definition, it was inflexible and hampered adult development. This was particularly so if the women wanted a job. Most participants in this camp reported their limited contribution to housework and childcare was a major cause of acrimony between them and their partner. Partners complained of the inordinate amount of work they had to do. Many participants were alert to this disparity but took advantage of their partner's being relatively powerless to protest. Carlyn acknowledged his inactivity but made no plans to change:

Gareth: *What sort of things do you do around the house?*

Carlyn: *Round the house? Ha ha ha.*

Gareth: *Like housework.*

Carlyn: *Very little. Ummm... Which is quite slack of me. Before we had baby I used to do everything*

Gareth: *Did you?*

Carlyn: *I'd like to say I did everything – from vacuuming, to cleaning the bed, doing dishes. Ummm... just now I haven't had, got, the time or the energy. As where... Karen doesn't have the time or energy as well.*

Gareth: *Do you cook much?*

Carlyn: *No, I probably cook a barbie once every two or three weeks. Cook! You'd be lucky me to cook once a week. Ummmm... Karen does all the cooking.*

This attitude was common amongst participants in the traditional camp. They sensed they should do more to help their partner. They were apologetic and sheepish when they explained their minimal contribution to housework and childcare. Lee-Roy responded to an enquiry regarding cooking with “*No, I don't, I can't really cook, tell you the truth*”. However, these participants had little inclination to improve their performance. A clear sense of male privilege emerged in this group. They seemed to have contrived a family structure that afforded them a great deal of freedom and few expectations aside from breadwinning. Some used that freedom to pursue sporting commitments and social activities. They felt that, because housework and childcare were their partner's responsibilities, outside working hours they were free to engage in recreation. This was in spite of their being aware that this behaviour detracted from their performance as a father and annoyed their partner:

*Yeah, oh yeah, yeah. I suppose... Ummm... I reckon I could do a better job if I, if I wasn't playing much sports to start with. 'Coz sports drives me away from the family anyway. And then I had training four times a week sometimes. Ummm... Monday and Wednesday, Monday and Thursday, I had Tai Kwon Do. I do Karate. Wednesday... Orh, even on Thursday is... I have touch games, play touch. When I was playing rugby, it was Monday, Wednesday, Saturdays. Ummm... Monday, Wednesday, training. Saturdays, game. Every day after the game I would get on the piss. So Sundays would be, like, 'full-on sleep day' kind of thing. So that I think that stops me from being a better father too.*

(Lee-Roy).

Lee-Roy spoke of his wife's wanting to get a job but he showed no awareness this could impact on the amount of time he would have for himself. He used his putative male privilege to the full. There was very little his partner could do to counter it. While she juggled childcare and housework, he socialized and played sport. Carlyn, Nathan, Kerry, Luke and Heta all alluded to the discontent their partners had expressed at what they considered an inequitable domestic regime. The role of sport in undermining New Zealand fathers' contribution to housework and childcare has been noted by Julian (1998). Several participant fathers admitted they spent a great deal of their time involved in sport. By contrast, Ben, Darryl and West all curtailed their sporting activities so they could contribute to housework and childcare.

A small group of participants enacted the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver format yet still sought to assist with their partners domestic duties. Heta said the intention was to "*make it lighter for them*". Although this was helpful, these participants never took on more than a modicum of domestic duties. They were always able to resist the pressure to help at home by pleading tiredness from work.

These participants validated their adoption of the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver paradigm by appealing to natural gender dispositions and the various physiological advantages women have over men. They were alert to the paradigm's shortcomings, but none mentioned any sense of obligation to improve the situation in any but a minimal way. It was 'just family life' and it could not be expected to be perfect.

### **The de-gendered family form**

Contrasting with the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver family, was the 'de-gendered' family practiced by some participants. Although they conceded certain female advantages in regard to bonding with the child, the home was thought of as a gender-neutral domain where both parents participated equally. For these participants, fatherhood extended to domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning, tidying-up and childcare. There were differences in ability between the partners but these were individual differences, not

gender differences. Allocating tasks according to ability, knowledge and time available was said to be an effective means of maintaining domestic efficiency and harmony. Domestic tasks had lost their 'gender sting', and unlike the men Uhlmann (2006) interviewed, they were not considered to be 'lesser' activities.

A proportion of the participants in this de-gendered camp regularly cooked the family dinner. This was reported as an unremarkable feature of their home life. Participants did not consider themselves as going against traditional family practice by taking over the role of cook. Cooking was described as gender-neutral. In explanation of their propensity to cook, these participants reported, nonchalantly, that they were better cooks than their partners. It was, therefore, they said, a good utilisation of available talent:

Jason: *When I am not working, I will cook dinner. Umm...*

Gareth: *Why is that?*

Jason: *I am just a better cook.*

Gareth: *Is that right?*

Jason: *I just know. I can do better things and... with cooking and that. And I know how to cook a hell of a lot more, sort of thing.*

There was no shame in a woman's not being as good a cook as her partner. Contrary to Cowan and Cowan's (1992) findings, women did not resist men's taking up this role. Neither did the men feel they were inviting gender ridicule by enjoying, and excelling in, cooking. Their doing the cooking reduced stress and afforded the family greater flexibility. On the other hand, men in traditional, gendered families, who did not cook, were aware that their reluctance to cook was a potential cause of stress. Many of those with de-gendered family formats stated explicitly that one of the reasons they cooked was to reduce stress on their partner and thus to promote family peace and wellbeing.

Similar attitudes were reported in relation to cleaning and tidying-up. Participants in de-gendered families reported being very involved in maintaining a tidy home. Washing, tidying, cleaning, and doing the dishes were all described as everyday, gender-neutral

tasks – as Robert says, “*things that have to be done*”. It made no difference which parent attended to them. There was no shame associated with men doing housework, just efficient division of labour:

*But, umm... Like, I help out with housework. I said to her, “Look, if you tend to Billy more, like, I can do the washing, I can do the dishes, sometimes”. Umm... I just, like, I usually... I’m a clean freak. I’ll, if the house is messy, I’ll, nah... I’ll do the vacuum, I’ll tidy up our room, get our washing sorted.*

(Henare).

Helping-out reduced stress and promoted family wellbeing during the high-pressure period when the children were young and income was limited. This was the key reason for helping-out. Participants never expressed resentment at their having to assist with housework. They were sympathetic about the vast amount of work their partner had to do and were unable to sit idly by while she did it. Admittedly, helping the partner had a price. Whereas those in the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver camp enjoyed sporting and socializing activities, these participants had limited social contacts and few extra-familial recreations. Sam explained that, once his son was born, he could no longer ‘mess about on cars’ while his wife did all the childcare and housework. That interest had since been shelved. But the necessary giving-up of outside interests and hobbies was not reported as a cause for resentment. Explaining why he now saw little of his rugby friends, Ben said, “...*just more commitment and... Help out. Things to be done round the house and, yeah, I’d rather be here with the kids and Amelia*”. Ben felt he was doing the right thing, staying at home with his partner – a feeling which compensated for the pleasure he forfeited when he chose to forego socialising with friends after a rugby match. Those in de-gendered families reported far less bad feeling between them and their partners than those in gendered families reported.

A de-gendered family format was not merely a philosophical position; it was an ecological adaptation to a demanding family regime. In contrast with the more traditional fathers, those practising the de-gendered family did not describe women as virtuous or

inherently more moral than men. There was no mention of traditional or ‘natural’ gender attributes. Partners were described, in gender-neutral terms, as working in concert to raise the family. There was greater cohesion between these couples – and their respective family contributions were more closely coordinated. Fathering was closely interlinked with mothering, being a good father meant working side-by-side with the child’s mother.

The de-gendered family was not a purist institution. Participants who espoused the de-gendered regime, and were fully involved in housework and childcare, were still able to use ‘male advantage’. Che, for example, said his wife should not have to “*cook, clean and do the dishes*”. This obliged him to assist her whenever he could. He reiterated, “*what’s good for one is good for the other, ay*”. However, he also said, “*Orh, fuck that. I won’t clean the toilet. Not the toilet*”. When asked why, he just re-stated that he would not do it. He did not refer to it as female work or unmanly. He just regarded it as objectionable.

Participants in de-gendered families were aware of their departure from long-standing family conventions. Those conventions were depicted as inadequate in the present socio-economic period. They were unable to meet either the economic or the emotional needs of family members. Darryl gave a pejorative caricature of those traditions, saying, “*Old man earns the money, comes home, and dinner is cooked on the table for him. Mum’s responsibility to look after the children and the house and that*”.

Participants were also able to identify the origin of their domestic ideology. Most admitted once holding traditional views about housework, considering it to be part of the woman’s duties. However, all had come to realise the enormous burden this placed on women – as home-makers and care-givers. For Jason, this realisation occurred soon after the birth of his son (his partner had two older children). The pride he had as family breadwinner was dashed when he compared his workload with that of his partner:

*I've come to the realization that Sioux can be up all night. Twenty-four hours in the day, if she has to. And that is her job. So really... And she's not getting paid for it.*

Rawiri made a similar contrast with himself in his previous (failed) relationship and himself now. In his current relationship, he is fully involved in childcare and housework. He attributes the breakdown of the earlier relationship to his failure to help in the house:

*You know, I mean, it would be... My views, my views back then were completely different to what they are now. I mean, my view back then was: I put the food on the table, you take care of the house, type thing. And the kids. That was it.*

In addition, well prior to having their families, these men had been prompted to re-examine their gender ideology by observing their own mothers enduring stress:

*...my father, he's a typical male: "the females should be in the kitchen". Mum always was, and my mum always made his lunch. Even though I never understood why – because he was the one who ate it. Why couldn't he make it? Stuff like that, so. Ummm... Yeah, there's... I think my stepfather is a bit like that. Well, he always the first one to sit on the chair with a beer in his hand, while mum is still slaving away, doing little things. Suppose I didn't really, didn't like that actually.*

(Gene).

As a father and partner, Gene was determined his wife would not be overburdened with housework as his mother had been. Gene regularly cooked, cleaned and took care of the children. He also expressed enormous gratitude to his partner for her efforts, saying “*she's just so wonderful for everything she does at home and that*”. Anti-models seemed more salient in forming a father's concept of how much work he should do at home than positive role-models. Those who adopted the de-gendered family format did so to promote their family's wellbeing: it was the right thing for a father to do. By not taking

their partner for granted, and not ignoring her requests for assistance, they increased their own workload – but it resulted in less family stress and one would think, a more enjoyable home life for their children.

It was important to read between the lines of men's self-reports of housework and childcare. Men can over-report their domestic contribution (Press & Townsley, 1998). However, fathers in the de-genderised camp did demonstrate a close familiarity with their child's foibles and routines. This contrasted with Lareau's (2002) findings amongst an American population. Participants in my research were also able to be specific about household chores and their preference for certain tasks.

### **The dual income family ideal**

Whatever their family's gender ideology, all participants planned for their partner to eventually get a job. This would impact on their fathering by increasing the expectation they would contribute more at home. Stay-at-home motherhood was reported as a temporary arrangement, not a long-term family ideal. Although Carter described motherhood as 'an occupation', it was considered to have run its full course once the youngest child was at school. Housework was not depicted as part of a virtuous 'home-craft' domain. Neither was it said to be, as Daniels (1987) described it, 'mingled with love and leisure'. It was considered an endless and thankless activity. Women were not going to gain life satisfaction being stay-at-home mums. Rawiri is sympathetic:

*'Coz, you know, Katie, Katie was two. She's a handful. She is full on. I sort of realized, hey, maybe it is not so easy sitting at home looking after kids. It's not. Orh gawd, it's not. I spent a few days at home and I am like, "Arh! Get rid of them".'*

The standard family format was conceived to be 'dual income' – the single income was a temporary measure while children required full-time care. This understanding had a big effect on fatherhood. Fathers would cease being the exclusive provider and would be expected to increase their at-home care-giving. The male advantage would be



compromised and the gender differences blurred still further. Participants supported their partner's plan to get a job for two reasons. Her working provided another income for the household but it also provided her with a greater sense of identity and purpose. Paid work was seen as an expected dimension of adult life, one which women should not have to forfeit by being stay-at-home mums. Nathan refers to both of these reasons:

*I think it was kind of a necessary, for financials, eventually that she would...*

*Arrh... And she was pretty keen to, because of the social aspect of sitting at home with the baby.*

Men believed that their lifestyle as full-time workers and part-time parents was easier. Childcare was not depicted as a soft option. Mothers were seen as doing it only as an interim activity until circumstances allowed them to join the workforce. Even Rawhiti's partner, who was fully entrenched in the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver format, wanted to get a job:

*Gareth: Is she happy being a housewife?*

*Rawhiti: Arrh, no she is not. I know she wants to get out and about and get a job. She's never had a job before, ay. She has been a mother since she was fourteen.*

Dual-income families came in several forms. The most successful were those in which each partner took up as much housework as possible while maintaining a full-time position. Sam, Darryl and Peter all had partners who worked full-time. They reported doing about half of the housework and childcare. Fathers in these families had a greater sense of their child's needs and were more aware than other fathers of the demands of family life. Their homes were well managed, so each parent could maintain both a work life and a home life.

By contrast, other men maintained the male advantage afforded by the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver regime while having their partner working as well. Carlyn did no housework or childcare. He accepted the distress this caused his partner, who

worked part-time, as a normal feature of family life. Nathan did not adjust his schedule on account of his wife's working. She was obliged to call on her parents to do childcare and cooking. These men seemed intent on maintaining a male advantage despite their wife having the additional duties of paid employment.

Whatever the domestic gender arrangements, gender differences were not over-emphasized. Gender-role blurring was naturally most pronounced in two-income families and in families where the man assisted with housework and childcare. But even those enacting the traditional gendered format did not draw heavily on what Gavanas (2004) called 'gender essentialism'. Distinctions existed in regard to relatively minor issues – for example, cleanliness and patience – but there were no trenchant contrasts. This was especially true once the children were no longer infants and were able to receive care from either their father or mother. Although participants may have enacted a 'structural functionalist' domestic format (Parson & Bales, 1955), they did not use a sweeping gender ideology to justify this. When explaining the need for children to have two parents, they referred principally to the value of having two adults working together to promote a child's wellbeing, rather than to the separate inputs of a male and a female parent.

## **Discussion**

Over half of the participants promoted family harmony by taking an active role in housework and childcare. As well as making their partners more available for their children, thus decreasing stress for both, it also increased the amount of father-child interaction, even if this tended to consist of more functional activities such as putting children to bed, washing them, or feeding them.

Burman (2008) argues that working-class men have traditionally assumed a larger role in childcare and household duties than middle-class men. She says this is because their wives are more likely than middle-class women to have to work. Russell (1983) proposed another explanation. He found that paternal involvement in childcare increases when men have less responsible jobs. Feldman, Nash and Aschenbrenner (1983) found a similar

pattern. All the fathers in my research had low-responsibility jobs. For many, attention to childcare and housework was an opportunity for them to take some charge of their environment. It contrasted with their lack of authority and responsibility at work.

No participants reported their partner resisting their involvement in childcare and housework. Several researchers (Betcher & Pollock, 1993; Doucet, 1995; Ehrensaft, 1995) have noted that mothers often resist paternal involvement, as it undermines their sense of authority. The dearth of resistance amongst our participants' partners suggests that mothers, as well as fathers, consider childcare and housework to be no longer an exclusively female activity. Indeed, participants reported it to be part of fatherly activity.

The paternal contribution to housework and childcare took its own form. Participants in the de-gendered camp did not appear to use motherhood as a template for their attempts. Instead, the liberal attitude was self-formulated. The role of education in developing liberal gender attitudes (Erickson & Gecas, 1991) is possibly overstated by some researchers. Participants in this study developed their attitudes without relevant education. It was their observing their partner – and/or having observed their mother – suffering under an excessive work burden that prompted them to re-script family gender patterns. The intention was simply to reduce their partner's workload. I would suggest it is not education which promotes this liberalizing effect but the capacity to consider the welfare of others – empathy. For example, Gene commented that he saw his mother “*slaving*” away while his step-father drank beer. This he thought, was just not fair on his mother. Jason noted his partner could be up “*24 hours in a day*”, so he had to help at home. Being able to put themselves in their partner's or mother's shoes fostered in them a sense they had to help at home.

Working-class women in the English-speaking world have always worked (White & Rogers, 2000) but their income has usually been considered supplementary. It was the father's income that was considered the primary family support (Creighton, 1999; Thompson & Walker, 1989). The wholesale entry of women of various classes into the labour force in the 1970s was expected to be accompanied by a swing-door effect (Young

& Willmott, 1973) whereby men would take up some housework duties. However, a substantial portion of men resisted this and were part of an “acculturation holdover” (Dienhart, 1998, p. 149) which maintained the ‘separate spheres’ ideology. No change in domestic gender ideology is swift as it touches the inner self-concept individuals have of themselves as subjectivities. The move towards the male-breadwinner family format family was long and haphazard and many men resisted their formation as principally breadwinners (Creighton, 1999). It is unsurprising after nearly two hundred years of its discursive bearing, the discourses of the male-breadwinner family still hold enormous power over some men.

It would be unfair to assume that all ‘holdover’ men resisted change solely to preserve male advantage. Some neglected childcare and housework because these were foreign to them and they genuinely had no concept of men performing these tasks. What is most interesting is the substantial number of our participants who see their undertaking those chores as part of active fatherhood (because of its positive spin-off for family well-being).

In the late 1990s, Pleck and Pleck (1997) reported fathers in an analogous American population engaged in similar large amounts of childcare and domestic work but voicing conservative gender opinions. This type of working-class population is often misrepresented as retaining sexist attitudes – in contrast with the middle-class, which is reported to hold more socially desirable attitudes (Deutsch, 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner, 1994; Hood, 1983). Peterson and Steinmetz (2000) observe sexism is often conflated with race, with ethnic minorities being represented as retaining outdated gender attitudes. No pattern emerged among participants in the present study. Maori were equally represented among those who had retained traditional attitudes and among those who had expanded fatherhood to include housework and childcare.

Participants demonstrated no need to self-present as sexist to counter any perceived embarrassment associated with doing housework and childcare. The effect of the housework-childcare contribution is both direct (it increases their contact with their child)

and indirect (it reduces their partner's work burden). For some it was a conscious move towards an 'equal division of labour', as Che said, "*what's good for one is good for the other, ay*". Other participants who enacted this family format described it as being a natural application or extension of fathering. These fathers were more than mere breadwinners, they participated in homelife and domestic operations. Being a 'breadwinner-only' dad was part of an historical regime, one these men seem to have ditched. When explaining why he cooked, Robert said "*its just part of being a dad*". Kalmijn (1999) found this approach is associated with greater marital stability. He reasons that this is because both parents are happier, having this new venue of shared activity and experience.

Coltrane et al. (2004) found that American fathers resisted this re-formulation of fathering to include domestic activities. As recorded above, a large portion of participants in this study did also. However, the dialogues of these more conservative participants suggested they sensed their position was not defensible. They appealed to personal inadequacies, historical standards or natural gender differences but, overall, they were unable to argue against the new expanded fatherhood. They felt it necessary to acknowledge, and to either brush off or explicitly accept their inadequacy in the housework and childcare area. On the other hand, none of the fathers who were already helping with cooking, vacuuming or bathing the children felt that any special justification was necessary for their helping in these ways. For them, gender divisions were already so smudged that no societal codes were being breeched. It appears that the weight of argument in favour of the de-gendered family format has moved the fatherhood concept towards the de-gendered model – in which housework and childcare are accepted as part of the paternal role.

The concept of the father's role in the home is nebulous and multifaceted. It intersects with gender construction, economic forces and social expectations. This helps explain the considerable variety of fatherhood practices. Participants were unable to account for themselves as fathers without reference to their partner and her role. For all participants, fatherhood involved moving towards a de-gendered family format, even if a portion of

fathers resisted this transition. From the advent of the male-breadwinner family, motherhood was focused on childcare and housekeeping. The 'subtle revolution' of the 1970s (Smith, 1979, p. 1) has expanded the motherly role to include provision. As the role of family provider has become less crucial for fathers, domestic duties and childcare have become a domain in which they are expected to make a significant contribution. The emerging de-gendered family is not a social improvement in a simple teleological sense. It would be more apt to characterise it by default, by calling its counterpart a social anachronism. Realistically, the de-gendered family format is a response to pervasive forces in the social economy extrinsic to the household. Under such forces sharp gender distinctions are unsustainable. New parental identities must be constructed in the home as well as the workplace.

## Chapter 12: Conclusion

Fatherhood opened up a viable long-term social niche for participants. Having achieved little social development in their life prior to parenthood, fatherhood provided them with an identity as purposeful and positive members of society. That identity was secured by the five discourses they used to construct their role as a father. Each participant connected himself to his child and extended that connection outwards to include his partner, general family and wider social environment. For participants, fatherhood was a social activity that engaged them with their community – by building and expanding their identity into something with deep personal importance and widespread social significance.

### **Fatherhood offers participants a viable niche in greater society**

Fatherhood is a viable and pro-social niche in which participants were able to establish their own status, re-script their lives, obtain direction and expand their self-identity to include strong emotional relationships and positive social engagement. The five discourses discussed in this work establish the dimensions of the fatherhood niche and the means by which participants took it up. For participants, fatherhood was an adaptation to their surrounding “social and physical ecology” as defined by Newsome et al. (2008, p. 112), an ecology which offered them few other routes to manhood and status. Fatherhood allowed participants to act on their best values, encouraging them to make positive, pro-social choices.

Fatherhood opened up an emotional dimension for participants. Participants’ accounts of fatherhood centre on connection with the child, the love they felt for him or her, and the emotional sustenance they received as part of a strong and caring family unit. This emotional sustenance acted almost as an intoxicant on the participants, transforming their view of life and giving them direction for the first time. This shows up the dearth of emotional connection they had prior to fatherhood. Love, caring and tenderness did not feature in their accounts of pre-parenthood life. Recounting their childhoods, what did

feature were a sense of disappointment, neglect, abandonment and tragedy. Their childhoods were not domains in which affection with primary caregivers was built and sustained. They had no strong foundation of affect on which to build their adult world. During their childhoods, emotions had the constant potential to be painful. It is unsurprising that during adolescence and early adulthood this dimension of themselves was sealed off. Fatherhood opened that seal. It encouraged participants to re-invigorate their emotional selves – now, positive emotions could be nourishing. The participants could impart to the child a feeling of being important, which would help them at least build an appreciation of their own selves.

This draws attention to the lack of emotional stimulation available to young working-class men in their formative years. Their childhood family experience, with its poor parental connections and lack of social engagement, severely constrained their self-concepts. In their own defense, it was best for them to shut their emotional selves off. However, as well as protecting them from further disappointment, this reduced their capacity to connect with others and to develop a meaningful relationship with themselves. That capacity is essential for a sense of human value (Melser, 2004).

McKee and O'Brien interviewed fathers in the early 1980s and found that, whenever they attempted to discuss emotional issues with fathers, subjects questioned the "legitimacy of the topic" (p. 151). The big changes in gender roles that have occurred since then allow working-class men to discuss their emotional selves in the context of family life without having to justify this discussion. This development has expanded the domain on which working-class fathers can engage with fatherhood. It might also explain why fathers in this selected cohort were able to engage in a full emotional experience with their children, and their own fathers were not. Their own fathers grew up and became adults in a period when men did not 'do' loving emotions well. And they certainly did not demonstrate them publicly. Participants did not feel they were breeching societal codes or being unmanly by addressing emotional issues. Discussing the pain of their own childhood was not shameful, neither was it unacceptable to talk of one's devotion to one's child. Gender codes which condone male emotional discourses promote fatherhood



engagement with children. These codes give fathers a platform on which to engage with other fathers. This generates a self-sustaining discourse about working-class fatherhood which constructs emotional bonding as legitimate, normal and indispensable.

Historically, men in some working-class communities have masked their paternal affections (Tilley, 1979). Tilley argues this was a means by which fathers inoculated their children against the adversities they were guaranteed to encounter in adult life. It 'toughened them up', in much the same way that parenting in some non-industrial societies is intended to inure children to physical hardship (Everett, 2008). Participants demonstrated they sensed no need to prepare their children for possible hardship and setbacks in later life. Loving one's children, being tender with them, nourishing their self esteem – this was described as the most effective and socially appropriate way of preparing children for adult life. Fathers engaged with their children in such a way as to develop the child's sense of self-worth. Their aim, many stated, was to instill in them a sense of right and wrong and for some participants, to prepare the child for accepting opportunity later. Although they used popular terms to define this aim, they saw it as motivated by their sense of what was right for the child. They described their father-child connection without reference to other family or to any broader societal agents. It was a stand-alone engagement, prompted, they maintained, by their sense that this approach would ensure their child was happy and well-adjusted.

Being emotionally connected with the children was the most fundamental aspect of participants' construction of themselves as fathers. Re-scripting their birth family's child-rearing patterns was also important but it had a wider range of reference. It drew on the father's experience of childhood and his family of origin's patterns. Many participants seemed to see themselves in their child. This revived the hurt and neglect they had themselves experienced as children and it prompted them to ensure their own child endured no such injury. The participants reported coming from a section of society in which child neglect, child abuse, economic stress and family trauma were commonplace. They blamed most of their experience of neglect or abuse on their father or step-fathers. Now fathers themselves, participants were acutely aware of their obligation to expunge

these features from their family pattern. Doing so would rupture the potentially damaging connection with the previous generation. The new family therefore becomes an increasingly atomized unit, disengaged from the previous generation for the purpose of preserving its own welfare. This social isolation placed the family at greater risk, giving them even fewer social resources with which to negotiate adversity. That isolation was compounded by participants' decision to disengage from old peer groups once they entered fatherhood. Although they were part of a newly formed micro-community that connected them with their child/children and partner, they were progressively isolated from others in their wider society.

The drive to repair their family's parenting style was built around the new emotional connection with their child. It prompted participants to make changes that were difficult to maintain, re-shaping family patterns that were, they found, ingrained in their psyches. The shortcoming of re-scripting was that it was a negative reaction against inappropriate behaviour. The father was left to identify for himself appropriate positive techniques – a tall order, given their limited personal resources and limited exposure to positive parenting styles. Aside from help from the partner, the participants had little assistance in the re-scripting project. It was attempted in isolation and without an established language with which to recount/explore ways of good parenting. One or two terms, supplied largely by government campaigns, were available – for example, 'breaking the cycle'. Generally, participants were unable, in their interview responses, to theorise this dimension of fatherhood. Instead they gave examples and recounted family patterns. That dearth of linguistic resources severely hampers the development and legitimization of re-scripting as a bone fide discourse (Katznelson, 1981). Participants had to paste a discourse together and struggled to define themselves as men developing a new regime of fatherhood. The same applies to their attempts to describe their emotional connection. This difficulty is not explained by their limited education. Research amongst far less educated populations has found villagers and peasant people able to discuss quite esoteric and erudite issues (Geertz, 1984; Daimond, 1998). Rather, participants' difficulty articulating their emotions and experience is indicative of the very limited association that society makes between working-class men, emotions, and positive family life. Few

linguistic resources are available for them to account things not considered socially significant for working-class men. That contrasts with the vast resources available to them for the discussion of sport – but then, no-one makes money out of working-class men talking about emotional connections. The efforts these men make to be emotionally connected with their children and to re-script their family's patterns can only take effect if they can gain access to a robust language with which to account it.

Re-scripting the behavioural patterns of their families expanded participants' performance, setting it against their own experience of childhood. Being the family provider expanded the sphere of fatherhood still further. It placed fathers in the wider community as employees working and earning to support a family. It was as a provider that participants acted as fathers in the wider community.

Although providing was a core feature of participants' concept of fatherhood, they underplayed its importance. As I argued before, this reflects the meaninglessness of many of the jobs they performed. It also reflects the seamless move they were able to make into the labour force, a move facilitated by a prospering economy and low unemployment rates. The burden of their responsibility to provide was diminished by the ease with which they were able to take up the role. Providing did not define them as fathers, it was just a dimension of being 'a good dad'. Despite that, they obtained significant status as a working man supporting his family. This had significant 'off the shelf' moral capital. Because they were being responsible, they were respectable, pro-social members of society. It counted for something to others, that they were now fathers. In contrast, being a single unencumbered working-class man counted for little.

Older men tend to respond more to fatherhood's provider expectations than its emotional dimension (Townsend, 2002a). Coontz (1992) goes on to suggest that older men tend to mask their own material and career aspirations with dialogues around good providing and their children's material welfare. No participants did this. Their social status and socio-economic position was an accepted fact and they did not aspire to enter the middle class (although some seemed to hope their children would, one day). Participants did not

approach their life as a planning project (Beck-Gershiem, 1996). They made no attempts to secure the future welfare of their family. This was indicative of their limited income and resources – which meant they lived largely week by week. By living so close to the poverty line, they were more likely to go under it during periods of economic difficulty.

The economic adversity participants reported did not undermine the sense of being a good father. In contrast with other populations of men (Ruxton, 1999; Warin et al. 1999) difficulties with providing did not damage fathers' sense of being essential in their child's lives. I have argued that this was because their central fatherly role was as an emotional agent. I also go on to propose that discourses espousing material wealth and hyper-consumerism undermine that position. These discourses pervade social life (Aird, 2002; Hamilton & Deniss, 2005; James, 2007) and are progressively gaining an overarching domination of all quarters of society (Baudrillard, 1998). They passively discredit the family practices of those in the lower socio-economic band by highlighting their incapacity to consume infinitum. They work to make fathers 'victims of consumerism' (Elkind, 2002, p.36), compelled to compete in the marketplace in order to be able to satisfy their children's manufactured wants. Although participants take up their provider role with a strong sense of purpose and achievement, wider discourses act to undermine any long-term sense of accomplishment.

Being the family provider lodged participants into the wider community as positive fathers. That engagement with the wider community was expanded by their adoption of pro-social codes of behaviour. Fatherhood provided a platform from which participants could present as well-adjusted members of society – in contrast with their previous position as single, poorly educated, low-skilled, low socio-economic status men. From that earlier position, participants had had few legitimate avenues via which to engage productively with wider society – a society that had accorded them very little status and blocked their entry into it. Effectively they had been unable to establish a social niche for themselves.

As fathers, participants found reason to adopt the precepts of wider society and engage with it. These attempts to engage were more likely to be reciprocated from their position as fathers. The euphoria they associated with fatherhood did not result exclusively from their emotional relationship with their child; it also came from the wider social status they had now acquired. Although unable to achieve social status on the grounds of their family connections, education, qualifications or access to capital, they were able to achieve status through active fatherhood. Adopting the mores of wider society would therefore pay a dividend for this population – hence their pro-social development.

The niche that fatherhood offered participants was mostly laid out around their family life. In their accounts of fatherhood, participants described themselves moving towards a de-gendered home in which fathers and mothers participated equally in child care and domestic duties. The separate spheres ideology established in the mid-industrial period (Daniels, 1987) began to be smudged and blurred. Being a good father was about being emotionally connected, choosing to parent correctly, providing for one's family and being a pro-social citizen. It was also about being fully involved in the home, assisting with cooking, cleaning, tidying up and childcare. Fathers became more fully engaged in the family when they enacted this model. They expressed greater familiarity with their child's character and were more aware of his or her daily routines. This was an extension, albeit a pragmatic one, of their emotional connection with their children. This approach had some minor shortcomings, in that it increased the stress on fathers by adding to their breadwinner duties. However, that stress was countered by the greater togetherness they felt with their children and the reduced stress on their partner. It began to return the family to its pre-industrial form, in which parenting, including housework, was a non-gendered, fully shared activity.

The social niche that fatherhood offered these men was centered on emotional engagement with family and home life. By taking on traditionally female duties, fathers were able to secure a greater footing in that niche, promote greater father-child contact and expand their identity as a father.

### **The fatherhood niche is contingent on discursive practices in wider society**

Participants' accounts centered on their personal experience of childhood, partnership, fatherhood and family life. To fully appreciate their experience, we cannot view them exclusively from this phenomenological vantage point. We must see their experience within the wider socio-economic frameworks. The discourses they take up and use in those wider socio-economic locations broaden their experience of fatherhood and intensify their identity as fathers.

At the most intimate level was their propensity to represent themselves as emotional agents, engaging in what I will call, an affective discourse. The 'men's movement', begun in the late 1980s, publicised the need for men to be connected with their emotional selves. It provided a legitimate language men could use when accounting themselves, one that focused on feelings and their intimate selves. In New Zealand, the icon of the emotionally restrained and disengaged Kiwi male began to be replaced by an idea of manhood in which emotional expression was legitimate. Most importantly, a discourse emerged, one which constructed men as emotional beings, free to be moved by affection and free to report that. This loosening of the gender codes hampering male affect allowed fathers in the early twenty-first century to construct fatherhood as an essentially emotional activity and themselves as emotional agents. When accounting fatherhood, participants drew on this emotional discourse as their means of constructing appropriate fathering. It has far more durability and capacity than a discourse based on breadwinning or gender modeling. Its deviation from the traditional 'Kiwi male' icon was contingent on the gender re-visioning that began in the 1980s, and access to a language with which to depict it.

Predominant in that wider framework are the opportunities for them to enact the breadwinner/provider discourse. Within their accounts of fatherhood, the provider discourse was central, although seemingly secondary to the affective fathering discourse. Despite their very limited personal resources, participants were able to move easily into the labour force. Their adoption of the male-breadwinner role bolstered their position as a

father and largely underpinned their status as a pro-social family man. Its performance has a powerful effect on the family's social adjustment.

Most of the participants came from families which had connections to, histories in, or members who were part of, an underclass. Murry (1994) defines an underclass in terms of three characteristics: involvement in crime, non-marital births and disengagement from the labour force. We could pose, the family provider discourse had no status within this demimonde. Many participants certainly reported not living in a home where it was espoused. Most of the participants were unemployed and involved to some degree in crime prior to fatherhood. Most had been in informal relationships and had unplanned children. The family prospects for the child prior to its birth were very poor. But the availability of work for the father turned the child's prospects around. It provided the family with a regular income. It also extended the father's identity beyond that of a domestic emotional agent. He had a provider discourse which linked his operation as a father to the wider community, and marketplace. Work now had meaning, it had a long-standing and historical discourse which informed its performance, being the provider, the breadwinner. This discourse informed their operation. It gave meaning to, what for many was, meaningless work.

Work also expanded the family's possibilities – Te Huia and his wife, for example, planned to buy a house, Che hoped to use his practical skills to become a tradesman, Henare considered listing for an apprenticeship in the engineering shop where he was a labourer. The availability of work, which allowed them to take up the provider discourse, hoisted participants away from an underclass, securing them a position within a stable, pro-social, self-supporting socio-economic band. The provider discourse served to consolidate the participants' fatherhood identities. It also consolidated their identities as members of wider society.

When describing their life course participants gave significant attention to their own subjectivity. Fatherhood for them was largely a self-construction. Ties with past generations and historical practices were broken and they devised, largely by themselves

and for themselves, a new form of fatherhood, one they believed to be effective for raising well-adjusted happy children. The will to do this, according to Gordon (1991), is part of the self-governing tendency which characterizes our subjectivity – a continuing self-examination, reflection and comparison with others, by which our lives become our own. This capacity enabled participants to engage with fatherhood as they did, reflecting on their own childhood, considering the lives of others, and imagining a life they would like to provide their offspring. I suggest that it is the participants' capacity to reflect that underpins the inter-generational repair they attempt. This discourse, which focused on 'I want my children to have a better life than the one I had' dominated their dialogues. They had spent substantial effort musing on their early life, unpicking the reasons it failed to nourish them and questioning the behavioural codes they had been exposed to. Although they broke from the past, they engaged with it when they chose to parent in a fashion dissimilar from the parenting they had experienced as children.

Accompanying participants' capacity to reflect on their primary concept of fatherhood was their exposure to other fathers who prioritized their children and family life. For this exposure to occur, participant fathers must have had social contact with other fathers and children other than their own. However, the compulsion to work long hours not only limits the access fathers have to their own children, it also severely limits their level of contact with other fathers and children who are not their own. In effect, it limits their contact with other discourses, discourses that prioritize child wellbeing and assist men re-script their fathering style. If the opportunity for young men to engage with other fathers is limited, their potential parenting repertoire is limited. Increasing atomization of families compounds the lack of social intercourse. The continued decline in social engagement, community life and interpersonal association which has occurred throughout the latter part of the twentieth century (Lane, 2000) thus further restricts the exchange of positive parenting discourse between older and younger men. The spectrum of discourses available to these men becomes narrow. And their ability to dispense with what they consider inappropriate discourses becomes limited as they encounter few alternatives. Nevertheless, a large number of participants were able to attribute a portion of their parenting style to styles they had observed in other fathers.



### **The long term prospects for participants as a population**

Easterlin's (1973) cyclic theory of marriage proposes that men form families when they sense they have the opportunity to support them. In defiance of this theory, no participants reported giving consideration to their supportive capacity prior to family formation. Being able to find work and support their family was, instead, a corollary of their choice to live with their partner and child. Learning their partner was pregnant either compelled participants into the labour market or committed them to remaining in it. The relationship between forming a family and work was clear.

The sudden downturn in the New Zealand economy that began in late 2008 is likely to bode very poorly for participants in this study. Having few skills, they are most likely to find themselves redundant and unemployed. Although these prospects face men in a wide range of workplaces, participants in this study lacked the kind of contextual support that is available to fathers in higher socio-economic strata (Doherty et al. 1998). They particularly lacked the social connections that are essential, Newman (1999) argues, for providing economic security. Participants and their families had no padding to soften the blows of economic setbacks. They did have some moral resources they could draw on, however. Unlike the downwardly mobile middle class (Newman, 1994), participants were unconcerned about their socio-economic status or presentation. Providing they had enough for basic family survival, they reported being content. They did not have dreams of moving into the middle class, dreams that would have been painfully corroded by economic setbacks. Their emotional energy was invested in their family and they had very little investment with personal activities outside that (for example, careers). The cultural capital of emotional connection with one's children could be used to counter any loss of status resulting from the hampering of breadwinning efforts. This highlights the expansion of fatherhood well beyond breadwinning responsibilities. Furstenberg (1995) reported that, if fathers sense they can make no material contribution to their child's life, they are likely to withdraw from it. Participants in my study were clear, however: their paramount contribution to their child's life was an emotional one. Naturally, a father would be disturbed if he found himself unable to provide for his family. However, this did not impinge on our participants' ability to be emotionally connected to their children

and that connection defined good fatherhood. Economic hardship was not poised to attenuate a fathers' connection with his children

We need to put aside a purely economic assessment of participants, and consider the social impact of fatherhood. The key social effect of fatherhood upon them, was to engage them in the dominant social convention, the family. Despite the decline in family life since the 1970s, the family remains the dominant social activity and identity in our society (Uhlmann, 2006). By becoming family men, the participants became something with status, they became an 'insider' of society, part of what the rest of society was doing, being involved in a family. We should not overlook the value of that impact upon them. We should also consider how agencies in broader society, particularly government and social agencies, could bolster their newly acquired 'insider' status, by at least acknowledging it.

### **Some shortcomings of participants' approach to fathering and family life.**

Some of the participants' practices appear to bode poorly for their children. The most obvious was their lack of interest in career advancement and social mobility. This attitude tended to kept them in the lower socio-economic echelons, where they had few reserves against economic hardships. It positioned them close to the population that Nichols' (1994) labeled "the working poor" (p. 70) – those who are employed, but whose income is so limited they are likely to dip below the poverty threshold. Thus, the participants' apparent lack of ambition severely constrained the life prospects of their children. As well, Newman (1999) argues that the go-nowhere jobs that unskilled fathers are compelled to take up eventually undermine adult men's sense of dignity and predispose them to being short-tempered with their children. Before we judge them, we need to consider why the participants set their job aspirations so seemingly low. As detailed earlier in this work, during the 1990s many industries which offered men, and women, meaningful work on livable wages, were exported overseas. Jobs in the manufacturing industries which have long provided low-skilled men with a strong sense of satisfaction, ceased to exist. The service sector jobs our participants engaged in offered no sense of fraternity or common purpose. Those jobs also provided minimal training or skill

development. Possibly the participants set their career sights so low, because nothing offered them an opportunity to set them any higher. In their workplaces, amongst workmates, with peers, discussion of job advancement may never have occurred because work advancement did not exist.

We should draw back our focus, and acknowledge why the employment market for these men was so limited. Those limitations prevented participants taking up discourses which extolled job training, career development and skill acquisition. The jobs which once existed in their region, for example vehicle assembly (Hino Vehicle Plant), white ware manufacturing (Masterware), plastics manufacturing (Alcatel & Cassiens) became economically unviable due to cheaper production opportunities overseas. But maybe we should read that as ‘greater profitability’ to be obtained overseas. Government policies which fail to protect local jobs, which allow the employment landscape for low-skilled men to be devastated, do nothing to promote the welfare of the families these men form. While they are still in their twenties, the prospect of a low-paid, go-nowhere job might seem tenable. This is particularly so as they support a young family buoyed on their new experience of fatherhood. The affective fatherhood discourse, combined with the provision discourse are able to give meaning to a meaningless job, prompting commitment to it. I argue, that commitment is unlikely to be sustainable for the next twenty to thirty years. Whereas discourses around work fraternity, common purpose and company loyalty once sustained that commitment, those discourses do not exist in the neo-liberal economy in which we now live.

Some of the parenting techniques participants used had the potential to counteract their good intentions. Middle-class men tend to control and discipline their children using oral techniques rather than physical ones (Parcel & Menaghan, 1994). Middle-class men have greater verbal skills and material resources with which to impose their will. Prudent use of these resources is associated with more harmonious father-child relationships (Woodworth et al. 1996). Participants tended to lack these oral skills and this was evident in their dialogues. Nearly all of them were frank about their propensity to use smacking as a control technique. However, they were very receptive to alternative methods and

many had adopted behavioural techniques they had seen modeled elsewhere. It is regrettable that most of the media which explore effective fatherhood are in formats that poorly educated and low-skilled fathers find difficult to access. They eagerly watched television to learn new techniques but none reported reading a book on fatherhood.

Participants' focus on moral development, as opposed to the middle-class parents' focus "on individuality and self-development" (Verheyen, 1987, p. 37) can be associated with lower levels of self-autonomy. This focus is also likely to limit their children's academic and career success in sections of society dominated by middle-class values. This focus, along with their attitudes to career advancement and the use of physical force as a control technique is possibly best explained as a cultural lag. Working-class families are the last section of society to adopt new cultural practices as they are progressively diffused throughout society (Young & Willmott, 1973). As discourses promoting self-realising parenting practices, plus behavioural and cognitive control techniques gain greater hegemony, so lower socio-economic status fathers will adopt these precepts.

### **Social policy implications and possibilities**

Participating fathers demonstrated both emotional and financial commitment to their families. Providing them with support, be it financial, educational or even just moral support, could bolster their commitment thereby promoting the security of their family unit. Such support would harness the motivation these men reported, it would prepare them for the coming years as their family dynamics changed as a result of their children's development.

To promote their parent-child relationship, parental training could be provided. As detailed in chapter eight, the participants were receptive to effective behavioral child-rearing techniques. For many of them, their limited reading skills reduced their access to parenting publications. These techniques could be introduced to such men by way of mentorship from parenting agencies and social welfare providers. Parenting programmes targeting adolescent fathers have proved effective in raising their commitment to, and involvement with their children (Parra-Cardona, Wampler & Sharp, 2006) and it is likely

a similar effect could occur with older fathers. Given that many of the participants came from families in which conflict was not well managed, assistance and tutoring in managing relationship difficulties is likely to pay a dividend for the co-parental relationship.

At a much broader level, the family security of the men involved in this research could be promoted by improving their employability. Winn (2002) argued for a “GI” bill for families, and a similar programme of government support for low skilled fathers is appropriate, given their family responsibilities and limited earning capacities. Such a programme could provide them with easy access to practical job training, tutoring to ensure they were able to complete all aspects of trade training and guarantees of reasonably long term employment so training programmes could be completed in full. Such training, and particularly apprenticeships, would move these men into the upper section of their socio-economic band. Financial adversity would be less of a threat to their family security and their sense of job satisfaction is likely to rise dramatically. The fuel for such policies, the element which would greatly increase their success, is the motivation these men have to being a member of, and providing for, their family. Interventions at this stage of their family life would capitalize on that commitment.

Another dimension of the “GI” bill for families, could be financial assistance which enabled them to buy their own homes. Owning one’s own home makes a powerful statement about family security and parental commitment. Uhlmann (2006) has described the value of home ownership as a means of centering a families emotional focus. Most participants aspired to own their own home, but their limited earning capacity restricted their ability to buy one. Allied to this issue, a tailored budgeting skills programme aimed at helping these families make the maximum use of their income, could reduce the need for the parents to work long hours in paid employment.

Overall, policies which give a ‘leg-up’ to these men have the potential to promote long term positive outcomes for their families. These policies would capitalize on the motivation these men have to be positive and pro-social fathers. Timing, however, is

crucial. Motivation is greatest at the time of their child's birth (MacLanahan & Carlson 2002) so policies must target this period.

### **Limitations of findings and possible further studies**

This research was conducted within a specific community, low-skilled, low socio-economic status men in the Wairarapa. Collectively, they provided a full account of their experience of fatherhood and family life. Their accounts were rooted in the trajectory of their own lives and also the social-geography of their community. The lives I recorded were intimately tied to their social-geography by connections with social features of the landscape, economic features, and cultural mores that define the Wairarapa. This may limit the generalisability of the findings, grounding them so much within a unique environment that they provide little insight into communities beyond the province. I resist this interpretation. Although certain features are unique to my participants, the discourses those participants engaged with demonstrated a powerful affinity with the discourses found in similar communities in other geographies. This research, however, highlights major departures in the practices of some of those foreign communities; the relaxation of gender boundaries, the demise of the breadwinning hegemony and the atomization of the family unit as a means of preserving family security. Moreover, the research demonstrates what fathers in one regional society are doing and their performance is part of a wider paternal activity embodied in fatherhood discourses which pervade the English-speaking world. It also gives a very close insight into how those fathers operate, their interpretation of fatherhood and how they promote the welfare of their families. Because the research is qualitative, focusing on the discourses men use, it gives a far greater, closer insight into the minutiae of fatherhood operation.

The variety of participants contributes to a degree of discordance within the findings. For example, some advanced a strong de-gendered position, others retained traditional gender divides. This variety is inherent in any human population and attempts need not be made to suppress it. Discursive inquiry demonstrates the operation of this variety, as the hegemony of one discourse gives way to the advent of another. Amongst participants there was a degree of personal variety. Some were clearly moving into the middle and

secure section of the working class, with permanent jobs that had a small degree of good prospect. Others seemed to be falling at many fences, slowly slipping into an underclass with few resources to sustain their family. A cluster of participants had extensive support networks, whanau, family and friends with whom they could inter-mesh their lives, thereby receiving and providing support. Others lacked even the most rudimentary social networks and their families were isolated islands. This diversity does not detract from the weight of the arguments made within this work. Collectively, participants engaged in the discourses I have detailed and whatever their circumstances, fatherhood offered a viable social niche their socio-economic environment had failed to offer prior to them becoming parents.

It could be argued that as I had ethnographic links with a number of participants, and had no such links with others, the results are a hybrid of contributions. I concede the overall work would have been far richer and fuller had I been able to draw on a cohort of participants, all of whom had a deep pre-interview familiarity. Practically this would have been a formidable task. It might also be argued that the intensity of my engagement with participants disposed me to be overly positive regarding their fatherhood performance. This is a legitimate concern, and the propensity has been tempered by judicious self-reflection as well as third party review.

The work would be considerably extended were follow-up with the cohort of 23 participants to occur. This follow-up would demonstrate how participants fared in their attempt to re-script their lives, expunge deleterious parenting styles and mould a new form of fatherhood predicated upon emotional engagement. Fatherhood in whatever circumstance is not static, the mere development of their children would stimulate participants to at least re-shape their concept of fatherhood if not re-formulate it. A follow-up investigation would provide an insight into that re-formulation. Such a chronological follow-up would also provide an invaluable insight into how fatherhood changed, or did not change, as these men, who embarked upon it during a time of economic security and buoyancy, entered a period of economic downturn and diminished horizons. Fatherhood offered participants a viable social niche in a specific socio-

economic environment. A chronological follow-up would provide insights into the security and efficiency of that niche. Further study of this nature would invite a phenomenological, or idiographic examination of participants' personal life trajectories. Its focus would be how the discourses used to construct fatherhood, sustained their performance of it.

### **Final conclusion**

The fathers involved in this research wished to act on their best values. They wished to be emotionally available for their children and to expunge family patterns that would injure their child's development. They wished to be financially supportive and pro-social fathers and they wished to immerse themselves in the micro-community surrounding their child. Their capacity to do those things was contingent on several factors exterior to the family. It was contingent on a social construction of fatherhood that extolled male emotional engagement and the importance of fathers. It was also contingent on the availability of work, and on participants' capacity to move into a social community (albeit a very passive one) in which they could re-work their previous life pattern. These contingencies were the "social support networks that allow people to act on their best values rather than on their worst ones" (Coontz, 1991, p. 22).

As good fathers, their commitment to their family dwarfed other commitments they may have had. Most of their social identity and emotional energy was focused into their family; there were very few, if any, other venues in which they could feature as pro-social adaptive members of society. This family position returned fatherhood practice to the form it had had before the hegemony of the male-breadwinner family format, a form in which fathers were essential parents, emotional connection was the primary dimension of fatherhood and gender differences were blurred. In embracing fatherhood so seriously, these fathers promoted their child's welfare, their own welfare, that of their family, and overall, the welfare of the greater society.



## Appendices

### Appendix A. Notices posted at select worksites, businesses and offices, calling for participants.

Are you.....

A Father

Aged 29 years or younger

Supporting a family

Then I would like to talk to you!

I am a researcher at the School of Psychology, Massey University. I am researching the experience of young fathers (20 to 29 years of age) and their ideas about being a good father. If you are prepared to participate in this research please give me a call on 0800 100 800. All contributions will be confidential, and participants will be compensated for their expenses.

Gareth Rouch,  
School of Psychology  
Massey University.  
Palmerston North

This research project has the approval of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, 06/30

#### **Fathers Wanted?**

**Yes of Course**

**Are you a father aged between 20-29, working to support your family?**

**Maybe you might like to participate in my study. I am a PhD researcher studying the experience of fatherhood for men living with their partner and children, men who are working to support their family.**

**I am conducting interviews with fathers to talk about how they see themselves as dads. If you are interested in participating, phone 0800 100 800, leave your contact details and I will get in touch.**

**All contributions will be confidential. Participants will be compensated for their contribution.**

**Gareth Rouch  
School of Psychology  
Massey University  
Palmerston North**

**Appendix B:** Notice appearing in trade union newsletters and men's group newsletters.

Researcher seeks young fathers.

I am a researcher at the School of Psychology Massey University. I am researching the experience of young fathers (20 to 29 years of age) with particular attention to their ideas on being a good father. If you are a young father and have a family to support, you might like to consider contributing to my research. This would involve being interviewed about your experience as a father and family man. Your contribution will be confidential, and you will be compensated for your expenses.

If you are interested in participating please phone me on 0800 100 800.

Gareth Rouch  
School of Psychology  
Massey University  
Palmerston North

This research project has the approval of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee 06/30

## Appendix C.

Information sheet for potential participants.

### *Working fathers talk about being dads and how they provide for their family.*

#### INFORMATION SHEET

##### Introduction

Hello/Kia Ora

My name is Gareth Rouch and I am a student at the School of Psychology, Massey University, Palmerston North. I am investigating the experience of working fathers particularly those on low wages. To do the research I want to interview about 20-30 young fathers, and let them talk about their experience as dads. I want to talk to fathers from a range of backgrounds and lifestyles. That is why I hope to interview between 20 and 30 dads.

##### What type of fathers do I want to talk with?

I want to talk with fathers who fit the following profile

- o They are between 20 to 29 years of age
- o Their child, or at least one of their children, is over 12 months of age.
- o They are in a co-parenting relationship with their children's mother. It does not matter if they are married or unmarried.
- o They are in, or have up until recently, been in paid employment or earning money.
- o They are responsible for the financial welfare of their own children.
- o They can have step children.

##### What do I want from these fathers?

I would really like to interview you and let you talk about your experience of fatherhood. I am particularly interested in what you have to say about providing for your family. The interview will be at a place and time you select and it will be tape recorded so I get a perfect account of what you say. It should last about sixty to ninety minutes. If there are any questions I ask that you do not want to answer, you are free to pass on them. As the interview will involve taking up your time, time you could have spent with your family, participants will be given \$20 compensation.

After the interview I will have the tape recording typed out in full. All personal details about you will be changed so your contribution cannot be identified by anyone. For example your name will be changed, the name of your child or children will be changed. The name of where you work and what you do will all

be altered, so no one apart from me, is ever able to identify what you said. Once the interview is typed out and analysed, the tapes of the interview will be destroyed.

I will use the things you have to say in my research on working fathers. The information I collect will be the basis of my doctorate. When my research is completed, I will send you a summary of the findings.

### **Your rights as a participant in the research project**

As a participant in this research you have certain rights. These are detailed below

- o First of all, if you don't want to be involved in this study, you don't have to be. I am seeking participants who are open to talking about their parenting.
- o You can ask any questions you wish about the study, I will answer them as best I can.
- o During the interview you may ask to have the tape recorder turned off. If you do I will comply with your request.
- o At the end of the interview I will check with you that you were happy with your contribution and are comfortable with it. You can withdraw from the study at any time up until that point.

If you want to discuss the possibility of participating in this research, please feel free to contact me or my supervisors on the numbers listed at the bottom of this sheet. I am very happy to answer any of your questions regarding the research in general or the interview specifically.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 06/030. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Brian Murphy, Acting Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern. Telephone 09 414 0800 ext9251, email [humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz).

Gareth Rouch  
School of Psychology  
Massey University  
Palmerston North

Gareth Rouch: 0800 100 800  
Prof Kerry Chamberlain: 0508 439677

**Appendix D.**

Participant consent form.

*Working fathers talk about being dads and how they  
provide for their family*

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:**

.....

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

## **Appendix E.**

Interview schedule.

### **Interview Schedule**

#### Note

This research project is underpinned by a social constructionist epistemology. The schedule detailed herewith therefore acts as an inventory of issues for comment, not a checklist for the acquisition of specific datum. The object of the interview is to allow the participant to construct their experience of fatherhood, free from imposition of a pre-established specification of what fatherhood should mean, or the form it should take.

The interview schedule is therefore designed to provoke an account of fatherhood from the participant. Transcripts of this account will be used to identify how they have constructed their experience. Rather than an inventory of questions, the schedule is a list of issues provoking comment from the participant. Issues that will be woven into the fabric of the interview. It is not intended for the participant to view the interview schedule.

A wide range of issues for discussion have been listed. In the course of the interview the researcher will decide to present or withhold specific issues according to the family circumstances and life history of the participant.

### ***Schedule***

#### **Stage One**

Initial introduction/re-introduction

Reiteration of the purpose of the research project.

Clarification of the researcher's role and purpose.

Detailing of the participants' right to:

- o Withdraw from the interview
- o Request the audio-tape be turned off at any time
- o Decline to answer any question
- o Request sections of the interview not be included in the research
- o The right to have their transcription not included in the final research project.

Establish rapport and secure the participant's confidence

#### **Stage Two**

##### ***Life background.***

1. Details regarding the young man's life prior to co-parent relationship and parenthood.
2. Economic circumstances of his family of origin
3. His youth:

- i. Pre-family preparation for family life (*This is a very central issue, in his pre-parenthood life did he consider preparing for parenthood? Did he make personal arrangements to ensure he could do this job well/ he would be able to provide for his family in full?*).

***Establishment of couple and parenthood.***

1. Establishing relationship with partner.
2. Planning/non-planning for parenthood.
3. Preparation for baby's arrival and wider social preparation.
4. Phenomenological effects of the child's birth.
5. Domestic adjustment to children.

***Features of his child/children***

***Fathers' time with child/children.***

1. Amount of contact with his child/children
2. Domestic activities/duties
3. Play with child/children.
4. Reason for father's choice to play with children.
5. Father's evaluation of the value of play:
  - a. For his child/children.
  - b. For himself.
  - c. Invitation for comparison.
6. Emotional connection with his child/children.
7. Value of emotional connection:
  - a. For his children
  - b. For himself
  - c. Invitation for comparison
    - i. His own father-child emotional connection
    - ii. That of other children he knows/knows of.
8. Participant's opinion on the role of a father.
9. Father's primary duties. "Things you must get done".
10. Social Conventions.
  - a. What people think fathers should do
  - b. What fathers actually do.
11. Obstacles to performance of responsibility.
12. Nature of the paternal relationship c.f. maternal relationship.
13. Means of assessing a father's performance.

***Father's employment and material provision.***

1. Nature of his work
2. Effects of work demands.
  - a. Physical
  - b. Psychological
  - c. Availability for family

3. Income and disposal
  4. Effect of limited income on the household.
    - a. Physical.
      - i. Effecting parents: What do they do without?
      - ii. Effecting children: What do they do without?
      - iii. Effecting household operation
    - a. Inter-personal.
      - i. Effects on co-parental relationship
      - ii. Effects on paternal relationship with children
      - iii. Effects on maternal relationship with children.
      - iv. Effects on sibling relationship
1. Identification of family member responsible for financial management
  2. Identification of member responsible for the financial welfare of the family?
  3. Explanation as to why.
  4. Constraints and compulsion arising from this

### ***Chronicle Projections***

1. Developmental hopes father has for child.
2. Father's role in their realization
3. Comparison with mother's role in their realization
4. Unique features and value of fatherhood
5. Comparison with his own child/adolescent development and an explanation if a dissimilarity exists.

### **Section three.**

Invitation to reflect on interview

Assessment of participant's affective state.

Clarification of data use.

Clarification of research feedback.

Compensation of \$20 to cover costs of interview participation

Answering any questions participant has.

### **Termination**



## **Appendix F: Feedback to participants.**

Given the personal topics discussed with participants during their interviews, I became privy to very personal and intimate details of their lives. My relationship with participants ceased to be exclusively academic. I became someone they off-loaded to, bounced things off, reflected with and shared. The second interview extended the relationship established in the first one and the researcher/researched boundary faded as we became kiwi men talking about children, wives, lives, partners and our hopes. Given that, it seemed impersonal and exploitational for me to send a standardized letter to all of the participants. I preferred to honour their commitment to my project by sending personalized letters. Each letter detailed the overall nature of my findings and my conclusions. Each one also referred specifically to the nature of their individual contribution and how it enriched my work.

Where appropriate, I made references to their lives as a means of offering support, condolences, concern or congratulations. Three years after the original data was gathered a handful of participants had separated from their partners. Some suffered periods of mental illness. Some were laid off work and others resigned so they could take care of their partner who was unwell. One or two received job promotions and obtained a degree of financial security they had not envisaged. One was severely injured in a car accident, one had a child die. My feedback to them acknowledged their lives went on after my interviews, analysis and writing- and I remained concerned for their wellbeing.

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