The Good Family Man

Fatherhood and the Pursuit of Happiness in America

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The Fatherhood Script

Much more than motherhood, fatherhood is a cultural invention. Its meaning for the individual man is shaped less by biology than by a cultural script or story -- a societal code that guides, and at times pressures, him into certain ways of acting and of understanding himself as a man.[1]

Historically, the content of the script, the plot line, changes over time. It also varies somewhat from society to society. Indeed, these facts confirm that fatherhood is primarily a cultural, rather than a biological, story. Yet the underlying purpose of this script is remarkably similar across history and continents.

The deepest purpose of the script is to define socially necessary activities for men. Margaret Mead observed that the supreme test of any civilization is to establish productive roles for men. More recently, conservatives such as James Q. Wilson and liberals such as Myriam Miedzian both remind us that poorly socialized males constitute the essential source of violence and crime in all societies. Accordingly, in Wilson's words, "human progress depends decisively on the socialization of the male."[2]

In cultures across the world, the socialization of the male hinges largely, if not entirely, upon shared norms of fatherhood. In general terms, if we equate the essence of the unsocialized man with violence, we can equate the essence of the socialized man with being a good father. At the very center of our most important cultural imperative, therefore, we find the fatherhood script: the story that describes what it ought to mean for a man to have a child.

Moreover, at the same time that the script displays a social purpose -- to harness male behavior to collective needs -- it also reflects an individual goal. In a word, that goal is happiness. For as David Gilmore points out, the genius of a well-functioning culture is its capacity to reconcile individual happiness with collective well-being.[3] By situating individual lives within a social narrative, culture endows private behavior with larger meaning. By linking the self to moral purposes larger than the self, a well-functioning culture tells us a story in which individual fulfillment transcends selfishness and in which personal satisfaction transcends

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[1] The idea of fatherhood as a "cultural invention" is taken from John Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 64. My notion of a "fatherhood script" has been influenced by the discussion of "manhood codes" in David D. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[2] James Q. Wilson, "Human Nature and Social Progress," the May 9, 1991 Bradley Lecture of the American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C. See also Myriam Medzian, *Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking the Link Between Masculinity and Violence* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

[3] Gilmore, *Op. cit.*, p. 225.

narcissism. Our cultural script, therefore, is not simply a set of imported moralisms, exterior to the individual and designed only to compel self-sacrifice. It is also a pathway -- indeed, it is our only pathway -- to what the founders of the American experiment called "the pursuit of happiness."

This essay is a criticism of today's fatherhood script in the United States. Let me be blunt. My criticism is fundamental. I believe that today's prevailing story of fatherhood, particularly as told by opinion leaders and cultural elites, amounts to a social and personal disaster. It is a story with one-dimensional characters, an unbelievable plot, and an unhappy ending. It reveals in our society both a failure of collective memory and a collapse of moral imagination. In short, today's dominant story of fatherhood undermines families, neglects children, causes or aggravates many of our society's most pressing social problems, and makes individual adult happiness -- both male and female -- harder to achieve.

These are large claims. Before I seek to prove them, let me illustrate my theme and conceptual framework, first with a story, then with a metaphor.

The story is a true one. Some months ago, a group of fathers were discussing their sons. These fathers are highly educated, affluent, and professionally successful. Each seems to love his son very much. The question arose: "What are we teaching our sons about what it means to be a man?"

The answers varied, as might be expected. Several men cited the value of honesty. Other values were also stressed. Respect for others. Kindness. Generosity. Communication. Being true to principles. Sensitivity to the needs of others. Yet one thread unites all these answers. These men sought to teach their sons about manhood through *universal human values*. The very same values, they agreed, that they would try to teach to daughters.

An observer then challenged these answers, accusing the men of ducking the question. The question is about gender, about sexual embodiment. It is about the difference between teaching a "child" and teaching a "boy." Yet the fathers were generally unrepentant. For them, the essence was human values, not some delineated ethic of masculinity.

This idea is quite widespread, especially among elites. It is summarized eloquently by Mark Gerzon in *A Choice of Heroes*, in which he examines the "changing faces of American manhood," or what he also terms "the emerging masculinities" of our society. These ascendant norms, he concludes, are united by

> one striking similarity. The human qualities they symbolize transcend sexual identity ... These traits are based on values; they are not sexual, but ethical. This is the ultimate difference. Unlike the old archetypes, which were for men only, the emerging masculinities are not. They are, in fact, emerging humanities.[4]

[4] Mark Gerzon, *A Choice of Heroes: The Changing Faces of American Manhood* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982), p. 262.

Gerzon celebrates this ideal. I do not. Much of my quarrel with today's fatherhood script, therefore, is rooted precisely in my quarrel with this trend. If fatherhood is a cultural ideal worth defending at all, then the defense must recognize and affirm sexual differences and gender complementarities, not simply androgynous "humanities." Indeed, to deprive the fatherhood script of all gender-specific content is not simply to redefine masculinity. In some fundamental way, it is to repudiate the existence of masculinity.

For the author of this essay -- indeed, for most people who write about the family -- the issues here strike close to home. I am the father of a son. I want to teach my son how to be a good person. But while that is necessary, it is not sufficient. I also want to teach my son how to be a good man and how to be a good father. But when I look around me for help and reinforcement in that crucial task, I see a culture that, at its best, communicates confusion, fear, and anxiety on the entire subject of what it means for a boy to become a man. At its worst, I see our culture as actively hostile to this entire enterprise.

Here is the metaphor. Imagine the cultural story of fatherhood as a book or a movie script. Three decades ago, the text was quite long, like a Victorian novel. It had many pages, chapters, and scenes. Each page contained vivid detail and description. The text told a story -- a detailed, specific story with a beginning, middle, and end. The story had a moral. As a script, its supreme virtue was telling the actors exactly what to do and why -- not just in general, but line by line, scene after scene, until the story ended.

Today, that book gathers dust, increasingly unread and even forgotten. Few people would want to make that movie anymore. (When anyone does, the film critics give it terrible reviews.) Those old roles are widely considered to be anachronistic: socially irrelevant and far too individually confining to be of any current value. Though this view is especially dominant among elites, most ordinary people today would agree -- the author of this essay would agree -- that there is much truth in this criticism of the old text.

Today, we have a new book, a new script. Its defining style and characteristic is minimalism. It is a very short text that is not divided into chapters or scenes. It resembles a political pamphlet, or what movie people call a "treatment." The language is suggestive, but there are very few specifics. There are a couple of big ideas and a few slogans, but little description and no detail. The moral is unclear and is intended to be. On most pages, there are no cues for the actors, who must simply improvise as best they can. Moreover, this improvisational imperative is presented to the actors as an inherent feature of the new story and as something to be thankful for.

The result is not surprising. Almost no one can follow this script. The actors simply do not know what to do. They are bewildered. They wander around. They are lost. Some argue with each other; many become frustrated and angry. A growing number eventually decide that the whole activity is pointless; they start looking for something new. Many who are left wonder if they, too, should simply quit. Without a story to follow, without cues to guide them, they have

little choice but to fall back onto themselves -- only to discover that, absent any larger story, there is not much there to fall back on. They fall, therefore, into increasing confusion and anxiety, into loneliness, into simple narcissism, or into all of these.[5]

Increasingly, this is the story of fatherhood in our time. It does not require special research to discover or document this problem. It is evident all around us. Indeed, I suspect that for most men (and women) today, the sad results of this story are plain and visible wherever they turn -- sketched, if not in their own lives, then certainly in the lives of many family members, friends, and neighbors.

The second core aspect of my quarrel with today's fatherhood script, then, is based on my analysis of culture. I look essentially to culture, rather than politics or economics, to shape family roles and influence family well-being. But in American culture today, I observe a conspicuous failure to maintain or establish successful norms of fatherhood. Ultimately, of course, this is also the failure of Margaret Mead's supreme cultural imperative: the challenge of socializing men.

Finally, in a still larger sense, the failure of the fatherhood script reflects nothing less than a culture gone awry: a culture increasingly unable to establish the boundaries, erect the signposts, and fashion the stories that alone can harmonize individual happiness with collective well-being. It is a culture, in short, that increasingly fails to "enculture" individual men and women, mothers and fathers.

In personal terms, the end result of this process, the final residue from what David Gutmann calls "deculturation", is narcissism: a me-first egotism that is hostile not only to any societal goal or larger moral purpose, but also to any but the most puerile understanding of personal happiness.[6] In social terms, the most important result of this phenomenon is male violence, especially violence against women. Both personally and socially, the largest result is our society's steady fragmentation into atomized individuals, isolated from one another and increasingly estranged from the aspirations and realities of common membership in a family, a community, a nation bound by mutual commitment and shared memory. In our examination of fatherhood in America, these are the ultimate stakes.

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[5] Arlie Hochschild's study of two-career parents, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Viking, 1989), plainly illustrates the confusion, tension, and conflict among couples trying to follow the rules prescribed by the new scripts or, as she terms it, "gender ideologies." Though the book advocates a "national social movement to support ... a public challenge to the prevailing notion of manhood," it offers a portrait of unhappy stalemate within families, hardly an encouraging sign that the revolution is at hand. (Pages 188-199, *passim).*

[6] David Gutmann, *Reclaimed Powers: Toward a New Psychology of Men and Women in Later Life* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987), pp. 235-253.

The Shrinking Father

Not to be overly gloomy, but in some respects it has been all downhill for fathers since the Industrial Revolution. In colonial America, fathers were seen as primary and irreplaceable caregivers. In both law and custom, fathers bore the ultimate responsibility for the care and well-being of their children. Well into the 18th century, for example, child-rearing manuals were generally addressed to fathers, not mothers. Until the early 19th century, in almost all cases of divorce, it was established practice to award the custody of children to the father rather than the mother. Throughout this period, fathers, not mothers, were the chief correspondents (senders and receivers of letters) of children living away from home.

More centrally, fathers largely guided the marital choices of their children and directly supervised the entry of children, especially sons, into the world outside the home. Most importantly, fathers assumed primary responsibility for what was seen as the most essential parental task: the religious and moral education of the young. As a result, societal praise or blame for a child's outcome was customarily bestowed not (as it is today) on the mother, but rather on the father, who was assigned the major responsibility for his child's competence and character.[7]

Of course, all of this eventually changed: not marginally, but fundamentally. Industrialization and the modern economy led to the physical separation of home and work. No longer could fathers be in both places at once. The major change in family life in the 19th century was the steady feminization of the domestic sphere. Accompanying this radical change were a host of new ideas about gender identity and family life -- some focusing on childhood as a special and separate stage of life, others on what were believed to be the special capacities of women to care for children and to create, in opposition to the outside world dominated by men, a secure moral ethos for family life.

During this period, then, fathers began their long march from the center to the periphery of domestic life. As Joseph H. Pleck observes: "A gradual and steady shift toward a greater role for the mother, and a decreased and indirect role for the father is clear and unmistakable."[8] Beginning in the 1830s, child-rearing manuals, increasingly addressed to mothers, began to deplore the father's absence from the home.[9] By 1900, one worried observer could describe "the suburban husband and father" as "almost entirely a Sunday institution."[10]

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[7] Demos, *Op. cit.*, pp. 44-6; Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 73.

[8] Joseph H. Pleck, "American Fathering in Historical Perspective," in Michael Kimmel (ed.), *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity* (New York: Russell Sage, 1987), p. 86.

[9] Degler, *Op. cit.*, p. 77.

[10] Demos, *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

Within the home, the father retained his formal status as chief executive, or head of the family, but had ceded to his wife the role of chief child-raiser, manager, and decision-maker. As Pleck puts it:

> The father continued to set the official standard of morality and to be the final arbiter of family discipline, but he did so at more of remove than before: He stepped in only when the mother's delegated authority failed.[11]

In short, the fatherhood script was radically rewritten during the course of the 19th century. Fatherhood became a far thinner, more shrunken social role. Within the home, fathers moved to the periphery -- if not formally, then certainly in practice. In this period, the fatherhood script became increasingly anchored in, and restricted to, two paternal tasks: head of the family and breadwinner for the family.

In our own century, of course, these two roles as well have undergone profound change. No longer conventional wisdom, each of them today is a fundamentally contested idea. Each of them goes to the heart of today's great disagreements, anxieties, and conflicts about gender identity and the family -- tensions that are evident not only among men and women generally but also within homes across the nation.

At the same time, however, the trendlines are clear: we are witnessing in our century a continuing decline of fatherhood as a defined social role. The remarkable generational changes on this set of issues, illustrated by the data in Table I, clearly demonstrate the steady erosion, over the course of the 20th century, of the last two remaining anchors of the traditional fatherhood script.

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[11] Pleck, *Op. cit.*, p. 89.

Daniel Yankelovich also confirms this steady change in American attitudes:

Table I

Adult Americans Who Agree that:

"It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family."

Age Group:	Percent who agree:
18-29	27
30-44	28
45-59	47
60-69	63
70-79	75
80 & up	82

Source: National Opinion Research Center, combined data for 1986-1991.

> Up until the late 1960s, being a real man meant being a 'good provider' for the family. No other conception of what it means to be a real man came even close. Concepts of sexual potency, or physical strength, or strength of character ('manliness'), or even being handy around the house were relegated to lesser positions of importance in the identification of traits associated with masculinity. By the late 1970s, however, the definition of a real man as a good provider had slipped from its number one spot (86 percent in 1968) to the number three position, at 67 percent.[12]

In sum, over the course of the past 200 years, fatherhood has lost, in full or in large part, each of its four traditional roles: primary caregiver, moral educator, head of family, and family

[12] Daniel Yankelovich, *The Affluence Effect*, paper presented to the Brookings Institution Seminar Series on Values and Public Policy, August 20, 1991.

breadwinner. Within the home, fatherhood in our generation has completed its 200-year march from the center to the periphery. Indeed, that relocation has been so dramatic that many men today have travelled well beyond the periphery: they are absent altogether from family life.

The result is that fatherhood as a social role has been radically diminished. It is diminished in two respects. It has become smaller. There are simply fewer things that remain socially defined as a father's work. The script is shorter; where once there were many pages, now there are only a few. Second, fatherhood is diminished in that it has become less important, less socially valued. Influential people in today's public debate argue that fathers, when all is said and done, are not very important at all.

Many analysts of gender issues in our century have pondered Freud's famous question: What do women want? Fewer have sought to name the most important question, the core issue, for men. Let me take a stab. In keeping with my thesis of differences, I believe that, for men, the question ought to be reframed. Women in our time face the challenge of opportunities, choices, options. Female gender identity is being expanded, but not negated. The process, while anything but simple, is finally more about addition than subtraction.

For men, it is more about subtraction. The inherited manhood script in our society is under siege, blamed as the cause of everything from nuclear weapons to environmental destruction. Nowhere is this siege more evident and more consequential than in family life. Accordingly, and especially in light of this radically shrunken fatherhood role, the core issue for men today may be less about their desires than about their functions. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that men, more so today than women, cannot name their desires without affirming their functions -- recognizing and enjoying the special work that society needs them to do.

Thus the question is not: What do men want? From a societal perspective, and probably from an individual man's perspective as well, the far more urgent question is: What do men do? Central to that question is the fatherhood script. So the core question then becomes: What, if anything, do fathers do?

The Superfluous Father

Contemporary American culture has now fully incorporated into its prevailing family narrative the idea and model of what can be termed the superfluous father. This conception is rooted in the belief that fatherhood as a distinctive social role is unnecessary, undesirable, or both. The essential claim is that there are not -- or at least ought not to be -- any parental tasks that essentially and primarily belong to men. The argument, in short, is that society no longer requires, or can afford to recognize, any serious difference between norms of fatherhood and norms of parenthood.

This conception of fatherhood is now ubiquitous in our culture. It is conventional wisdom -- less a contested argument than the unifying philosophical premise of almost all currently fashionable arguments about men, masculinity, and fatherhood. Its ideologically diverse proponents have sucessfully justified it on grounds that are both societal and personal, pragmatic and utopian. Within elite discourse, at least, the superfluous father is not simply the core idea. It is virtually the only idea.

Intellectually, the conception of the superfluous father rests on two basic cultural propositions, each corresponding to a widely prevalent image of modern fatherhood. The first proposition is that fatherhood as a gender-based social role is literally what the dictionary defines as superfluous -- that is, exceeding what is necessary. The cultural image here is the unnecessary or bad father.

The second proposition is that social progress, particularly for women, as well as the achievement of greater individual male happiness, depends largely upon a redefinition of fatherhood based upon the ideal of gender role convergence. Accordingly, this proposition urges that fathers, for their own good and also for the sake of women and society as a whole, transcend gender-specific male roles in favor of essentially gender-neutral human values. The cultural model associated with this ideal is the nurturant or good father, or what many term the "new father."

I have looked through the expert literature and have followed the public debate on these issues. Perhaps I have overlooked something. But I cannot locate within elite discourse even one influential argument or school of thought about men and family life that does not derive intellectually from one or both of these propositions, or that does not deploy, at the center of its narrative, one or both of these cultural images or types.

Yet I dispute both of them. For ultimately I view these two propositions not as opposites, but as two supporting ideas for a larger thesis, two tales with a common moral: the moral of the superfluous father. Similarly, I view the two cultural types not ultimately as bad old father versus good new father, but rather as companions who are more alike than different: two overlapping expressions of the cultural face of fatherhood in the United States. Let me explain further.

The Unnecessary Father

The essence of this proposition is that men, generally speaking, are part of the problem. Specifically, this proposition is rooted in the belief that, from a societal perspective on maternal and child well-being, any gender-based notion of fathers' work is unnecessary at best, destructive at worst.

This idea is quite popular. Listen to the recent ABC mini-series, "The Women of Brewster

Place," on the subject of black men. Young, shy woman: "I don't have a husband." Older, wiser woman: "Well, I've had five, and you ain't missing much."[13] Or listen to Caryn James, a *New York Times* television critic, on the increasing number of unmarried pregnant women now featured on prime-time television dramas and sit-coms. These new shows have kept television "in touch with the shifting realities of women's options," the most important of which is that "women who want children do not need or necessarily want a spouse underfoot."[14]

Or look at social work and the related helping professions. In the United States, argues Martin Wolins, both "social welfare policy and social work practice" are rooted in "an assumption of paternal irrelevance." He warns us that

> several millenia of human social existence should have been sufficient as evidence that fathers are worthwhile. Only in the 20th century have we begun to wonder whether it is possible to do without them and "get away" with it.[15]

This is the heart of the proposition: that we can do without fathers and get away with it. For example, Barbara Ehrenreich argues that, when poor mothers must choose between welfare payments and husbands, the course of wisdom is to choose the welfare payments, since welfare payments are generally more reliable and less bothersome than men.[16] Applying the same logic to the broader society, Anna Coote of the Institute for Public Policy Research in London insists that

> The father is no longer essential to the economic survival of the unit. Men haven't kept up with the changes in society, they don't know how to be parents ... At the same time, women don't have many expectations of what men might provide.[17]

This philosophy of the unnecessary father also undergirds what is surely one of today's most influential media images of modern fatherhood: the dead-beat dad. Across the political spectrum, liberals and conservatives, feminists and traditionalists -- people who would never agree on anything else -- seem fervently united on this one point: there are too many divorced and separated fathers out there who do not pay their child support. In Governor Bill Clinton's

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[13] Cited in Jack Kammer, "Drugs, murders, crime and the special problems of males," *Baltimore Sun*, Pespective Page (Section M), March 26, 1989.

[14] Caryn James, "A Baby Boom on TV As Biological Clocks Cruelly Tick Away," *New York Times*, October 16, 1991, p. C15.

[15] Martin Wolins, "The Gender Dilemma in Social Welfare: Who Cares for Children?" in Michael E. Lamb and Abraham Sagi (eds.), *Fatherhood and Family Policy* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Associates, 1983), pp. 113, 121.

[16] Barbara Ehrenreich and Frances Fox Piven, "Women and the Welfare State," in Irving Howe (ed.), *Alternatives: Proposals for America from the Democratic Left* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 41-60.

[17] Cited in Bryan Appleyard, "Only nuclear families can defuse this social A-bomb," (London) *Sunday Times*, September 22, 1991, p. 2-2.

current stump speech for the Democratic presidential nomination, for example, cracking down on these dead-beat dads is the core proposal in his discussion of family values and personal responsibility. As William Mattox recently put it:

> To hear some "experts," one could very easily get the impression that the 1990s definition of a good father is a man who sends his child-support payments on time each month.[18]

I, too, will jump on this bandwagon. These guys should be forced to pay. But I also suggest that something is terribly wrong when our public policy debate collapses the question of fatherhood into a question of economics. In such an anemic formulation, the father fulfills his obligations by mailing checks. Fatherhood as a social role shrinks to the size of a wallet.

In large part, this notion represents a final recognition and culmination of 200 years of family history in which fathers, with each passing decade, have become ever further removed from the center of daily family life. When we consider families today, we perform a sort of mental triage in which women and children claim our primary attention. Fathers, far away from the important action, become marginal, irrelevant, or worse.

Yet despite its basis in social reality, and despite its ubiquity as a cultural proposition, the unnecessary father thesis suffers from one flaw. It is not true. It is also more than not true. It is false in the most fundamental sense: as an intellectual thesis, it is the polar opposite of everything we know -- from the history of our species, from the social sciences, from common sense -- about the primary sources of child and societal well-being. The unnecessary father argument is false as an assertion, but even more false as an evasion. It simply dismisses the most fundamental family problem of our time: male flight from family life. It is false, therefore, in a way that commands our attention.

Consider, first, the social science evidence. Approximately one third of all children in the United States today are growing up apart from their biological fathers. In 1990, over 22 percent were living with only their mothers, compared to eight percent in 1960.[19] Scholars estimate that over 40 percent of all children born between 1970 and 1984 will spend at least a significant part of their childhood living in a single-parent home.[20]

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[18] William R. Mattox, Jr., "Family vs. Work: Don't Leave Dads Out of the Picture," *Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 1991.

[19] "Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1990", Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 450, (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, March 1990), pp. 5, 45.

[20] Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., and Kathleen Mullan Harris, "The Disappearing American Father? Divorce and the Waning Significance of Biological Parenthood," unpublished paper of March 1990, p. 3.

As of 1990, approximately 14 million children lived in mother-only households. When

Table II

Living Arrangements of Children in the United States in 1988:

Live with Mother & Father	60 percent
Live with Mother Only	21 percent
Live with Mother & Stepfather	8 percent
Live with Father Only	3 percent
Live with Father & Stepmother	3 percent
Other Arrangements	5 percent
Total of Children Living Apart From Biological Fathers	34 percent

Source: U.S. House of Representatives Select Commitee on Children, Youth, and Families, *U.S. Children and Their Families: Current Conditions and Recent Trends, 1989*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1989), p. 51.

families with stepfathers are added to this total, we find that approximately 19 million children today live in households that include their biological mothers, but not their biological fathers.[21]

Recent studies demonstrate just how fatherless these children are. Frank Furstenberg and Kathleen Harris, for example, recently documented the contacts between divorced fathers and their children. Of all children living apart from their fathers, these children would seem the most likely to maintain some type of relationship with their fathers. Yet Furstenberg and Harris

[21] The number 19 million is a conservative estimate, combining 1988 data for mother-stepfather families with 1990 data for mother-only families. It represents approximately 30 percent of all children living with at least one biological parent and approximately 34 percent of all children under age 18.

find that more than half of these children have never visited their father's home. More than 40 percent do not see their father at all in a typical year. Only one in five sleeps in a father's home in a typical month, while only one in six sees a father an average of once or more per week. These scholars conclude that

> a substantial and growing fraction of non-residential fathers spend little time with their biological offspring [and do not] offer them much in the way of material or emotional assistance. The picture that emerges is not an optimistic one. It raises serious questions about what can and should be done to strengthen the position of fathers in the family or make up for their absence.[22]

Yet this is the heart of the problem: it is very hard indeed to "make up for their absence." In the social sciences, absolute proof is virtually impossible. But if current scholarship proves anything, it is that children who grow up without their fathers are worse off -- economically, educationally, psychologically, every way we can measure -- than children who grow up with their fathers.

To begin with, these children grow up in households with less money. This is an obvious and widely repeated fact. But it is also a misunderstood fact. It leads many commentators to conclude that money-absence, not father-absence, is the fundamental issue. In yet another iteration of the unnecessary father thesis -- one that is quite popular among policy analysts -- we are told that there is very little wrong with single-parent homes that more money and more services will not cure. As a popular parenting manual, *Ourselves and Our Children*, suggests: "Single parents need several different kinds of help: help measured in hours of child caretaking time, help sharing the emotional enterprise of raising the children, and often, financial support of some kind."[23]

Scholars have studied this issue carefully, documenting the effects on children of fatherless homes while controlling for income -- that is, eliminating income as a dependent variable in the studies. They have concluded that father absence, not money absence, is the core issue. Urie Bronfenbrenner, for example, finds that

> controlling for associated factors such as low income, children growing up in such [female-headed] households are at greater risk for experiencing a variety of behavioral and educational problems, including extremes of hyperactivity or withdrawal, lack of attentiveness in the classroom, difficulty in deferring gratification, impaired academic achievement, school misbehavior, absenteeism, dropping out, involvement in socially alienated peer groups, and, especially, the so-called "teenage syndrome" of behaviors that tend to hang together -- smoking,

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[22] Furstenberg and Harris, *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

[23] Boston Women's Health Book Collective, *Ourselves and Our Children* (New York: Random House, 1978), pp. 145-146.

> drinking, early and frequent sexual experience, and, in the more extreme cases, drugs, suicide, vandalism, violence, and criminal acts. Most of these effects are much more pronounced for boys than for girls.[24]

Irwin Garfinkel and Sara McLanahan, in their careful summary of the research on the many "intergenerational consequences" of fatherless homes, place special emphasis on the "family formation behavior" of girls who grow up without fathers. Among white families, for example, one major study finds that

> daughters of single parents are 53 percent more likely to marry as teenagers, 111 percent more likely to have children as teenagers, 164 percent more likely to have a premarital birth, and 92 percent more likely to dissolve their own marriages.[25]

Again, income is not the determining issue. McLanahan and Garfinkel do favor new public policies that would provide greater economic support for single-parent homes. (So do I.) But they also insist that we confront the research findings that

> increasing the incomes of single mothers would alleviate at least some of the educational disadvantages now associated with being a member of a female-headed family, but would not have much of an impact on out-of-wedlock births or on the perpetuation of mother-only families.[26]

Listen, also, to the nuanced clinical observations of Judith Wallerstein, whose pioneering studies have explored the long-term impacts of divorce among middle-class families. She describes why young teenage girls can idolize their absent fathers:

> The idealized father that the young adolescent girl imagines is the exact opposite of the image that later becomes prominent in their minds as they grow older -- namely, the father as betrayer. Both images block the real picture of the father. And because daughters of divorce often have a hard time finding out what their fathers are really like, they often experience great difficulty in establishing a realistic view of men in general, in developing realistic expectations, and in exercising good judgment in their choice of partner and in their relationships with men.[27]

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[24] Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Discovering What Families Do," in David Blankenhorn, Steven Bayme, and Jean Bethke Elshtain (eds.), *Rebuilding the Nest: A New Commitment to the American Family* (Milwaukee: Family Service America, 1990), p. 34.

[25] Irwin Garfinkel and Sara S. McLanahan, *Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1986), pp. 30-31.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[27] Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men, Women, and Children a Decade After Divorce* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1990), p. 244.

As they get older, many of these young women have affairs with older men:

> ... the relationships with older men represent primarily the search for the parent they never had. They have no conscious memories of being continuously well-parented as little girls, and so they miss the sense of having been loved, taken care of, and esteemed. Trading sex for closeness now, they want to be held and cuddled by their older lovers, as if they are trying to recapture -- or to experience for the first time -- the physical nearness that very young children seek by crawling into daddy's lap.[28]

She describes many boys who grow up without fathers as

> cut off from their feelings and memories, as if a major part of their psychological life is not available to them. To avoid the pain of some feelings, they shut out all feelings ... [thereby] suffering from an inhibition that makes intimacy difficult to establish. Unable to share deeply hidden feelings, they build lifestyles of solitary interests and habits to protect these inhibitions from being tested ... this kind of holding back seems to be a male pattern of coping with the fear of rejection.[29]

Finally, consider briefly what may well be America's most urgent social problem: crime. What causes it? Why is it escalating at such an alarming rate? What, if anything, can be done?

No complex social phenomenon, of course, can be explained by one fact alone. That said, let me try, since I detect within our pubic discourse a curious vow of silence, particularly among elites, regarding an obvious primary source of this problem. For despite the vast public discussion of crime -- no one can read a newspaper or watch TV news without encountering it -- almost no attention is devoted to what is almost certainly the central underlying cause. That cause is fatherlessness.

In *Boys Will Be Boys*, Myriam Miedzian seeks to identify the primary source of "criminal and domestic violence" in the United States. Her answer is what she terms the "male mystique" -- the values of toughness, dominance, repression of empathy, and competitiveness that comprise the inherited manhood script in our society. These historically defined male norms, she argues, are the seedbeds of crime. Modern violence is the result of traditional masculinity. Only by fundamentally revising the latter can we reduce the former.

She describes the father who embodies this destructive masculine mystique:

> He does not express much emotion. He doesn't cry. He is very concerned with

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[28] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

> dominance, power, being tough. His taste in movies runs to John Wayne and Sylvester Stallone. On TV he watches violent shows like "Miami Vice" and "Hawaii Five-O." Whatever his actual behavior may be, he is likely to indulge in callous sexual talk about women. He may feel that a high level of involvement in child care is unmanly.[30]

Such fathers, she concludes, "reinforce in their sons just those qualities that serve to desensitize them and make them more prone to commit violent acts or condone them."[31]

Not to be overly glib, but I would like to offer a good word for this type of father. Doubtless he is far from perfect, as a man or as a father. But there is one sin of which he is almost certainly innocent. He is not the reason why young men commit crimes. In fact, exactly the opposite is more likely to be true. This type of father -- playing rough with his children, teaching his sons to be tough and competitive, coming home every night to watch football or crime shows on TV while seeking to repress some of his anxieties or doubts -- may not deserve the Dad of the Year Award, but as regards the probability that he or his sons will commit criminally violent acts, he is much more likely to deserve a letter of commendation from the local police department than he is to deserve the charge that Miedzian levels against him.

There are exceptions, of course, but here is the rule. Boys raised by traditionally masculine fathers generally do not commit crimes. Fatherless boys commit crimes.

Clinical studies as well as anthropological investigations, for example, confirm the process through which boys separate from their mothers in search of the meaning of their maleness. In this process, the father is irreplaceable. He enables the son to separate from the mother. He is the gatekeeper for his son, guiding him into the community of men, teaching him to name the meaning of his embodiment as a male. In this process, the boy becomes more than the son of his mother, or even the son of his parents. He becomes the son of his father. Later, when the boy becomes a man, he will reunite with the world of women, the world of his mother, through his spouse and family. In this sense, only by becoming his father's son can he finally become a good family man.[32]

When this process of male identity does not succeed -- when the boy cannot separate from the mother, cannot become the son of his father -- one main result, in clinical terms, is rage. Rage against the mother, against women, against society.[33] That is why if we want to learn the identity of the rapist, the hater of women, the occupant of jail cells, we do not look first to boys with traditionally masculine fathers. We look first to boys with no fathers.

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[30] Miedzian, *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[32] Gilmore, *Op. cit.*, pp. 26-29.

[33] I am grateful to David Gutmann for his comments on this issue.

In making this argument, I certainly do not seek to endorse, as a package, all of our society's inherited manhood codes, any more than I would seek to endorse all fathers. But fatherhood is in enough trouble without being blamed for crime, especially since fatherlessness, not fatherhood, is the real culprit. Fatherhood is the enemy of crime.

The social science evidence strongly supports what one recent study terms the "strong relationship between crime and one-parent families."

> The relationship is so strong that controlling for family configuration erases the relationship between race and crime and between low income and crime. This conclusion shows up time and again in the literature.[34]

Moreover, as James Q. Wilson reminds us,

> Neighborhood standards may be set by mothers, but they are enforced by fathers, or at least by adult males. Neighborhoods without fathers are neighborhoods without men able and willing to confront errant youth, chase threatening gangs, and reproach delinquent fathers ... the absence of fathers ... deprives the community of those little platoons that informally but effectively control boys on the street.[35]

Miedzian acknowledges the connection between fatherlessness and crime, but only in order to support her larger argument in favor of replacing traditional conceptions of masculinity. But this ellision reveals the flaw in her argument. The friend of violence is not a traditional father. The friend of violence is a home with no father in it. The two simply cannot be collapsed together.

In short, there is a link between masculinity and violence, but not the link that Miedzian describes. The rapid growth of crime in our society over the past three decades does not derive from traditional male norms. It derives instead from the decline of certain traditional male norms -- particularly the norms of family obligation and the duty to provide for children, the decline of which has led to growing numbers of fatherless boys.

There is a further irony which I believe haunts Miedzian's thesis. If you want male violence, move fathers out of the home. If you want to move fathers out of the home, tell them

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[34] Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and William A. Galston, "Putting Children First: A Progressive Family Policy for the 1990s," (Washington, D.C.: Progressive Policy Institute, September 1990), p. 14.

[35] James Q. Wilson, "Changing Values, Changing Problems," paper presented to the Brookings Institution Seminar Series on Values and Public Policy, November 5, 1991. Quoted with permission of author. See also: Douglas Smith and G. Roger Jarjoura, "Social Structure and Criminal Victimization," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 25 (1, February 1988), pp. 27-52; R. J. Sampson, "Neighborhood and Crime: The Structural Determinants of Personal Victimization," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 22, pp. 7-40, but especially pp. 23-25.

that the traditional fatherhood script -- the essence of the manhood code that they inherited from their parents and grandparents -- is empty and meaningless.[36] Tell them that a father's work, in exactly the degree to which it differs from a parent's work, is unwanted work. Tell them, in short, that fatherhood as a distinctive social role is unnecessary at best, harmful at worst.

Increasingly, this is exactly the message that our culture sends to men today. In this sense, if fatherhood is simply no longer a cultural ideal worth defending -- if it is more like a problem to be overcome -- we should not be surprised by the continuing decline of fatherhood in our society and the ongoing flight of men from family life. If a dominant goal of our elite public discourse on the family is to remove the influences of traditional masculinity from our homes and from the lives of our children, we are likely to discover, sooner rather than later, that we have succeeded all too well.

[36] Arlie Hochschild, for example, argues that inherited notions of fatherhood are rudimentary and underdeveloped. She writes: "It is not that men have an elaborate ideal of fatherhood and then don't live up to it. Their idea is embryonic to begin with. They often limit that idea by comparing themselves only to their own fathers, and not, as more involved men did, to their mothers, sisters, or other fathers. As a Salvadoran delivery man put it, 'I give my children everything my father gave me.' But Michael Sherman gave his twins what his mother gave him." Hochschild, *Op. cit.*, p. 229. Michael Sherman is a "new father" interviewed by Hochschild.

The New Father

If, as a cultural proposition, the unnecessary father is an irrelevant or disagreeable fellow whom we would not want to marry our daughter, the new father is fast becoming our culture's best family friend -- the answer to our worries about what it means to be a man, the answer to our concerns about how to care for children, the answer to our dreams about social justice, personal happiness, and equality between the sexes. If the unnecessary father emblemizes irresponsibility and flight, the new father embodies domesticity and care. The unnecessary father is someone we can get along without. The new father is someone we need.

He is nurturing. He expresses his emotions. He is a healer, a companion, a colleague. He is a deeply involved parent. He changes diapers, he gets up at 2:00 a.m. to feed the baby, he goes beyond "helping out" in order to share equally in the work, joys, and responsibilities of domestic life. Because he is a favorite of the media -- he is the one required guest on every television show that devotes a special segment to Fathers' Day -- his influence in the culture is larger than the actual number of such fathers. Fathers like him are

> finding that "equal sharing" is more satisfying and fair-minded than just doing the token chores they once considered "dad's work." Men who used to "help out" their wives by babysitting now see child-rearing as an important part of their lives, and in many homes both parents share this responsibility, the work and decision-making as well as the fun of parenting.[37]

Letty Cottin Pogrebin, in *Family Politics*, devotes a chapter to celebrating the emergence of "the new fathers" who

> do not have to pretend. A man in Albuquerque, for example, loves being a father so much that he wanted to share his enthusiasm with a father-to-be. He gave his best pal a baby shower at which men friends gathered to toast the forthcoming baby with good will, good food, and a rap session about father feelings. All over the country, men are materializing in childbirth courses, child-care centers, and early childhood education; they are staying home to care for their own children, braving the quizzical stares of cops and mothers as they push a baby carriage or watch their children in the playground; asking for joint custody; demanding paternity leave; and taking baby-care classes to prepare to be more skillful, better prepared fathers.[38]

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[37] Julie Wheelock, "The 'New' Father: Are Old Sexist Stereotypes About Childrearing Breaking Down?", *Television & Families* (Summer 1991), p. 14.

[38] Letty Cottin Pogrebin, *Family Politics: Love and Power on an Intimate Frontier* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), p. 206.

To advance this ideal, she argues, our culture is "breaking the absurd linkage of Father with Breadwinner, understanding that one role is not dependent on the other and that neither role determines 'masculinity.'" We are also eliminating "sex specialization" within the family: "Sex-specialized caring imperils children because it is contingent on parents' sex role choreography rather than children's needs."[39]

The social science evidence suggests that the new father is more than an abstract cultural exhortation. It is affecting the way many married men lead their lives. Joseph Pleck concludes that young married fathers today spend from 20 to 30 percent more time in child care and domestic work than did young married fathers in the early 1960s. Interestingly, Pleck also finds that, among two-earner couples, nearly one mother in five reports that the father is the primary caregiver while the mother is working -- which means, among other things, that more of these children are being cared for by fathers than are in day care centers.[40] Similarly, Judith Wallerstein reports from her longitudinal studies that

> We have seen a major shift in the attitudes of fathers, more of whom are trying to maintain an active parenting role in their children's lives.[41]

I, too, find much to commend in the concept of the new father. I may well be something of a new father myself -- if more in practice than in theory. In short, I have a lot to say in support of nurturing fathers.

But at the risk of being the skunk at the garden party, I will also argue that, as a cultural proposition, the new father is part and parcel of a culturally impoverished conception of fatherhood: what I term the superfluous father. My claim, therefore, is that the new father closely resembles the unnecessary father. As models, they are more alike than different. Though they are almost always portrayed as opposites -- one good, one bad -- they are ultimately two related chapters of a single cultural narrative: the narrative of the superfluous father, in which fatherhood as a distinctive social role is either irrelevant or undesirable.

As a cultural proposition, the new father rests upon a premise and an imperative. The premise is that social progress, especially for women, as well as the attainment of individual male happiness, depends in large part upon overturning traditional masculine norms within the home.[42] The social progress component of this premise is well summarized by Michael Lamb,

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[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 197, 209.

[40] Joseph H. Pleck, "Family-Supportive Employer Policies: Are They Relevant to Men?", unpublished paper dated August 12, 1991, pp. 1-2.

[41] Wallerstein and Blakeslee, *Op. cit.*, p. 303.

[42] It is revealing that, as a cultural model, the new father is chiefly identified with the nurture of infants and very small children, not with children in the latency stage or teenage years. Thus, the new father is most evident at precisely that moment in the life cycle when gender identities diverge most dramatically and therefore when that divergence most threatens the ideal of role convergence. Although infants obviously benefit from the loving attention of a father, it is also

who tells us that, in recent years, reformers began to realize that

> further progress toward the attainment of women's rights was dependent on changes in men's roles. First in Scandinavia and later in other countries, reformers came to realize that social and gender roles are intimately interrelated, because male and female roles are largely defined in relation to one another. Consequently, it is impossible to bring about major changes in either without complementary changes in the other. More specifically, it was recognized that women were not going to achieve equal opportunity in the employment sector, or become full participants in this sector, unless and until men assumed an increasing responsibility for family and home work.[43]

Fortunately, in this premise, societal needs coincide with the individual needs of men in pursuit of happiness. In this area, public and private requirements converge; the political serves the personal. As James Levine argues, the ideal of the new father is based not only on the needs of women and children, but also in large part on the "meaning of fatherhood in the lives of men themselves."

> Some 15 years after the rebirth of the women's movement, and after scores of books about the meaning of motherhood in women's lives, a literature by and about fathers is now beginning to find its way into popular consciousness and college curricula. This diverse literature ... calls for fathers to be more involved with their children because of the enriching effect such involvement will have on men's own lives.[44]

The imperative that flows from this premise is role convergence. The essence of this imperative is the removal of socially defined male and female roles from family life. Accordingly, this imperative urges the increasing displacement of gender-specific family roles by ideals of human development based on gender-neutral universal values. In part, then, the imperative simply urges the reduction or elimination of sex specialization within the family. But in a larger sense, the imperative warns that any notion of socially defined roles for human beings constitutes an oppressive and socially unnecessary restriction on the full emergence of human potentiality within each individual.

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true that infants need fathers less than do older children. Clearly, therefore, the new father ideal is largely shaped by forces other than the developmental schedule of the child.

[43] Michael E. Lamb, "Fatherhood and Social Policy in International Perspective: An Introduction," in Lamb and Sagi (eds.), *Op. cit.*, p. 2. This notion also helps explain our society's current preoccupation, in the scholarly literature and in the media, with the father's relationship to the infant. The birth of a child literally requires that mothers and fathers conform to divergent gender identities. Yet, to many advocates and analysts, the imposition of such divergent roles, however temporary, is viewed as regressive. Therefore, fathers must be recruited to identify with and share in the nurturing role so as to minimize sexual differences and thereby advance the goal of gender equality.

[44] James A. Levine, Joseph H. Pleck, and Michael E. Lamb, "The Fatherhood Project," in *Ibid.*, p. 102.

Benjamin Spock, who has probably had more influence on American parents than any other person in this century, has substantially revised his famous book, *Baby and Child Care*, to incorporate the ideal and model of the new father based on this imperative of gender role convergence. Women, he tells us in the updated version,

> in trying to liberate themselves, have realized that men, too, are victims of sexist assumptions -- sexual stereotyping ... When individuals feel obliged to conform to a conventional male or female sex stereotype, they are all cramped to a degree, depending on how much each has to deny and suppress his or her natural inclinations.[45]

Spock now urges parents to minimize gender-based roles, for both themselves and for their children. Regarding household chores, for example, he "used to assume that it was wise for parents to strengthen the maleness of their boys and the femaleness of their girls by differentiating ... the chores they assigned to them." But

> I believe now that it's sound for boys and girls to have basically the same ones, just as I think it's wise for men and women to share in the same occupations, at home and outside. Boys can do as much bed making, room cleaning, dishwashing as their sisters. And girls can take part in yard work and car washing -- as I hope their mothers will.[46]

More poetically but in exactly this vein, Mark Gerzon celebrates the emerging cultural narrative of family life in which

> Couples may write their own scripts, construct their own plots, with unprecedented freedom. Whether the encounter is between strangers on a bus, colleagues in a meeting, or lovers in bed, a man and a woman are free to find the fullest range of possibilities. Neither needs to act in certain ways because of preordained cross-sexual codes of conduct.[47]

This is a vision, ultimately, of freedom. In some ways it is a bracing, exhilarating vision, bravely contemptuous of boundaries and inherited limitations, distinctly American in its radical insistence on self-created identity. It draws upon the American myth, the nation's founding ideals; it echoes much of what is best in the American character. It is the vision of Whitman in his "Song of the Open Road."

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[45] Benjamin Spock, M.D., and Michael B. Rothenberg, M.D., *Baby and Child Care* (New York: Pocket Books, 1985), p. 38.

[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

[47] Gerzon, *Op. cit.*, p. 237.

From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary lines,
Going where I list, my own master total and absolute

There is so much to commend in this vision. It is the reigning ethos of much of contemporary American culture. But as a social ethic for fatherhood -- or motherhood --I dispute it.

I dispute it because it demands the obliteration of precisely those cultural boundaries, limitations, and behavioral norms that valorize parental altruism and therefore favor the well-being of the human infant. I dispute it because it denies the necessity and even repudiates the existence of fathers' work: of irreplaceable work on behalf of family that is essentially and primarily the work of men. I dispute it, finally, because it rests upon a narcissistic and ultimately self-defeating conception of personal happiness and human completion. Thus it cannot be, at bottom, the vision of the good father. It is finally the vision of Huck Finn, the boy who ran away from society, and of Peter Pan, the boy who would never grow up.[48]

Fundamentally, the new father's imperative of role convergence is based on the sexual equivalent of what some political scientists term the "end of history."[49] Politically, the end of history refers to the ending of the historic contest between communism and capitalism, between the two political ideologies whose struggle, now over, shaped the politics of the modern era. The struggle is over because one side won everything. The losing side not only lost, but seeks now to emulate the victor. Thus in world-political terms, consensus replaces conflict; sameness replaces difference; universalism replaces particularism.

Sexually, the end of history would refer to the ending of any historically inherited and socially important differences between males and females. Unlike past sexual history, which was based on differences and complementarities, the end of sexual history would denote the fundamental social irrelevance of sexual roles -- a new fusion of previously divided components of humanity.

Moreover, the end of sexual history also suggests the end of a tension or struggle. As in the political analogue, the struggle ends because, at least within the home, one side wins everything. The losing side not only loses, but also seeks to emulate the winning side. Sexually, the losing side is aggression, competition, toughness, and other historically masculine norms. The winning side is nurture, cooperation, empathy, and other historically feminine norms. Accordingly, in the realm of domestic life -- in public life, the trend is the same but the other side wins -- the historic tensions rooted in sexual complementarities are replaced by a new consensus rooted in sexual universalities. Independence replaces dependency. Sameness replaces

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[48] The archetypal male hero in American literature has been frequently identified with freedom from civilization, especially as represented by women and children. From Natty Bumpo to Huck Finn to Sam Spade, this hero is the man who got away. Indeed, it is this mythic iteration of male juvenility and flight from responsibility that poses a central cultural challenge to the ideal of the good family man.

[49] See Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?", *The National Interest* (16, Summer 1989), pp. 3-18.

difference. Particularisms evaporate into the whole. History ends.

I will leave it to others to debate the end of political history. But I decline to accept the end of sexual history, either as an empirical fact or as a utopian goal. The peculiar trait of our species -- unique among the mammals -- is the remarkably long period of time in which the human child depends on his mother and father for survival. During the period of life that David Gutmann calls the "parental emergency," the needs of the child compel mothers and fathers to specialize in their labor and to adopt socially and sexually mediated family roles. In part, these adaptations are required simply to get the work done. But more importantly, they help and also pressure adults -- especially men -- to restrict their desires for omnipotentiality in favor of serving the needs of the dependent child.

This sexual division of labor within the family is a common trait in human societies, occurring across history and cultures, precisely because it is integral to the survival and reproduction of the society. The human child does not know or care about some disembodied abstraction called "parent." What it needs is a mother and a father who will work together, in overlapping but different ways, on its behalf. Thus the sexual division of labor is not, at bottom, the result of social conditioning or cultural values. Nor does it have anything to do with fostering the desire for omnipotentiality that is present in all humans. Rather, it is ultimately the consequence of our biological embodiment as sexual beings and of the inherent qualities of the mother-child bond.

These basic facts have not disappeared and will not. History continues. Moreover, the necessity and irreplaceability of a father's work has not disappeared and will not. In service to the child and to the social good, fathers do certain things that other people, including mothers, do not do as often, as naturally, or as well. When fathers do not do this work -- as is increasingly the case in our society -- child and societal well-being declines.

Historically, the good father, above all, protects his family, provides for its material needs, devotes himself to the moral education of his children, and represents his family's interests in the larger world. This work is necessarily rooted in a repertoire of inherited male values: historically and socially mediated understandings of what it means to be a good father. These values are not limited to toughness, competition, and aggression -- but they certainly include them. These "hard" male values have changed and will continue to change. But they will not disappear or turn into their opposites. Nor should we wish them to do so.

Finally, I dispute the new father's imperative of gender role convergence because I refuse to credit its promise of greater human happiness. As an ideal of human completion, gender role convergence reflects a philosophy of radical individualism. Indeed, androgyny constitutes the most radical conception of expressive individualism that we can imagine.

It is the belief, quite simply, that human completion is a solo act. It is the insistence that the pathway to human happiness lies in transcending the old polarities of sexual embodiment in order for each individual man and woman to embrace and express all of human potentiality

within his or her self. No longer, in this view, do we accept otherness as a biosocial fact. Instead, we appropriate otherness into the self. No longer, for example, would a man alone consider himself in some way to be incomplete. The fractured moieties of male and female, child and adult, reside together as part of the omnipotentiality of the individual man. Now each man, within the cell of himself, can be complete.

I submit that this idea, so deeply a part of our culture, is fool's gold. It is a denial of sexual complementarity and ultimately, I believe, a denial of generativity -- particularly male generativity, which is, much more than the female's, largely a social construction. Especially for men, then, its promise of happiness is a cruel hoax. Like all forms of narcissism, its final product is not fulfillment but emptiness. If fatherhood has anything to say to men, it is that human completion is not a solo act.

The Good Family Man

> This story shall the good man teach his son.[50]

> It is odd that there is so much literature available to help parents -- mothers especially -- to nurture their children and support the children's movement from infancy to childhood, and so little to help parents -- fathers especially -- encourage young people to develop independence, self-reliance, and effectiveness ... In general, fathers need help in clarifying for themselves what they are about in their relationships to their children. Some of the answer may be in helping fathers to be better parents, but much of it, I think, is in helping fathers to be better fathers.[51]

I conclude this essay by revisiting my point of departure: the fatherhood script. If our culture's prevailing story of fatherhood is fundamentally flawed, what is a better story? If today's impoverished script features a character called the superfluous father, what type of man ought to be featured in a richer cultural narrative? If the work of the father is irreplaceable, what is the content of that work? What do fathers do?

Consider, to begin, the cultural model that preceded our currently prevailing story. That model was the good family man. As a phrase of speech, it was once widely heard in our culture, bestowed on men deserving it as a compliment and a badge of honor. Rough translation: He puts his family first.

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[50] William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act IV, Scene III.

[51] Robert S. Weiss, *Staying the Course: The Emotional and Social Lives of Men Who Do Well at Work* (New York: Free Press, 1990), pps. 180-81.

Ponder the three words. "Good": moral values. "Family": purposes larger than the self. "Man": a norm of masculinity. Yet today, especially within elite culture, who hears this phrase? It sounds antiquated, almost embarrassing.

Part of the reason, of course, is the success of the women's movement. Women today enjoy opportunities in the workplace and in public life that were largely unavailable to their mothers and grandmothers. Though the employment patterns of mothers and fathers are far from identical, a majority of mothers today, including a majority of mothers with young children, work outside the home as well as in it. Moreover, most married couples today, especially younger couples, favor the ideal of shared authority between spouses and reject, at least in principle, earlier norms of sexual inequality and male domination. Consequently, two of the ideas once widely associated with the good family man -- man as sole breadwinner and man as head of the family -- are declining as cultural ideals and are no longer accepted by most young couples.

Clearly, therefore, we cannot enrich the fatherhood script for our time simply by reinstating an earlier script. Such an exercise in cultural irrendentism will fail, and ought to fail. Nor is it possible simply to confect new cultural scripts out of nothing more than our own imaginations as informed by today's elite fashions. It would not work, since most ordinary people would be wise enough to ignore it. Nor should we want it to work.

A third approach -- the only feasible one, I believe -- is to draw upon our available repertoire of inherited cultural meanings to imagine the new script. I begin, therefore, with the good family man. I begin with him in part because my parents and grandparents did and in part because I simply cannot envision a good society that would not celebrate the ideal of the man who puts his family first. Our culture's task, then, is to revive and revise for our time a widely shared conception of the good family man.

Perhaps it is best to envision our audience as a twelve-year-old boy. What is the story of fatherhood that we will tell to him? What if he were to ask: What does the good family man do?

The good family man puts his family first. In part, this means for the good father exactly what it means for the good mother. For example, they both believe in marital permanence. To both of them, the marital bond is not contingent on other things, such as fluctuations in their feelings. It is less a calculation than a faith. Secondly, both of them love their children at the highest level of priority. There are other family things that they do and believe in basically similar ways, but these are the main two.

But a man also puts his family first in ways that are his own. As a man and as the father, he has his own special work. In the deepest sense, this work is irreplaceable. It cannot be done by anyone or anything else.

1. *The good family man protects his family.*

Men are bigger and stronger than women. This gendered aspect of embodiment carries powerful social meaning. Indeed, many traditional male values -- the ability to contain emotions, to disengage, and to treat others instrumentally -- derive from this core fact. Men are better than women at physical combat. Thus families, neighborhoods, and nations prefer to call upon men for physical protection. In turn, cultures across the world require that men "win" -- often fight for -- their manhood status in tests of physical courage and ability.[52]

Moreover, a mother with a newborn child is, in the literal meaning of the word, vulnerable. They require protection -- sometimes in the physical sense of protection from danger, sometimes in the general sense of protection from outside pressures. The good family man provides this service to his family.

A practical question to test this idea. The family is asleep upstairs. An intruder is heard, apparently breaking in. Everyone is scared. Who goes downstairs?

2. The good family man provides for his family's material needs.

The role of provider is no longer the domain of the father alone. But while the father is often not the sole provider, he is usually the main provider for his family's material needs, especially when his children are young. In the realm of the workplace, men earn higher incomes than women, work longer hours and more years, hold different types of jobs, achieve more status and power, and pursue workplace success at a higher level of priority.

In short, the father and mother today usually share a common but unequal commitment to paid employment outside the home. Few young women today seek or expect to be a lifelong mother and homemaker. Most seek and expect to hold jobs or pursue careers both before they have children and after the children are older or grown. When children are young, some mothers will wish to maintain virtually the same commitment to paid employment as do their husbands. Most will not. Some other mothers will be forced to work, against their wishes. But most mothers will wish and will be able to reduce or eliminate their commitment to paid employment during this period. It is during this period of the "parental emergency," therefore, that the father assumes a special responsibility in providing for his family's material needs. The good family man views this task not as an alternative to family life, but as his commitment to it and his special work within it.

3. The good family man teaches physical prowess to his children.

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[52] See Gilmore, *Op. cit.*, chapter 1, *passim.*

Mothers have varieties of courage, including physical courage, that fathers lack. But for men, much more than women, physical strength and capacity -- in the family context, the ability to protect and to ward off danger -- deeply inform the male sense of self and of social status. Because physical prowess is a part of male sexual identity, it is also integral to the male sex drive, including (in a way that is not true for women) sexual arousal and the ability to engage in sexual intercourse.

This paternal identity with physical prowess is evident from the first moments of fatherhood. For example, studies reveal that fathers, as compared to mothers, spend proportionately more time playing with their infant sons and daughters. Moreover, fathers engage in more physically vigorous, rough-and-tumble play with their infant children than do mothers. Children learn early that their father is especially fun to play with, just as they learn that their mother is a special source of comfort and soothing.[53]

The father's play with the infant foreshadows his later role with the child. Compared to the mother, the father's relationship with his child is less symbiotic and more dissonant.[54] Accordingly, it can be especially through the father that the child learns to relate to strangers and feel comfortable in strange situations. In this sense, the father is able to serve as a secure gateway through which his children can approach the world outside the home.[55] This is a special and enduring rhythm of the father-child bond.

The father's gendered identity with physical prowess and stamina also leads him frequently to a special interest in physically competitive rituals such as sports or hunting, not only for himself but also for his children, especially sons. These are important male bonding rites. In a familial sense, they can be understood as the father initiating his son into the community of men. In this sense, the son who kills his first deer or hits his first home run experiences the secular equivalent of a baptism or *bar mitzvah* -- a coming of age ritual, based in action and testing, in which the boy is metaphorically reborn, this time of the father.

For the father, such rituals are both gendered and engendering. They are also both a celebration of his generativity -- a kind of prayer of thanks for his child -- and a vicarious but powerful reconnection to his own childhood and to his own prior physicality. These rituals are increasingly ignored and even ridiculed in our culture, especially among elites, but for many fathers they remain a part of a father's work: not only a renewed affirmation of his own manhood, but also a statement of faith in himself as a procreator.

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[53] Ross A. Thompson, "The Father's Case in Child Custody Disputes: The Contributions of Psychological Research," in Lamb and Sagi (eds.), *Op. cit.*, pp. 65, 71-72.

[54] See Alice S. Rossi, "Gender and Parenthood," *American Sociological Review* (49, February 1984), pp. 5-9.

[55] "Children Bond to Mother and Father in Different Ways," *The Brown University Child Behavior and Development Letter* (December 1990), p. 5.

4. The good family man fosters character and competence in his children.

Though responsibility for the moral upbringing of a child ideally is shared between mother and father, fathers have a special and distinctive contribution to make in guiding their children toward successful outcomes in adult life.

Many researchers have noted a biological basis for the differences between male and female incentives for childrearing. Since women are born with a finite number of eggs and a shorter period of fertility than men, they have the primary incentive to secure the biological viability of their offspring. By contrast, men, who are born with a renewable supply of sperm and a longer period of fertility, have a weaker incentive to preserve the viability of prospective offspring, since failure does not as dramatically compromise the possibility of future reproductive success.

Consequently, at the most basic level, successful childrearing for women means achieving the survival of the infant. In comparison, childrearing for men has more to do with ensuring successful adult outcomes for their children. The father's biological handiwork is expressed through the visible deeds and achievements of his children in the larger world. In other words, a father produces, not just children, but socially viable children.

The father's special task, therefore, is to contribute to the future success of his children by guiding, instructing, correcting, and sponsoring them as they move toward adulthood. This does not mean that mothers do not play an important role in fostering competence and character as well. However, fathers tend to be more deeply invested and deeply attached to childrearing work associated with children's performance in the world outside the home.

Indeed, this has been one of the defining cultural ideals of fatherhood. As John Demos shows, colonial fathers bore primary responsibility for the outcomes of their children, especially their sons: "Sons were seen as continuing a man's accomplishments, indeed his very character, into the future. Thus would a successful son reflect credit on his father -- the credit of 'good name' or 'good repute.'"[56] Since that time, paternal responsibility for character and competence has declined dramatically, but it has not vanished. There remains a solid basis for a revitalized script. For example, among the men profiled in his study, Robert Weiss notes that the meaning of fatherhood is closely tied to a sense of accomplishment in bringing up honorable and competent children. Fathers invest heavily in their children's ability to perform well in the world. They take great pride in their children's achievements and, conversely, experience anxiety, distress, and a sense of personal failure when their children get into trouble or do badly as they enter adult life.[57]

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[56] Demos, *Op cit.*, p. 46.

[57] Weiss, *Op cit.*, pp. 185-188.

Consider the following story. A man's college-age son gets drunk, causes a disturbance, and lands in jail. The father bails the son out of jail and, several days later, arranges for the young man to consult a psychologist. After his son has had a few sessions, the father asks the psychologist for his professional assessment. The psychologist launches into a long discussion of adolescent angst but finally reassures the father: "Nothing to worry about. Typical identity crisis stuff." The father lets the news sink in. Then he says: "Thank you, doctor, but I think you've got it wrong. My son is a bum."[58]

It is hard to imagine a mother saying the same thing. Fathers, more than mothers, are haunted by the fear that their children will turn out to be bums, largely because a father understands that his child's character is, in some sense, a measure of his character as well. Put another way, the largest test of the good family man is whether he is able to raise good children.

5. The good family man represents his family's interests in the larger world.

Fathers mobilize to deal with crises that threaten children and their opportunities to achieve successful adulthood. To begin with, they confront dangers and threats that jeopardize the physical safety of the child. Though fathers need not, under ordinary circumstances, devote their time to protecting their families from physical attack, there remain occasions when a father's physical strength and courage are required. More commonly, fathers take action to rescue their children from trouble. As Robert Weiss notes, the more serious the trouble, as viewed by the family, the more likely the father will intervene. In particular, fathers become involved in crises in which children may diminish their chances for successful adulthoods:

> A daughter who becomes pregnant out of wedlock and so may have to drop out of school, a son who fails two courses and is suspended, a son who is discovered to be drug dependent, a daughter whose car is demolished in an accident -- all these become occasions for fathers to involve themselves actively with adolescent or adult children.[59]

Of course, fathers cannot always steer a child in the right direction. But their task is to try: to express their paternity through agency in the world on behalf of their children.

6. The good family man is constant: he stays the course.

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[58] I am grateful to Barbara Whitehead for sharing this story.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

Ordinary steadfastness may seem unworthy of special attention or praise. Yet, in a society of fathers who leave, we should not minimize the importance of the fathers who, in the words of the gospel hymn, "keep on keeping on" in service to their families. The majority of American men, after all, do not have particularly exciting, spiritually enriching jobs. They get up in cold houses on dark mornings, grab an Egg McMuffin on the way to work, worry about their boss's mood and how many new orders they'll fill that day, put in their eight or ten hours, and head home, stopping for a gallon of milk along the way. Indeed, this constancy, this willingness to "stay the course," is one of the basic contributions fathers make to the security and well-being of their children.

Even a father's emotional inarticulateness, now nearly universally criticized, has an altruistic dimension; by keeping his feelings to himself, a man protects his wife and children from worries that might undermine their sense of peace and security. Stoicism is now out of fashion, and certainly more emotional give-and-take, more physical warmth and affection, do contribute to stronger bonds with children. Yet the regular, steady, uncomplaining commitment to work, however difficult, tedious or even demeaning, is a hallmark of the good family man.

7. The good family man uses his strength to serve, not rule, his family.

The father's desire to protect his family, as well as his gendered identity with physical prowess, both in turn reflect a larger component of male identity and a father's work. That component is power. Or more precisely, the use of power by men to do fathers' work.

Historically, this power -- derived from male embodiment and shaped by culture --has been the basis of patriarchy, including the rule of the family by the father or the elder male. This concept reflected a philosophy, a moral paradigm: man as ruler, woman as ruled. Superiority over inferiority. Strength over dependency. Aggression over nurture. Father over mother. This aspect of the old script is no longer acceptable to most people in our society. At the same time, the new script cannot be one of androgyny or sameness.

Instead, the new model should replace a norm of rulership with a norm of service. It is men's work, male leadership -- protection, provision, physicality, moral education of children, and special agency outside the home -- understood as service to family. It repudiates any notion of moral hierarchy. It overturns the false linkage between gender difference and gender worth. The work of the mother is just as morally significant as that of the father: just as socially important, as worthy of praise, and just as authoritative, both within the family and in the larger society.

I recommend for fathers the model of service precisely because I did not invent it. It is one of the deepest ideas of the Judeo-Christian moral tradition: the one who leads is the one who serves. This concept, then, suggests the largest and best definition of the good family man: a man who uses his power to serve his family. This is what fathers do.

8. The good family man finds happiness in generativity.

Fatherhood calls men to adult responsibilities. Indeed, in many societies, a man is not part of the community of adults until he becomes a father. Moreover, fatherhood, like manhood itself, is continually in the making. It is achieved through the steadfast meeting of obligations to others, through agency in the world on behalf of one's offspring.

Consequently, the task of raising children is, for men especially, a pathway to a fully realized maturity. Children endow a man's life with a larger meaning. They confer a special blessing on his worldly endeavors, endeavors that might otherwise seem small and unworthy. Children make it possible for a man to believe that he has lived a good and purposeful life.

Without this focus, this harnessing of unruly energies to a fundamental social task, men remain forever boyish and unformed. Judith Wallerstein observes that young divorced fathers, once separated from their children, seem to have their development blocked. Some never recover a sense of purpose or direction: they cannot grow up into fully mature men outside the structure of the family.[60] Even older fathers often lose their bearings when they live apart from their children. Unable to guide and sponsor their children in a predictable and routine way, they withdraw altogether or try to "start over" with a new family.[61]

The failure to gain a perspective on the future beyond the self has profound consequences. In Erik Erikson's classic formulation, it leads to narcissism, psychological invalidism, and, ultimately, complete stagnation. In the final stage of life, men who have not engendered and cared for others cannot come to terms with their own impending death.[62]

Yet this Eriksonian notion of happiness and human completion is radically at odds with today's prevailing cultural ideal of happiness. In the contemporary context, the family is often viewed as an obstacle to individual happiness, and family roles and responsibilities are regarded as drags on human freedom. As I have argued, even the effort to promote "new fathers" derives from the categories and language of expressive individualism. Thus, the nurturant father is the man who has been able to express his feminine side, to discover and unleash buried potentialities,

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[60] Wallerstein, *Op cit.,* p. 142.

[61] Weiss, *Op. cit.*, pp. 190-191.

[62] Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd edition (NY: W. W. Norton, 1963), pp. 27-69.

to become a more complete person.

This formula for male happiness ultimately disappoints. Despite its great promise, it leads to restlessness, loneliness, boredom and anxiety. The reward of happiness and human completion lies elsewhere. Happiness -- or the promise of happiness -- comes about through the pursuit of certain abiding commitments. Some of these, for fathers, are gendered commitments. For the good family man, then, the pursuit of happiness is neither elusive nor disappointing. It comes about in the daily work of being a good and faithful father. It is less discovered or given than earned. It is earned, finally, by following in his family life the biblical admonition of Paul: "Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."[63]

[63] First Corinthians, 16:13. I am grateful to Lawrence Mead for suggesting this verse.