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Fatherhood**

Inside this Issue

1 Fatherhood

Importance of Fathers

**2 Socialization of Men to be
Involved Husbands and
Fathers**

**3 Fathers' Involvement
in Childcare within Ethnic
Families**

**4 Successful Balance of
Work and Family: How
Some Dads Do It**

Gay Fathers

5 Figures on Fathers

**6 Editorial Advisory
Board and Staff**

Invitation to Dialogue

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Fatherhood

– Cheryl Asmus

Father's Day, June 17, was first observed in 1910. The importance of fathers has been researched from both negative (effects on children when a father is absent) and positive (effects on children when a father is present) perspectives.

This issue of the *Briefs* begins with an article on the importance of fatherhood by Colorado State University Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Agent Ken Grimes.

David MacPhee addresses the status of involved fathers in the United States today. He describes individual, social and environmental factors that contribute to the development and success of becoming and being an involved father.

A much needed research area is in the role of fathers across ethnicities in the United States. Ziarat Hossain shares his research on African-American, Hispanic and American Indian families. His findings help dispel negative stereotypes of fathers in ethnic families.

An ongoing research project at Colorado State University studies dual-earner families with a successful balance between work and family life. Toni Zimmerman and Shelly Haddock highlight the fathering role by the men in this study.

The next article brings to light important facts surrounding some families that do not fit the traditional picture: families with homosexual parents. Jerry Bigner discusses research findings on children raised by a gay father.

An underlying theme in these articles is that successful fathering depends on environmental supports.

Families, programs, agencies, educators and policy makers can make an impact on successful fathering.

Acknowledgement of this can be seen at the federal level. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson indicated that the 2002 presidential budget would request \$64 million for a program to strengthen the role of fathers in the lives of their children. Individuals, agencies, or departments interested in collaborating on a project addressing fatherhood should contact the Family and Youth Institute (970-491-2292).

It is with a mixture of sadness and joy that we say goodbye to original *Briefs* editor, Sandy Tracy. Her persistence, good humor, intelligence and commitment to quality have made the *Briefs* the success that it is. She has started graduate studies in the School of Education at Colorado State University.

– Cheryl Asmus, Ph.D., is coordinator of the Family and Youth Institute at Colorado State University.

Importance of Fathers

– Ken Grimes

At a recent Regional Family Support and Fatherhood Summit held in Denver, speakers discussed the importance of fathers in children's development. In a society where over one-fifth of children grow up in households with a single mother and where unwed partners have increased in the last decade by 71 percent, fathering has become increasingly complicated.

Michael Lamb, noted fatherhood expert, said in a 1996 speech that "Children who grow up with only

one parent are raised by a person who lacks somebody to back them up, to give them time away from parenting, to share both the burdens and the enjoyable aspects of being with and raising children. And that sense of being overwhelmed as a single parent translates into difficulties in parenting which also has an effect on children's development."

The sense of being overwhelmed, of not always knowing how to be a father was a theme throughout the conference. Jerry Tello, executive director of the National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute, described his father as a complex man with strengths and shortcomings, who sometimes drank too much, and was, at times, abusive. Yet this man, Tello said, demonstrated a love for his son and for his family that became permanently engraved in their minds and in his character.

His father had a favorite hat that the children were not to touch. One day, Tello looked inside this hat and discovered the names of his mother, himself and all his sisters and brothers etched in the hatband. Tello said two things about his father stood out: his father's commitment to their family and his subtle love that was profoundly demonstrated for Tello when he discovered his father's etchings in the hatband.

Tello's story confirms what Michael Lamb says: "What each child needs is somebody who passionately cares about them." Lamb says that he would add, "Children feel better when there are two people who passionately care about what happens to them."

Chris Veasey, Jr., Ph.D., director of the Denver department of human services, described a lesson he learned from his daughter that also personalizes Lamb's research. Veasey participated in his sons' activities, while his wife participated in their daughter's activities. When his daughter was sixteen, she told him, "You don't even know me, so why should I respect you?" He re-

alized then that she too needed a father as much as his sons. Being a father to her made a difference in his relationship with her and later with her children, his grandchildren.

The conference comprehensively covered the diversity of fatherhood and yet the many family voices were singular in agreement about one simple but profound fact. Fathers are a vital and necessary influence in the lives of our children.

— Ken Grimes is a Colorado State University Cooperative Extension 4-H youth development agent in Denver County. He is the father of two and grandfather of five.

Socialization of Men to be Involved Fathers and Husbands

— David MacPhee

When one considers the contemporary father, two truisms apply. Fathers do much less housework and childcare than mothers do, but today's fathers are much more involved than were men of a generation ago. This increased involvement of fathers, in the form of hands-on care as well as emotional availability, is one of the most significant social trends to affect present and future families.¹



For example, parents in a recent *Child* reader survey reported 25 percent of the husbands to be hands-on, highly in-

involved dads whereas only 4 percent of their fathers were as involved a generation ago when their primary role was breadwinner. This involvement pays great dividends for children, too. Teens who have poor relationships with their fathers are much more likely to use illicit drugs, fail in school, and engage in delinquent acts. Various researchers have

noted that absent or unavailable fathers, more so than employed mothers, contribute to many problems of youth.

Which men tend to be involved fathers? Scores of studies² indicate that multiple factors contribute in small but meaningful ways to father involvement: whether the wife works; power differentials (e.g., which parent earns more money); and personality traits such as androgyny, sex-role ideology, flexibility, maturity, and self-esteem. Men who dislike restraint, obligation, and new experiences tend to be uninvolved fathers, which may explain why some fathers avoid play dates and diaper changing like the plague! Some of these traits can be traced to how the men were reared, which points to the possible influence of socialization.

A man's socialization in his family of origin may play a role, but this explanation is largely speculative at this point. A handful of studies,³ including one I did, find that some involved fathers had an engaged dad while growing up, but the majority rejected the role model they had of a distant, aloof father. In a sense, the typical pattern for contemporary men is to consciously reinvent their role as fathers. The latter theme emerged clearly in a recent cross-generational study by Nicole Forward and the author: 20 percent to 27 percent of parents said that the aspect of their upbringing they most tried to change was the lack of time or emotional investment in children.

Other findings point to the importance of socialization in the broadest terms. First, cross-cultural studies as well as comparisons of ethnic groups find marked differences in father involvement that mirror beliefs about patriarchy and gender roles. Second, recent work on maternal gatekeeping shows that one in five women prefer to maintain ultimate responsibility for family work, because they view the home as the woman's domain, and in so doing they discourage fathers from

helping out with household chores or childcare.⁴ Thus, cultural messages may teach children gender-based scripts that define how mothers and fathers contribute to family life. This is why the new father fights an uphill battle against his socialization history⁵ and why the generational change we have observed is so remarkable.

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⁵Cowan, C. P., & Cowan, P. A. (1987). Men's involvement in parenthood: Identifying the antecedents and understanding the barriers. In Berman, P. W., & Pedersen, F. A. (Eds.), *Men's transitions to parenthood: Longitudinal studies of early family experience* (pp. 145-174). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

– David MacPhee, Ph.D., is a professor in the department of human development and family studies at Colorado State University.

Fathers' Involvement in Childcare within Ethnic Families

– Ziarat Hossain

A primary focus of my research is on fathers' involvement in basic childcare within ethnic groups in the United States. I have examined how

much time fathers and mothers invest in three major caregiving areas, such as cleaning, feeding, and playing with their infants. In this article, I summarize some major findings from African-American, Hispanic-American, and American Indian families. All fathers who participated in my study were from two-parent families with an infant.

I found that although mothers are the primary caregivers in these three cultural groups, fathers are involved with their young children. These fathers bathe, clean, feed, hold, and play with their babies (Hossain & Roopnarine, 1994; Hossain et al., 1997; Hossain et al., 1999). Data presented in Table 1 indicate a similar level of fathers' participation in various basic caregiving tasks. It is interesting to note that Navajo Indian fathers tend to spend more time feeding and African-American fathers invest more time in playing with their babies than fathers in other groups.

An overall comparison between mothers and fathers indicates that fathers in my samples spend about 35 percent as much time as mothers in basic childcare tasks. Other findings suggest that fathers in two-parent middle-class White families spend about 25 percent to 30 percent as much time as mothers in basic childcare tasks, and these fathers are considered involved with their babies. Therefore, my findings cast doubts about traditional perceptions that fathers in

ethnic families are either uninvolved or absent from fathering roles. Other researchers report that ethnic fathers are warm, nurturing, affectionate, and highly involved, especially with young children (see Lamb, 1997; Bozett & Hanson, 1991; Parke, 1996). I agree with many developmental psychologists (e.g., M. Lamb, R. Parke, J. Pleck, J. Roopnarine) that the new findings will help us re-evaluate and dispel negative characterizations of the role of the father within ethnic families. Also, new findings will help us develop culturally sensitive child and family development programs for ethnic families in America.

Realistically, each ethnic group is itself internally diverse in its family and childcare chores. The distribution of childcare tasks in the family is largely influenced by parents' cultural values and beliefs (Ogbu, 1981). In order to adjust to a new resource base in the United States, migrant and ethnic families have always had to adapt to different economic, social and political forces here. Therefore, to truly delineate American ethnic fathers' roles in the family, factors external to the family environment

need to be incorporated. Useful future investigations would examine what kind of change occurs to both ethnic and host cultures, and what factors and cultural forces shape the perception and performance of ethnic fathers' role within a multicultural society.

Photo in this story by Jan Miller-Heyl, DARE to be You, Cortez



Table 1: Hours Fathers Spent Each Day in Basic Childcare Tasks in Three Ethnic Groups

Childcare Tasks	Ethnic Groups		
	Black	Latino	Navajo
Cleaning the infant	0.99	1.15	1.21
Feeding the infant	1.19	1.43	2.51
Playing with the infant	3.41	3.00	3.00

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– Ziarat Hossain, Ph.D., is an associate professor of psychology at Fort Lewis College, Durango.

Successful Balance of Work and Family: How Some Dads Do It

– Toni Schindler Zimmerman and Shelley Haddock

In order to figure out what contributes to the successful balance of work and family, we interviewed 47 self-described successful dual-earners about their approaches to balancing family and work. The average age of the participants was 38 for women and 40 for men. On aver-

age, the couples had two children, ranging in age from 6 months to 23 years old. The average age of the youngest child was 5 years old and the average age of the oldest was 9. The participants were primarily middle class families. Seventy-seven identified as Caucasian, eight as Hispanic-American, four as African-American, one as Asian-American, one as Caucasian-Native American, and one as "other."

While the couples were considerably diverse in terms of their professions, work schedules, and strategies, they showed significant overlap in their report of ten underlying philosophies for successful balance. Two of these philosophies seem particularly relevant to the topic of involved fathers: 1) valuing and maintaining family as the highest priority and 2) maintaining a high degree of equality and partnership in their marital relationship.



Clearly, the dads in this study pull their weight in the kitchen, on the soccer field and during the morning and afternoon routines with their children, while also being successful breadwinners. The deep friendship that they enjoy with their wives seems to be directly linked to the high degree of equality in their marriage. It is worth noting that these dads aren't doing their share just to appease their wives. They love being dads; family is first for them. This family-first, involved-dad philosophy coupled with marital partnership seems to be key to successful balance of work and family.

Although our results cannot be generalized to all dual earners, the purpose of the project was to offer a model for success that may be ap-

propriate to or adapted by many couples. While it is clear from our findings that these successful couples have been creative, proactive, and flexible in carving out a dual-earner lifestyle that works, their success often also appears to depend on contextual factors such as supportive workplaces.

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– Toni Schindler Zimmerman, Ph.D., is an associate professor and Shelley Haddock, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the department of human development and family studies at Colorado State University. This research to study successful balance of family and work is currently funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

Gay Fathers

– Jerry Bigner

Many people are probably surprised that homosexual men and women form families that include children. While not researched as often as other family structures, gay and lesbian families often resemble those composed by heterosexuals.

Researchers estimate that about 20 percent to 25 percent of self-identified gay men also are fathers. The large majority of these men became fathers after being involved in a heterosexual relationship or marriage. These relationships often are based on the man's denial of his sexual

orientation and do not endure. These men eventually come to terms with accepting their homosexual orientation, disclose this to wives and children, and divorce in order to assume the development of their true personal identity. They face a difficult dilemma on many sides as they strive over a period of time to adjust to the divorce and reconcile a divided personal identity as a gay father. Their ex-spouses also face a difficult adjustment of their own.

Research consistently has reported that being raised by a gay father does not harm children psychologically, emotionally, or socially. Gay fathers have been found to be just as effective as non-gay fathers in their ability to parent children. They typically are reported to be less traditional in their approach to childrearing, to have positive parent-child relationships, and to create stable home environments for children. While most do not hold sole custody of their children, joint custody arrangements are commonly held with ex-spouses. Many gay fathers form stable, long-term committed relationships with a partner and the result is a gay stepfamily arrangement. Almost nothing is known about this family form, although one of my students is currently working in this area.

Children of both gay fathers and lesbian mothers experience challenges similar to ethnic minority children in learning to deal with negative societal stigmas and prejudices. They have opportunities to learn first-hand about these attitudes and the social injustices experienced by homosexuals in our society. Some believe that these experiences help develop strength of character.

Other benefits may also be found in having a gay father. Gay fathers are more likely to incorporate expressive elements into their parenting behavior that are less rigid and more nurturing. In addition, gay fathers are more likely to model androgynous sex role behaviors for children because of their willingness

to embrace their own masculine and feminine aspects. This gender role is associated with positive mental health, greater acceptance of others, and greater flexibility in handling interactions. The benefits of learning and adopting this role orientation, incorporating positive elements of both masculinity and femininity, is likely to become apparent when children reach adulthood. Their adult relationships are more likely to be based on equality and personal respect rather than on who holds the most social and physical power.

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– Jerry Bigner, Ph.D., is a professor in the department of human development and family studies at Colorado State University.

Figures on Fathers

Note: These estimates should not be confused with Census 2000 results, which are now being released. The statistics in the “Single Fathers” section come from the forthcoming “America’s Families and Living Arrangements” report, based on data from the March 2000 Current Population Survey.

Single Fathers

There were 2.0 million single fathers in the U.S. in 2000. That is a ratio of 1 in 6 single parents. In 1970, there were 393,000 single fathers, comprising about 1 in 9 single parents.

In 2000,

- over 200,000 single fathers raised three or more of their own children under 18;
- 913,000 single fathers were divorced; 693,000 had never married; 350,000 were married to an

absent spouse; and 88,000 were widowed;

- 196,000 single fathers were raising their own infants under age 1; and
- 258,000 single fathers lived in the home of either a relative or a nonrelative.

Child Support

? 38% – The proportion of custodial fathers who had child support agreed to or awarded to them in the spring of 1998. The corresponding rate for custodial mothers was 60 percent.

<<http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2000/cb00-170.html>>

? \$3,300 – The average amount of child support received by custodial fathers who received any payments in 1997, not statistically different from the average received by custodial mothers.

<<http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2000/cb00-170.html>>

The preceding facts come from the Current Population Survey. The data are subject to sampling variability and other sources of error. Questions or comments should be directed to the Census Bureau’s Public Information Office (Tel: 301-457-3030; fax: 301-457-3670; e-mail: pio@census.gov).



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Public Information Office 301-457-3030. Last Revised: June 06, 2001.

Photo in this story by Sandy Tracy

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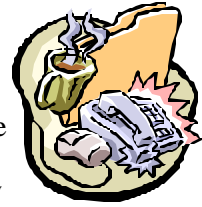
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Sandy Tracy is no longer *Briefs* editor. She is now a student in the Ph.D. program in the School of Education at Colorado State. The new editor will be announced in the August-September issue.

Invitation to dialogue

What issues and concerns would you like to see addressed?

Contact FYI at:



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Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Family and Youth Institute staff.

**Coming next:
*Insuring our Families' Health***