

The **U**niversity of **H**ull

**Fathering in the city:  
Diverse masculinities and care giving practices  
in New York City**

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by

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## Abstract

This thesis is about primary caregiving fathers in New York City. It aims to explore the changing nature of masculinities in relation to fatherhood. Starting with the premise that not all masculinities are equal, it asks whether, and if yes, how, differential access to resources and choices and discourses as *men* is reproduced in the realm of parenting, shaping their lives and experiences as *fathers*.

The literature on primary caregiving fathers is emerging, where sociological studies have focused on white, heterosexual, middle-class, married, stay-at-home fathers. Moreover, analyses often privilege one axis of differentiation –gender–, when other identity positions are often relegated to second position, thus obscuring the nuances and complexity of the men’s experiences. Using an ethnographic approach, I spent 11 months in 2016 following 15 fathers from different backgrounds, meeting with them and interviewing them, meeting their families and friends, meeting other fathers along the way, as well as interviewing 5 professionals working with fathers. This thesis combines men and masculinities and intersectionality theories to draw attention to the social inequalities that exist between men.

My research findings show that masculinities inform the kinds of father the men are. Masculinities are relational, they are performances undertaken in particular contexts, and intersect with other social categories, such as class, race, sexuality and faith, shaping their fathering experiences, the meanings assigned to fatherhood, and their experiences as men. I argue that race, as an organizing system of difference, is the most important axis of differentiation in parenting for these men. It has profound implications on the men’s lived experiences and on the ways in which they are fathers to their children.

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My father, Pierre Gallais, who collected stories from people all his life, and who raised me to question social norms and to believe that women and men are equal beings.

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## 1. Introduction

*One summer day, I am waiting for the F train on a subway platform in Brooklyn. I am going to a brunch in West Harlem organized by and for a group of gay fathers, organized for Father's Day. I see a young black man sitting down, and his young daughter, who is smiling and talking to him. She is wearing a princess tiara, a cute poofy blue dress, and sparkly shoes. I go to him, introduce myself and what I came to New York City to do. He is a single father. As soon as I ask him about his experiences as a dad, he says, "man, I remember the nights of sleeplessness. But now it's better". He adds, smiling, "I try not to yell too much, she's a girl, so I gotta soften up. She knows she's cute, it's hard to say no sometimes". I compliment on his daughter's hair, that has been styled in a tight bun. "Yesterday was the last day of pre-K. I took her to a salon, she's had her hair and nails done. But usually, yes, I do her hair". I ask him about the challenges he has had as a single father. "She's a picky eater, omg. I try to make her try different things, but it's difficult", he confesses. He says to me, "we had a good summer hanging out, we went to Disney with my mum and I. She's spoiled", he says, looking at her with all the love in the world shining from his eyes<sup>1</sup>.*

This ethnographic vignette offers a glimpse of what it means to be a primary caregiving father in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the United States. Many fathers in this study described the joys and the burdens of care work, appreciating all the time that they have and the bonds that they develop with their children. A lot of these men cook for their children, do their daughters' hair, learn to express their emotions calmly. While this thesis explores what these fathers have in common, I also recognise that just as there are different types of men, there are different kinds of fathers, for whom care is going to mean something unique at times. A primary caregiver can mean being a black single father, it can also mean being a white, Jewish, at-home father, or a transgender work-at-home dad. It can mean living on

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<sup>1</sup> From fieldnotes.



the Upper West Side of Manhattan or in an Asian neighbourhood in Queens. It can mean working full-time or being supported by a high-earning partner or depending on social assistance. What can we learn from these fathers who are primary care givers, about parenthood, about being a male parent, and about the diversity of fatherhood in New York City?

This research looks at fatherhood and masculinities through an intersectional lens. I conducted ethnographic research for 11 months in 2016 in New York City with 15 primary caregiving fathers. They were from different backgrounds in terms of class, sexuality, ethnicity, race, faith, gender, geography. Some were from New York, others came from other states, and a minority were living in other places<sup>2</sup>. I argue that there are different kinds of fathers, different ways of experiencing fatherhood and of making sense of their role as fathers. A key finding that emerged from the research is that, race, specifically, as a social location, is the primary axis of differentiation between the fathers of this study. Fatherhood intersects with race and gender to create unique burdens for black fathers. This research starts with the premise that, the fathers in this study, as men, are not located in the same social positions, and as fathers, are not starting with the same cultural stereotypes or cultural representations of fatherhood. They will have different push or pull factors, pulling them to, or pushing them away from, different models of fatherhood.

The literature on primary caregiving fathers is burgeoning (Doucet, 2006; Doucet and Merla, 2007; Merla, 2008; Ranson, 2015). These studies are primarily sociological in nature and the (female) researchers' focus has been mainly on white, heterosexual, middle-class, married, at-home fathers. Research on men and masculinities has seldom looked at the lives of men through an intersectional lens (Pini and Pease, 2013). The literature on intersectionality has focused mainly on women; when looking at parenthood, more has been done on black motherhood than on mothers from other backgrounds (Collins, 1993; Rodriguez, 2016;

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<sup>2</sup> One had grown up on Staten Island, N.Y., and was living in Boston when I met him at a convention for at-home fathers. I met another one at that same convention, he was living in Colorado. Another one had grown up in New Jersey, was living in California but came regularly to New York City, where I met him.

Dow, 2019). This anthropological research offers a particular look on fatherhood through an intersectional perspective, providing attention to social statuses that interlock with gender (such as race) that have often not been given the same amount of attention in the literature, thereby expanding our theorizing and understandings of the lives of men who care in families. It has a broader focus, in that it focuses on the lives of a group of men with very different backgrounds and who, as a result, occupy different standpoints. What the men have in common is that they are or have been primary care givers to their child/ren. The research adds to the academic debates on primary caregiving fathers and on men and masculinities, asking whether, and how, men's social locations impact on their experiences as fathers in the context of larger systems of power.

The methodologies of ethnography were chosen for this particular research as they offer great depth, texture, and richness. Qualitative methods enable the researcher to "explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants" (Mason, 2002, 1). Living in New York City for 11 months allowed me the sustained 'being there' (Geertz, 1988) of ethnographic research, allowing for "a direct, embodied experience of the field" (Hine, 2015, 19). This immersion in the field enabled me to conduct first-hand research, observing and participating in the men's lives, developing trust and building relationships with them. Ethnographers immerse themselves in natural settings for long periods of time because "the reality being studied, the meanings, symbolic significance and cultural interpretation, exist on several levels. It takes time ... to gain access to the deeper and ... most important levels of this reality" (Punch and Oancea, 2009, 161). Fieldwork is "the source of anthropology's strength" (Keesing and Strathern, 1998, 7) as a discipline.

Whitehead (2004) in that sense argues that

rich descriptive case studies can provide valuable, in-depth data even when the number of cases is small. ... The richness or thickness of ethnographic data comes from placing individuals within their various socio-cultural contexts, and exploring how socio-cultural processes and meaning systems are expressed within these

contexts. In good ethnography, hosts are not reduced to simple numerical values, but are depicted through the gamut of human experience, including rich contextual, process, and ideational constructions. (23)

My interest in studying men in families started with a 2013 French article entitled ‘Do you know what is really hipster? Being a father<sup>3</sup>’. It was about a magazine for dads, *Kindling Quarterly*, started by two white middle-class “modern” fathers in their 30s from Brooklyn, New York. The fathers featured in the magazine are incredibly privileged, eat organic foods and build things with their hands. The French article also talks about a support group in New York for fathers created in 2008 with more than 800 members; “every week, fathers and children meet to go to museums and parks<sup>4</sup>”. This is how this project started. This article prompted so many questions for me: why should these privileged fathers earn the title of ‘good’ fathers? What are the other ways of being a ‘good’ father, when one does not have access to so many resources? Are there full-time dads from other social groups, that are not depicted in this kind of magazine, and what does it look like for them to be fathers? What does it look like when fathers are parents, full time? If “fathers want to talk about fatherhood”, like the journalist in the article argues, what do they have to say? Why would men gather in groups, what would they seek, and find, in meeting other caregiving fathers?

Public policies in the United States give little support to the lives of American families (Boling, 2015). The country is, with Lesotho, Liberia, Papua New Guinea and Swaziland, one of the few nations that does not guarantee paid leave for either parent. In a culture that values individualism and self-sufficiency, (white, middle-class) fathers and mothers are supposed to care for their children on their own (Hansen, 2005). The country leaves the responsibility of child care to families and markets. It does not provide “an adequate supply of flexible, affordable, high quality childcare” (Harrington Meyer and Kandic, 2017, n.p.).

Support policies reinforce the ideologies of intensive motherhood and of the father as breadwinner (Randles, 2018). Fathers face ideological, structural and gendered barriers that

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<sup>3</sup> Original in French. My translation. (Levenson, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> I.d.

constrain their involvement in caregiving; they are located outside of 'landscapes of care' (Milligan and Wiles, 2010). Moreover, fathers from minority groups face additional marginalisation and oppression, having to navigate the consequences and dynamics of systems of domination in their daily lives. In this context, New York City, one of the most diverse cities in the world, a vibrant, progressive, liberal metropolis, provides an opportunity to explore the diversity and complexity with regards to what it means to be a primary caregiving father in the United States.

*Walking with [Paul] and his daughter who was in the stroller one afternoon in Central Park, I ask him if he considers himself to be a New Yorker. Living in the city for 15 years, he says that he does. Then, he shares a memory of showing the city to his nephew. Him and [Paul]'s son were playing chess in Bryant Park. He remembers a man, playing with people next to them. "I saw him go through 2 or 3 people but standing around the table was like a Jewish man, a Hispanic man, a black man with dreadlocks... everything was represented at that chess table in that moment. I recognized that for myself and thought, wow this is really special, but probably more importantly, I pointed it out to [Tim] and my nephew, like this is a very New York moment", he says to me<sup>5</sup>.*

## 1.1 The methodologies of ethnography

### *1.1.1 Participant observation*

Participant observation was a key aspect of this research. Boellstorff (2007) defines ethnography as "both an epistemological approach and a linked series of methods, with "participant observation" as the key practice" (11). Madden (2010) writes that "ethnographers talk, participate and observe simultaneously, and the sum total of all these actions creates participant observation in its broadest sense" (77).

Participant observation is a method that Agar (1996) argues

[s]imply codes the assumption that the raw material of ethnographic research lies out there in the daily activities of the people you are interested in, and the only way

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<sup>5</sup> From fieldnotes.

to access those activities is to establish relationships with people, participate with them in what they do, and observe what is going on. (31)

The ethnographer brings her embodied habitus into the field (Bourdieu, 1990); she also uses her body as part of the “ethnographic toolkit”, Madden (2010) argues (82). He argues that “the recorder that resides in the body of the ethnographer is always ‘on’ (67). Participant observation is according to him a

whole-of-body experience that has us observing with our eyes as we participate, but we also ‘observe’ with all our senses. Touch, smell, taste, sound and sight come together to form the framework for memories, jottings and consolidated notes that form the evidentiary basis of ethnographic writing. Good ethnographers will use their whole body as an organic recording device. (19)

Madden (2010) argues that because ethnographers cannot record or observe everything, “ethnographic observation is partial” (101). He defines ‘being ethnographic’ as

a matter of moving with the flow of people’s lives in as normal and everyday a manner as possible ... and receiving all of the sensations, interactions and conversations, from the most mundane and familiar, to the new and unfamiliar, as ethnographic. (82)

Spending once an afternoon with one of the fathers, Frank, and his 8-year-old son, we went the three of us to a science museum in New Jersey. I became used to writing ‘field jottings’ (Russell Bernard, 2011) on my phone during outings with the fathers. During that afternoon, Frank made a comment about how much time I was spending on my phone. I was honest and told him I was making notes about the place and the things we were seeing and doing, to which he said, “yeah, I guess you're always working!<sup>6</sup>”. As Madden (2010) writes, “constantly stepping in and out of participation to jot down notes can disconcert participants and give the impression that the ethnographer is distracted and not properly engaged” (124).

What is observed, retained and discarded is shaped and influenced by the individual:

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<sup>6</sup> From fieldnotes.

The ethnographic gaze ... all ethnographers develop one; our vision is inevitably shaped by our theoretical climate, the people and questions that interest us, and our own experiences, predispositions and foibles. ... the ethnographer's gaze ... refers also to the 'mind's eye' of the ethnographer, the mental frame of reference through which a particular ethnographer views the world. (Madden, 2010, 100)

It is important to acknowledge that ethnographic data is not collected, but *produced*, through the interactions and collaboration between the researcher and their informants (Agar, 1996, 16).

The work presented here is the result of an interpretation of the words and behaviours of the men I spent time with. "Someone differently positioned might produce different data and therefore a different interpretation" (Draper, 2000, 81). The stages of research, from the original ideas to research design, interviews, analysis and representations, bear my "unique stamp" (Gray, 2003, 83). Knowledge that is generated and represented is thus always "partial and always incomplete" (Surlina, n.d., 5). "Partial truths ... help to more faithfully represent the real world than totalising representations" (Madden, 2010, 22).

Like poetry, ethnography is an act of translation and the kind of 'truth' that it produces is necessarily deeply subjective [and therefore] the question often posed to anthropologist ethnographers about the dangers of 'losing one's objectivity' in the field is really quite beside the point. Our task requires of us only a highly disciplined subjectivity (Scheper-Hughes, 2007, 211).

Throughout the course of 11 months, I accompanied fathers and their children to many outings similarly to the science museum trip with Frank. I spent time with them at the Prospect Park zoo in Brooklyn, at a playground on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, in the New York botanical garden in the Bronx, in Ikea in Brooklyn, in the back garden of the house I lived in in Brooklyn. Participant observation was conducted in the homes of the fathers who invited me, either for interviews or for dinner to meet with their families. I was invited to share dinner with their families outside their homes as well, meeting their grown-up children who were visiting. I had many lunches with the fathers, or we met in coffee shops to drink hot beverages. I went on walks with the fathers as well, walking in the streets of Brooklyn and Manhattan, and talking about our personal lives, or walking in parks such as

Central Park. I was invited to 3 of the men's birthday parties, one in a restaurant and one organized at the man's flat, where we shared food he cooked for his family and friends and me.

I joined the Fathers' Group<sup>7</sup> early on, a support group for fathers. This group was created in 2005, and was originally a group of white, middle-class, (mainly Jewish) men, who were all part of a men's organization<sup>8</sup>, and who went off and formed their group for fathers. "It diversified over time", Bradley explains to me. Other fathers' groups<sup>9</sup> were created following that model throughout the country, with men also from that men's organisation. The group in New York had roughly 10 regulars, a diverse group of men who were meeting twice a month. The forum is for Fraser, my initial contact and the founder of the group,

an exchange of ideas, there is no dogma. There is nobody who comes in and says, 'this is the way to father'. There are principles, we created a set of principles, there's no telling people what to do, we can offer our opinions, we might even offer our advice coming from experience but we discourage people saying 'oh here is what you should do', cause we're not experts, we're just dads, so they are there to share their experiences. The forum is really about sharing, what has worked in our lives, listening, being the best listeners we can be so that we can effectively coach another man through a series of questions that we have developed, that we feel allow us to go, to get personal and deep, you know.

The men were not unfamiliar with doing the work in the presence of other women; they had organised forum seminars with women, who were part of a women's organisation, who would talk about their experiences as mothers, their experiences with their own fathers and what they expected of their partners. Fraser describes a "very respectful" and "safe" environment. After having been with the Group for 3 months, Fraser told me during a

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<sup>7</sup> A pseudonym.

<sup>8</sup> Mentor Discover Inspire, an international men's organization, founded in 2000.

<sup>9</sup> The groups had leadership calls periodically, where leaders of the individual teams checked in on how things are going, going back to the values and standards that they set up for themselves and talked about how to support the growth of organization, how to attract more members. There is also a national phone team, where fathers joined a group call once a month and shared over the phone like they would at a meeting; these men wanted to form their own group but could not find enough fathers locally. I joined 5 of these calls.

meeting he was thinking about ways to invite women to participate to the meetings because he thought everybody could benefit and learn from the other gender.

4 of the men in this study were part of the Group: Bradley, Mathias, Pete and Simon. The mission of the group is, according to their Principles, “to creating happy, well-adjusted, and successful children” (see Principles, Appendix 1). The principles are first and foremost focused on the children’s wellbeing. The Group’s motto is, ‘Fathering is like a team sport, you don’t do it alone’. These men want to be better fathers, and they help each other come to their own conclusions based on the ‘collective wisdom of fatherhood’. There is a sense of legacy: Fraser says to me, “if we can continue with the job of good fathering and hopefully cause our children to be good parents etc etc, we’ve done some really good work”.

The men meet twice a month. The first meeting happens in a formal setting, usually in a conference room in Manhattan. These meetings are usually 3 hours long and they follow a particular agenda<sup>10</sup>.

- One of the men<sup>11</sup> welcomes everyone; presents the agenda for the night; he (or sometimes someone else) reads out loud the Principles; welcomes guests if there are any; if there are guests, he explains what the mission of the group is, and men introduce themselves.
- One of the men on a voluntary basis reads out loud the Team Standards (see Appendix 2).
- One of the men on a voluntary basis talks about the importance of confidentiality and what that means in practice. Men agree and raise their hands.
- The ‘opening exercise’, an introduction to the ‘village exercise’ that follows; the father who leads the meeting shares a quote, a definition, a story, and each man

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<sup>10</sup> This list has been written in collaboration with one of the group’s members, Mathias.

<sup>11</sup> It varies every time; it is usually one of the men who volunteered to lead the ‘village exercise’, see down below.



around the table shares how it resonates with them in terms of their personal experiences, for instance, as children, or as men.

- The 'village exercise', which is based on the idea that it takes a village to raise a child, that was popularized by Hilary Clinton's (1996) book *It takes a village*. Once a year the fathers create a list of dozens of topics related to parenting and choose 12 they want to discuss throughout the year, that becomes the theme of the village exercise each month. Each of the men then commits to lead a conversation about a particular topic. One question is asked in relation to raising their children, and each man shares one after the other.
- The 'coaching session'; the men go around the table and each tells the group whether they have a pressing issue in relation to their children they would like to address. The group either helps the one individual or divides into two groups in private rooms. The men ask "coaching questions", in Fraser's terms, "we lead him to come to his truth, we guide him as opposed to telling him".
- The closing exercise is the 'call-to-action', led by one of the fathers, the men check in on commitments they made for the month prior; actions that they were committed to do to strengthen their relationships with their children. During the month between the meetings they report via group emails the progress being made, and then talk about it before making new commitments, that are written down, towards the end of each meeting.
- The meeting typically ends with the men embraced in a tight circle, arms locked, and with Fraser acknowledging the men for their participation in the collective wisdom, and more importantly as fathers who care. Then one by one, each man similarly gives a brief expression of gratitude<sup>12</sup>.

The second meetings of the month are informal, "to get closer, so that when we get together in a more formal environment, we feel more trust and confidence in the room",

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<sup>12</sup> This particular step was narrated to me by Mathias, although I did not see it for myself at the meetings I participated in. Mathias explains that it happened when the meetings happened in one of the men's homes.

Fraser tells me. The men invited me to come to these meetings as well. For instance, one evening was bowling night; two were movie night; another was 'Chicken on the roof', a tradition they started a few years ago where men meet on the rooftop of a building in Brooklyn where one of the men had an apartment, bring their families, food and drinks and watch the sunset; one excursion was a walking tour of the High Line in Manhattan; there were also dinners at one of the men's apartments in Manhattan where everybody was bringing food and drinks.

I attended the first meeting, listening and taking notes. The men met me that one time, and agreed I could come back, both to the formal and informal meetings. I circulated a document about the research I was conducting. With time, the men included me in the meetings, they encouraged me to share and to talk about my personal experiences in France or with my own father. I did participate in the coaching sessions as well, asking questions to the father who was in difficulty. The fathers let me lead one of their meetings, which I wanted to be centred on parenting and gender inequality. It was organised around a series of exercises to engage the men to talk about the difficulties of being men. At a meeting, after 5 months of knowing them, one of the fathers said, "we have a guest here, Catherine. [Fraser], do you want to introduce her?". The latter replied, "I've grown to love Catherine. She has become part of who we are, part of the fabric of what we do to serve each other. I don't personally see her as a guest. She is a very valuable part of who we are and what we do".

Another group I connected with was the New York Group<sup>13</sup>, a meet-up group originally of at-home fathers, created by two at-home (white, middle-class, heterosexual, married) fathers living in Manhattan. 5 of the men in the study were part of the Group: Kyle, Paul, Ross, Earl and Logan. As of 2017, the group had 1,800 members. Created in 2008, the group grew over time and became a national organisation, with several groups being created under the same model throughout the country. It was in 2017 in 36 cities with over 10,000

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<sup>13</sup> A pseudonym.

members. Marc, one of the co-creators that I met once for a short interview, and then other times at the Group's events, says to me, "my main goal is for dads to connect". Kyle, the other co-creator, explains that the Group's mission is to "create a community of active and engaged dads". While originally for at-home fathers, over time the group started to include fathers with different employment statuses. There has been in recent years an increase in the number of social outlets for men who father full-time, especially in and around the nation largest cities (Pulera, 2004, 114). Kyle explains,

It's easier in a city to run a group like ours, cities are more connected. When you walk down the streets you see people like you, there's an opportunity to broaden your mind of what life looks like... a dad pushing a stroller down the street at 10 am makes a statement that it doesn't make when he's in the suburbs pushing his kid to the playground and he's the only dad ... it's easier to be an at-home dad in a city versus a suburban environment. Being able to experience New York with our kids. Most other dads' groups outside our network means meeting in a living room at somebody's house, it's a playgroup at someone's house, in their backyard. We can't have people over to our living room because it's not big enough, so we always met at museums and playgrounds and music classes and art classes.

Through this group, I was able to attend a couple of events; a music class for fathers and their babies; a nutrition class for parents whose children struggle with food; a picnic in Central Park for father's day where 30 families gathered; a brunch for father's day for gay fathers and their families in Manhattan; an event for father's day organised by Fatherly<sup>14</sup> in their headquarters; a show for new and expectant parents where the New York Group had a lounge for fathers and their families; a conference on fathers and family leave with a New York City council member in conversation with leading experts, of which Logan was part of as a panellist; a parenting conference at 92Y<sup>15</sup>; and the Annual At-Home Dads Convention organised by the National At-Home Dad Network that was that particular year organised in

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<sup>14</sup> The fastest growing parenting site in 2016 (Davidson, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> "Founded 145 years ago to serve the Jewish people, 92nd Street Y promotes individual and family development and participation in civic life within the context of Jewish values and American pluralism. [It is] a nonprofit community and cultural center" that "reaches out beyond its core constituency of American Jews to serve people of diverse racial, religious, ethnic and economic backgrounds, seeking partnerships that leaven our programs and broaden our influence". (92Y, n.d.).

Raleigh, North Carolina, a three-day event with 140 at-home fathers from all over the country, with presentations by experts and panels.

*At the Convention, I strike up a conversation with one of the at-home fathers. Big biceps, broad shoulders, tattoos everywhere, wears a leather jacket. "Kids are my life, man", he tells me with a smile. We talk about the event where we are both at, and how important it has become for some who come back every year. "We don't use words like support and group together, we talk about network. But it's totally a support group, we just don't call it that, otherwise guys wouldn't come. Saying you need help is to say you're weak. The most fragile thing in this world is the male ego<sup>16</sup>".*

Lastly, I attended and participated to a 2-day conference in Princeton, 'Men and Masculinity in a Changing World', the first conference organised by the New Jersey-based organisation Men Mentoring Men. Founded in 1991, the organisation has four support groups that meet in 2 locations every two weeks. They also offer workshops, retreats, family events. The organisation is according to their website

designed to provide a safe and shameless experience for men to discuss, share, explore, and live inside the best of masculinity. Men are encouraged to broaden their imagination of masculinity to include fulfilling and expressing a broad spectrum of emotional needs, desires, and capabilities. (mthree, n.d.)

This conference featured panel discussions and speakers. With roughly 50 participants, the event was open to both men and women, as well as professionals and educators. The conference was designed "to learn specifics about the male experience in our society within a historical context" (Wadlow, 2016).

### *1.1.2 Interviews*

Latshaw (2011) who has studied primary caregiving fathers in the United States writes that "the interview component [is] advantageous in gaining a more nuanced understanding of the fatherhood experience and studying smaller, statistically rare subpopulations (such as men who father full-time)" (131). Interviewing is a "process in which interviewer and

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<sup>16</sup> From fieldnotes.

interviewee are both involved in developing understanding, that is in constructing their knowledge or the social world” (Aull Davies, 2012, 98). The quotes from the fathers used throughout this thesis are primarily based on in-depth, semi-structured, recorded interviews (the others, where indicated, are quotes from fieldnotes - see discussion below). The interviews are reproduced verbatim based on the interview transcripts. Interviews were transcribed manually, and no alterations have been made to the words pronounced. It is important to acknowledge that “interviews must be viewed as a set of interpretations in their own right. ... all data are mediated by our practices of reasoning as well as those of participants” (Draper, 2000, 85). 43 interviews were conducted in total, sometimes the same person being interviewed twice or three times. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 4 hours long. Most of the interviews were face to face, except for 4 with 2 different fathers that happened via Skype, as the fathers interviewed, Manuel and Silas, lived in different states. I originally met these two fathers at the Convention for at-home fathers in North Carolina.

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that I came with pre-prepared questions partly based on Latshaw’s (2009) interview guide she used in her study on at-home fatherhood (see Appendix 3). A priority was given to gather life histories, a type of interview which, as Kouritzin (2000) puts it,

focuses on individuals' understanding and recollection of events that have had a substantial impact on their development. Documenting a life history also entails triangulation in order to understand what has been omitted from, and what subjective meaning given to, narrated events. It is not the events themselves that are of greatest importance, but the participants' understandings of the events and their later impact on, or resolution in, the participants' lives. (4)

To ask the men about childhood experiences, relationships with parents and how they came to become primary caregivers shed light on how “images of masculinity are passed on and re-imagined” (Hanlon, 2012, 176); it showed how most of the men identified with a nurturing masculinity since they were very young, and when their desire to become fathers

came to be; and in talking about their decisions to stay home came to the fore the men's relationships to paid work, which are discussed in Chapter four.

Questions were open-ended, which gave space and flexibility for the fathers to talk about what mattered to them, leading to probing questions and conversations that had not been anticipated. Over the course of the year new issues arose and new questions came up as I became involved in the lives of the fathers; the idea that 'it takes a village to raise a child' for instance was recurrent, as discussed in Chapter 6. The question of whether they believed in that adage was then asked systematically to the fathers I met. Questions emerged also from observations of them with their children, from previous informal or formal conversations either with them or with their partners, and from meetings with the Fathers' Group.

The interviews occurred at the place of each informants' choice, which was very often in public spaces, such as diners and coffee shops. They either suggested the place which was accommodating to them, being closer to where they lived for instance, or it was the result of a joint decision between me and the father. I had met some of these men at social events through either the New York Group or the Fathers' Group; they knew of me and had talked to me and spent time with me. In many of these cases the fathers invited me to their homes to have the interview, either in the company of their small children, or not.

19 fathers were interviewed; 15 being the focus of my study and 4 that were part of the Groups or that I contacted through social media. I also interviewed two of the men's wives; Dale's husband; one of the men's mother; and one of the men's female best friend. 6 professionals were interviewed also; one was a journalist and a writer, Joshua Kendall, who had written articles and a book on the American presidents as fathers; Lena Green, who was the Executive Director of the AKIRA center<sup>17</sup>; one was Alan Farrell, previously New York

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<sup>17</sup> "A community-based social service program focusing on fatherhood, healthy marriage and relationships, and counseling for families in Harlem" (NYU, 2015)

City Fatherhood Services Coordinator<sup>18</sup> and was when I met him the Assistant Deputy Commissioner for Parent and Community Engagement in the New York City Human Resource Administration's Office of Child Support; Sally Tannen was the director of 92Y's Parenting Center in Manhattan; Ron<sup>19</sup>, a family service specialist and an offender workforce specialist working for an association; and Joshua Gonzalez, a Human Resources Assistant was working for the Coalition for Hispanic Family Services, a foster care and family services agency in Brooklyn. These people on the ground were working closely with families and were in contact with fathers with different socio-economic statuses who lived in different part of the city. It gave me a better understanding of what being done for different kinds of fathers in the city, the needs of families, the kinds of issues being identified and addressed, how and by who; these professionals were for some of them men and fathers, and there was also the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

I did use a tape recorder during the interviews as it is, as Aull Davies (1999) phrases it,

less intrusive and destructive of open and natural conversation than having an ethnographer taking notes and it is infinitely more reliable than memory ... [and it] allows the ethnographer to be much more aware of other aspects of the interaction that cannot be captured by sound recording and to enter more fully into the development of the interview (114).

### *1.1.3 Fieldnotes*

Many informal conversations also occurred with the fathers I befriended and spent time with throughout the year, conversations which were important in developing rapport. "Rapport-building is crucial to the ethnographic process and it can take some time to establish" (Madden, 2010, 16). Quotes that do come from these informal conversations are signalled in the thesis with a note that says 'from fieldnotes'. These quotes are paraphrased recollected notes that were typed up after my meetings with the fathers, or with Paul's wife

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<sup>18</sup> A new position created under mayor Bloomberg's leadership in 2010. "The Coordinator will rigorously evaluate and advance the City's existing parenting programs, and help our agencies develop more father-friendly policies" (Bloomberg, cit. in Loeser, 2010, n.p.).

<sup>19</sup> A pseudonym.

for instance that I met at the playground once. I would type the quotes first on my phone, which I believed were the most important to remember, making field 'jottings' (Russell Bernard, 2011), while being with the men but mostly afterward, on the subway on the way home –travelling from Manhattan to Brooklyn where I lived took roughly 45 minutes--. I would send that note to myself electronically.

The same day, once at home, I would write 'full fieldnotes' (Emerson et al., 1995) that are more expansive observations with proper sentences on my computer, describing the places and the contexts that might have affected the interactions, things that the men expressed without words, using body language, "pauses and silences", "which may be all significant in adding, sometimes contradicting, the purely semantic content of what is said" (Aull Davies, 2012, 114). I would have one Word file per event on my computer, for instance a music class I joined with the fathers of the New York Group, with the date of the event and pictures if I took any. I made also extensive observations of people in the subway, focusing on fathers, fathers and their children or families in general. I wrote down observations of scenes I would witness that grabbed my attention as well, of interactions between people, of the city. I paid particular attention to the neighbourhoods I lived in in Brooklyn, walking and observing life and people and families in particular living their lives. Overall fieldnotes were typed up notes, written either on my phone or on my laptop.

Madden (2010) writes that "analysis and interpretation are ongoing ... the act of ethnographic writing is a form of collating, reporting, and interpreting at the same time. it is both systematic, and artful" (153).

*At a music class in the East Village in Manhattan with fathers from the [New York Group] and their children, the female teacher, roughly in her 40s, of Asian origins, explains that she has been doing that for 14 years and never had an all-father group before. Everybody sits in a circle, age-appropriate instruments are on the floor and the fathers play with their babies. The teacher sings songs and fathers repeat after*



*her. She sings, "hug the... person that takes care of you!", hesitating a moment on the word person. She continues, "you should kiss your mum... and dad!".<sup>20</sup>*

### 1.2 'Family trees'

7 of the 15 fathers who were part of this study and who were primary caregivers drew their 'family trees', which are visual representations of who they considered to be 'family'. The men who agreed to participate in this project were asked to draw a family tree or family diagram with the names of the people, biologically related to them or not, who (i) have had a significant or long-lasting impact upon their lives (ii) who form(ed) their support group (iii) who have helped them become the father they are today. The tree could have any form they choose. In the interview process, men tend to project images of control and to provide "an account that exaggerates autonomy" (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001, 212), which some of the men did in the early stages of research. The 'trees' were a methodological way to try and circumvent that, that is, to ask who was important for them. The fathers drew the trees in front of me and followed a conversation between the father and I where I would ask questions about the names they drew, and why they included these people and not others. 'Family trees' in anthropology "serve as representational devices: a convenient way to map a different -- and supposedly more fundamental ... - level of reality. Trees are a 'map', a 'depiction' of reality" (Bamford, 2012, 169). The data that emerged from these 'trees' are discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to men's networks of care.

### 1.3 Other primary sources

Men's life histories were also collected through a memoir and a fictional book based on autobiographical experiences. Donaldson and Poynting (2013) argue that "it is possible to treat autobiographies and biographies as 'found life histories'" (160). Autobiographies in particular "give their subject the ultimate control over the representation of their selves" (i.d.). Pete shared with me a memoir he wrote, a fictional piece of writing based on his

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<sup>20</sup> From fieldnotes.

personal life, that was unpublished and still in the works. Pete wrote it when he was an at-home father for two years, while his wife at the time worked. He remembers at that time

Having those feelings and I couldn't tell anyone, so I started writing things down. 200 pages of just my feelings. I put that in a story line ... it is a walk-through my feelings, how I felt, what was going on, cause she made more than me, a whole lot more than me, and she made sure I felt that, I knew, not purposefully.

That Pete shared me with hundreds of pages about his feelings says a lot about the trust he had in me as a person and as a researcher. Extracts are used in Chapter 4 which treats of the men's relationship to paid work, and permission to use those particular extracts was obtained from Pete post-fieldwork. Because men, especially in the interview context, tend to "exaggerate rationality, autonomy, and control as part of signifying a masculine self" (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001, 212), here the memoir provides a privileged vantage point into the intimately personal. Not that Pete had difficulty sharing his feelings and be vulnerable with me directly, he did not; but this provides more depth and allows for a better understanding of how he experienced the situation of not earning money as a working-class black man.

The second piece of writing is from William, an at-home father living with his wife and adolescent children in California. This published book is fictional; however, it is based on his experiences of being an at-home father. I originally saw William and heard about his book at a literary event with Dale at a Jewish parenting centre, listening to Jewish male writers talking about their latest published books. There, William says,

[The book] is me learning that the landscape was going to feed me in ways I didn't anticipate. I'm a different person for the process of being this involved in the upbringing of human beings. ... it's about my being hands on ... it's all about selflessness, it's the religion of selflessness ... it's about the love I found in the people I helped create ... [the father in the book is lonely] and I have been at times ... to the extent of, what do I do with my feelings and how do they help? not better me but become immune in me so that I can continue to be someone I'm proud of as a father.

#### 1.4 Recruitment and diversity

Men participated in this study on a voluntary basis. The men either identified as 'primary

caregiver' or 'stay-at-home father'. Participants were recruited through a variety of methods. Most of them were recruited via parenting groups that had an online presence on the website meetup.com, a social networking platform that is used to find local meetups organised throughout the city. Anyone can create or join a group that is "established around particular interests, themes, and activities" (Singler, 2018, n.p.). I found through meetup.com two New York-based groups; one for gay fathers, and that is how I met his creator, Dale, an at-home father. The group's activities had stopped when I met with him for the first time. The other group was the Fathers' Group, and my original contact was with Fraser. I met with him in a lobby in Manhattan, and following our conversation, Fraser said he would ask the other men to see if all would agree that I attend a formal meeting, which they did.

Otherwise, I was already aware of the New York Group, which was one of the reasons I chose New York as a place of study as explained earlier in this chapter. I contacted one of the co-founders through the Group's website, and accessing the Group had its challenges, as discussed later on in this chapter. After finally meeting with him, things became more easier in terms of access as I was able to attend some events, introduce myself, socialize and recruit Paul, Kyle, Earl, Ross and Logan that way. Through this group and through Logan in particular, I became aware of the Annual At-Home Dads Convention; thanks to Logan (as discussed in the last section), I was able to go, attend the event, participate, and through this event were recruited Manuel and Silas.

It was important to recruit men outside of groups also, to explore the similarities and differences that could exist between men that are part of groups and men who are not. Posters were displayed in different places in Brooklyn in gyms, schools, public libraries. Were targeted fathers who were 'primary caregivers' and who identified as the first parent. One father, Victor, who went to the same gym as me, contacted me after seeing the poster. Other men were recruited via word of mouth, such as Frank who knew the roommate I was living with in Brooklyn; they were both parents, were acquaintances and had the same

lawyer. One father, Simon, was recruited in the subway; we were on the same platform and he was alone with his daughter. One father, William, was contacted through his professional website; I had seen him talk about his work based on his experiences as an at-home father at a literary event and contacted him to ask whether he would participate in the research.

While recruiting participants, I became more deliberate and choosier throughout the year in the kinds of fathers I selected to ensure that the sample was diverse in terms of backgrounds, in order to counteract the tendency in previous studies to focus on white, middle-class, heterosexual, married fathers. The white participants in this study, some were also Jewish, were recruited early in the year. Participants such as Manuel were recruited later on, after meeting him at the Convention. I knew Pete from the Fathers' Group but interviewed him late in the year, having listened to him at length already during the monthly meetings.

*I am walking in my neighbourhood in Kensington, Brooklyn, on a Sunday. It's 6pm. It was a very hot day. "Summer is brutal here", I remember someone said to me recently. Fathers are visible. Walking, I see a father of Latino descent and his daughter. He's wearing a top that says, 'I'm a cool cat', with the word cat replaced with a drawing of a cat's head. He's carrying bags and an umbrella. He looks exhausted. They probably went to Coney Island for the day. In the organic local store I often go to, I see a white father who is carrying against his chest his red-headed daughter, who looks like 6 or 7 years old. She is tired of walking. In another organic store, opposite the first one, I see an African-American dad and mum, with their son, who's roughly 3 years old. He's on the shoulders of his dad. He touches things that are at his level. "How tall do you want to be?", he dad asks his baby; both parents are smiling. Going back home, I see a father with Asian origins, pushing the stroller. His daughter is calm, looking at everything that's going on around her<sup>21</sup>.*

Weston's (1991) comments about her research participants resonates with mine. She writes that "in any sample [that is] this diverse, with so many combinations of identities, theoretic sampling cannot hope to be "representative" (11). The social and cultural diversity of New York City is not representative of the rest of the United States; there is actually something

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<sup>21</sup> From fieldnotes.

unique to the city, that was celebrated by the New Yorkers I met, proud to be from what some considered “the centre of the world”. The city was in that sense a valuable site as it was the home of men from multiple, diverse backgrounds. The men were a minority, by being primary caregivers, and some were statistically a minority within the minority<sup>22</sup>. Ethnographers and anthropologists cannot generalize in the way that more quantitatively oriented people can do, however, what ethnography can offer is greater depth, nuance and richness, as discussed previously.

### 1.5 Method of analysis

The “objective of analysis is to produce an intelligible, coherent and valid account” (Dey, 1993, 54). Interviews were transcribed and analysed through qualitative methods. Interviews were transcribed manually *verbatim* after fieldwork was over. It is important to recognize that “the interview transcript represents a further level of interpretation” (Draper, 2000, 86). Sandelowski (1994) argues that

By the time the transcript is made, the original experience it was supposed to preserve has already been altered in the act of telling itself, in the recording, and in the transcribing process. What ends up on the printed page - the raw data - is actually already partly cooked: that is to say, many transformations removed from the so-called unadulterated reality it was intended to represent. (312)

328 pages of interview transcripts were read multiple times, which is another phase of analysis (Dey, 1993). In immersing myself with the data, I was able to uncover general themes. “A thematic analysis ... involves carefully sorting through data to identify recurrent themes or patterns” (Goldberg, 2012, 18). In a second phase, to narrow things down, 124 sub-themes in total were identified. They were listed and each were numbered. These subthemes were applied to all research data, both interviews and fieldnotes. As Mason (2002) writes, “the function of the categories is to focus and organize the retrieval of

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<sup>22</sup> For instance, while single-father families are a growing trend, going from less than 300,000 in 1960 to more than 2.6 million in 2011 (Coles, 2015), black single fathers, like Simon, represent 15 percent of single fathers (Livingston, 2013). In the case of Logan, a black stay-at-home father, fathers who are at stay-at-home fathers are more likely to be black (Livingston, 2014); however, he is a minority by being married to a white woman: this configuration accounts for 8.6 percent of marriages in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

sections of text, or elements of data, for the purpose of some form of further analysis or manipulation” (111). While re-reading an interview, numbers corresponding to subthemes were written down manually on the margins of the transcriptions. One page of an interview could contain multiple numbers. Then, the page numbers were reported on a separate document, where subthemes were listed. Each subtheme has a number, and all the pages where a particular subtheme emerges are listed underneath the number. This allowed to see which sub-themes were recurrent and were taking more space than others in the men’s narratives. For instance, the subtheme number 45, which compiles all the times in the interviews the men talked about paid work, (not) earning money and/or unemployment, emerges as one of the most talked about. This later one, combined with the subtheme number 78, ‘care as work’, became Chapter 4, which treats of the men’s relationships to paid work and of the construction of care as ‘work’.

The same way that ethnographic observations are always partial, and that choices and strategies influence the writing up of ‘full fieldnotes’, “individual ethnographers will ‘see’ a different set of facts and themes emerging when presented with the same data set” (Madden, 2010, 140). As Gray (2003) puts it, “the researcher puts their unique stamp on the project through their interpretation and analysis” (147). Moreover, “the classification depends on the objectives of the researcher. It provides a basis for comparison to the researcher and presents the formal relationships that exist between the data (Walter, 2018, 125). Some themes were privileged and given more space while others were dropped or reserved for future publications. The theme of race for instance was a theme that was dominant in the black fathers’ narratives, but not in the others’. The research shifted as fieldwork continued, and I was able to ask Frank, an Asian father, and Kyle, who has children from different descents, about race and racism, and to pay more attention when analysing the interviews to how the white fathers talked or did not talk about race. This became the most important chapter of this thesis, Chapter 7, that treats of questions of race.

The classification "helps to develop an adequate conceptualization for the elaboration of a

theory on the social world" (Walter, 2018, 125). Theorizing is a further step in data analysing. "Theoretical development, informed principally by the data, is the most important product of qualitative research" (Draper, 2000, 105). Data was brought to bear on the research questions, which changed as analysis progressed. As Creswell (2007) notes, "our questions change during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem" (43). Anthropologists engage with concept work and build theory from the empirical (Melhuus, 2002, 76). For instance, the concept of hegemonic masculinity did not match very well with what I encountered empirically; others have pointed out "its lack of connection to men's practices, everyday life, identity constructions and self-presentations" (Christensen and Jensen, 2014, n.p.). I found the concept to offer more nuance when combined with the concepts of privilege and intersectionality.

The results of the analysis are presented in this thesis.

### 1.6 Ethical issues

Formal permission to conduct my research was asked to the people I interviewed. All the participants who were interviewed were provided with an information sheet, with details of the nature of the research; the implications of their participation to the research; contact details of the researcher and of the supervisors; information about the storage of the data collected; information related to audio recordings; information related to the protection of their confidentiality and to the anonymisation of data collected. They were provided with a consent form that they all signed, which reiterated the purpose of the study. By signing the form, the participants agreed they read and understood the information sheet; that their questions have been answered satisfactorily; that they are taking part in this research study voluntarily (without coercion); that they know they can withdraw at any time from the research process and have research data/information relating to them withdrawn up until three months after the interview.

The participants who were interviewed and recorded were told at the beginning of each interview they could say things off the record that would not be used for data analysis, which some of the fathers did. All the participants were told they had access to the recordings of their interviews; one father asked that the interview be sent to him electronically. That same father also asked at some point during an interview that I stop the recording while he was sharing a particular story, and then allowed me to turn the recorder on again, once he was happy for his words to be recorded again.

I obtained ethical consent, verbally or in written form, to make observations, to record the Fathers' Group meetings, and to interview the research participants whose words are used in this thesis. I also recognise that informed consent cannot, and could not in my case, in the context of participant observation, always be obtained from people. This concerns particularly some of the family members and friends of the fathers who I quote in this study; I met them in public spaces, such as the playground, or at family events. Watts (2011) argues that

Given the open and public nature of interactions and the duration of much participant observation research, the researcher is likely to come into contact with a wide spectrum of people, and ensuring that everyone in the setting has an opportunity for informed consent is not practicable because it would be extremely disruptive of the 'usual' workings of the setting. (5)

The research was conducted in accordance with the AAA (American Anthropological Association) Statement on Ethics. Approval for this research had been given by Hull University Ethics Committee. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms<sup>23</sup> have been given to all participants to protect their identities, as well to the two parenting groups some of the men were part mentioned earlier.

### 1.7 The positions as a researcher and reflexivity

We do not come to a setting without an identity, constructed and shaped by complex social processes. We bring to a setting disciplinary knowledge and

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<sup>23</sup> A lot of the fathers chose their surnames that are used in this thesis.



theoretical frameworks. We also bring a self which is among other things, gendered, sexual, occupational, generational - located in time and space. (Coffey, 1999, 158)

Men should not be the only ones to study masculinity, because women's standpoints are also necessary for a full understanding of gender relations. (Coltrane, 1994, 56)

To be a Western, white, middle-class, woman, who has received education from French, Dutch and U.K. universities has influenced what I observed and what I heard, what I retained from this experience in New York City, and what emerged as being important to write about. "Biases can shape a research design, inform implementation of methodology and influence data interpretation" (Chalklein, 2018, 154). The point of talking about myself is really "to create a more reliable portrait, argument or theory about 'them, the participants'" (Madden, 2010, 23). I recognize that my belonging in a socially dominant group involves issues of power especially when working with people from marginalized populations who "may be further marginalized in the research process ... and stripped of agency ... and control over how their voice[s] [are] used" (Parson, 2019, 20). Researchers "have power<sup>24</sup> in the research process in the decisions they make about the research project" (Parson, 2019, 19). This unbalance of power was challenged methodologically by conducting semi-structured interviews and by letting the informants choose the interview venue, for instance. Also, the literature on women interviewing men has stressed "the constantly changing subject positions and power relations ... [with] the researcher being on the receiving end of expressions of sexism, misogyny and inappropriate attention" (Johnstone, 2019, 19), an aspect that is discussed below.

I argue that, my being both a woman and Jewish, made me more aware of forms of oppression that emerged from some of the fathers' narratives. Having had my maternal grandmother saved from the threat of deportation during World War 2, while her family was taken away with SNCF trains, to go straight to Auschwitz camps and never come back,

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<sup>24</sup> "Strategies, tactics, and procedures that characterize power dynamics in research include participant selection, privacy, disclosure, interviews, observation, analysis, and the (re)presentation of research participants and their communities" (Vanner, 2015, 2, cit. in Parson, 2019, 16).

marked me deeply. That probably made me more sensitive and receptive to the stories of hardship and racism recounted especially by the minority fathers. Being Jewish also meant that there was a level of understanding and easiness with the Jewish fathers when they told me about their own ancestors being deported, or how they came to America, or when they talked about Jewish culture and values in general. Not being observant myself nor very knowledgeable, the fathers were adamant in telling stories about Jewish Americans, Orthodox Jews communities, and so on.

An extract of *Americanah* (2013), a fictional piece by the Nigerian female author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who has lived in the United States, deeply resonates with me in relation to how I received and sought to honour the stories told by the black fathers I met in New York. She writes,

Try listening, maybe. Hear what is being said. And remember that it's not about you. American Blacks are not telling you that you are to blame. They are just telling you what is. If you don't understand, ask questions. If you're uncomfortable about asking questions, say you are uncomfortable asking questions and then ask anyway. It's easy to tell when a question is coming from a good place. Then listen some more. Sometimes people just want to feel heard. Here's to possibilities of friendship and connection and understanding. (327)

The fathers I met did not call me out on my privileges. The only father with whom I talked about my racial privileges was Logan, a black father, who became a friend. We had many conversations about race, about blackness, about being a black man in America, and also about white privilege. I was once telling him about an uncomfortable experience I had, going to a dentist in a Jewish orthodox neighbourhood in Brooklyn, adjacent to the neighbourhood I was living in. This was a highly segregated neighbourhood, and the non-orthodox Jewish people were clearly the minority. I felt like an outsider, and it left me being humbled by that experience, and more aware of the privileges I carry, walking on the streets, for instance. Logan listened and replied, "and that's the lesson that most people are not ever going to learn, like what that feels like, so that they can potentially have some empathy for [minority people]". I remember one father, Pete, a black man, who was in the Fathers' Group; I remember him distinctively telling me 'hey, sister' as he entered the room,

more than once. This startled me, because I was the only woman in the room, and I was (am) white. I knew that the uses of the terms 'brother' and 'sister' were signs of belonging to the larger black community. 'Brother' and 'sister' are terms of respect and trust (Hamilton, 2011, 30). 'Sister' is a "ter[m] of endearment, a name as title/authority, a greeting as acknowledgement of being and respect" (Lugones and Rosezelle, 1995, 139).

Female ethnographers doing research in male-dominated environments have written about how their gender triggered certain kinds of behaviours (Arendell, 1997; Gill and Maclean, 2002; Lumsden, 2009). 'Hustling'<sup>25</sup> "involves statements or actions which place the female researcher in an inferior or devalued position" (Gurney, 1985, 12). "Sexual hustling is more likely to occur when a female researcher is perceived to be single or unattached to a male" (Coffey, 1999, 81), which was my case; this sort of dynamic is also "indicative of the heterosexual parameters within which fieldwork is often conceived" (80). I did encounter sexist behaviours and sexually charged remarks from two fathers. One was not part of the study, however he was part of the Fathers' Group. He was an older white man, who would make objectifying comments such as "in my head I still want to be 30 years old; when I walk on the street I look at all women like they're objects"<sup>26</sup>. Once, later in the year when I felt more comfortable with the men of the Group, at a dinner organised at one of the men's apartments, I wore a dress, which was something I purposefully did not do most of the time<sup>27</sup>. I caught this father looking at me in ways that made me feel objectified. He also once said to me in front of the other men of the Fathers' Group, in a restaurant, "you are very attractive", which I thought was inappropriate.

That same man made patronizing and mansplaining comments also; once, at a meeting, saying to me jokingly, "would you like me to teach you some French?", wanting to teach me

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<sup>25</sup> 'Hustling' ranges from "flirtatious behaviour and sexually suggestive remarks to over sexual propositioning" (Gurney, 1985, 12).

<sup>26</sup> From fieldnotes.

<sup>27</sup> Nor was I ever wearing makeup. That same night, I did wear makeup, and I remember one of the fathers, Bradley, asking me very seriously why I was wearing makeup, as I usually did not. It made me smile, he and I had a good relationship; but it startled me also.

about a French word that is used in English. Because multiple conversations were going on at the same time, I didn't hear him the first time; he asked again, adding "sweetheart". On the recording, Mathias laughs at his question and Bradley says, "there some mainsplaining going on". The other father, who is in the study, once boasted about how many orgasms in a row he was giving his wife while he made sure he did not finish because he did not want to be a father; that put me in an uncomfortable position. Female researchers often report tolerating things that made them uncomfortable but saw that as sacrifices the researcher must make (Gurney, 1985; Arendell, 1997).

There was however a lot of positives about being around most of the fathers I spent time with. They were very welcoming towards me. They were interested in my research and were open to share about their experiences. They were respectful, generous with their time, and eager to help. Some welcomed me into their homes, introduced me to their families, invited me over for dinner. They would think of me and invite me to events they went to with their children, whether it was going to a museum or an event organised for the Olympic Games. The men were incredibly patient with me, especially the black fathers who spent hours explaining to me what race and racism meant for them personally. I developed affectionate relationships with some of the men, who became protective of me, and I would not be surprised that I was somewhere between a friend or a proxy daughter to some. In fact, the last time I saw the men from the Fathers' Group, they had planned a surprise for me and prepared each a small speech to say; one said to me, "I see you as my daughter ... I would be proud to call you my daughter"; Bradley told me, "it made me realize that I don't see my [25 year-old] daughter fully as an adult but still as a child, that I want to treat her as an adult now". I considered some of these men friends, mentors, and paternal figures.

My gender influenced how the men perceived me, what they were going to confide in me, how much they trusted me also. "The researcher carries an identity with her and how the researched respond to the researcher both in terms of what they believe she will understand and in their presentation of self will be dependent upon what role they assign

to the researcher” (Walker, 1998, 283). I do believe that my being a young and childless woman benefitted me greatly in conducting this research. To be mainly an 'outsider' was an asset as it meant "little expectation of [my] understanding local issues and relations, [making it easier] to ask the obvious and basic questions" (Hammett, Twyman and Graham, 2015, 79). I was able to approach the men and explain that I did not know much about raising a child, and that I was wanting to learn as much as I could from them, which was true. There was no competition between their knowledge and mine; there was all the space for them to either display confidence, or to express vulnerabilities in relation to being a parent. The men were put in the position of 'experts', an interview strategy which "allow[s] men to feel in control and powerful in a particular way" (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001, 208).

Also, I believe that being a woman rendered the interview context favourable for the men to express vulnerable feelings. Men need "to protect a masculine self by maintaining control or by revealing no vulnerabilities and uncertainties" (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001, 209); male interviewees especially might encounter that since they are more likely to be considered "potential status competitors" (i.d.). Some of these men had been practising vulnerability with the Fathers' Group's meetings for years, and others were used to seeing a therapist and discussing emotionally difficult issues. Some of the men have cried in my presence and felt comfortable enough and safe enough to do so; others talked at length about vulnerable feelings, such as fear and doubt. Some of the men expressed gratitude for having had the opportunity to talk about their lives. Women are often perceived to be empathetic listeners; "people may confide [more easily] in the [female] researcher" as she is "perceive[d] as "powerless and less threatening" (Easterday et al., 1982, 66). "Certain sorts of data are more accessible by personable young women" (Dingwall, 1980, 881). Moreover, the longitudinal design of the research project allowed the relationships with the fathers to develop over a certain amount of time, which led to certain types of information being disclosed by some of men after they had known me for a couple of months. This is discussed in the Chapter 3 with the example of Frank.

Where my gender was a disadvantage was in terms of access. I did get access to the Fathers' Group and was invited to attend their monthly meetings, both formal and informal. However, things were different with the New York Group, whose goal on their website is "to form an inclusive & active community of involved dads". I remember writing several emails to the co-creator of the group, explaining about the research, asking whether I could meet with him, and maybe attend some of the events organised by the group. I could not get his attention for two months. Mathias helped me write a direct and concise e-mail, which worked, and I got a response. When I met the father, he was clear also that I could attend some events, but not others, such as the 'Dads night out' every Thursday in New Jersey, and the 'New Dad Boot Camp', a class designed for expectant fathers. I found some resistance also with the National At-Home Dad Network that organised the Annual At-Home Dad Convention, which was organised in Raleigh that year. The person I originally contacted said that researchers have attended the Convention before, and he put me in touch with the President of the organisation. The latter never replied to my e-mail introducing myself and asking whether I could attend. It was Logan, who was on the board of the organisation that set up the yearly event, who contacted them and made sure I could come. Logan was in many ways an important 'key informant'<sup>28</sup>, spending a lot of time with me and facilitating access to research opportunities.

### 1.8 Introducing the thesis

This chapter is followed by Chapter 2 which presents a theoretical overview of fatherhood, where I point out the underrepresentation of certain kinds of fathers in the literature, and of masculinities, plural. I look at the ways in which the two domains interact and shape each other. I identify some of the historical shifts in discourses and practices of fatherhood in the U.S. This chapter also discusses in particular the literature on men and masculinities that combines the study of masculinities with intersectional theory. It also examines the

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<sup>28</sup> 'Key informant' refers to a group member who steps forward to volunteer to give the research "stranger" access to the culture or group she wants to study" (Anastas, 1999, 99).

literature on men as primary caregiving fathers, identifies the arguments that have been made, and the gaps that exist.

Chapter 3 to Chapter 7 describe the results of fieldwork, with each chapter exploring a particular theme, being guided by what the men, -- and their loved ones --, have shared with me, and by what I was able to observe. Throughout these chapters, I incorporated the voices of some of the women who were present in the men's lives; these women play a key role in supporting them in their role as primary caregivers. I stress that some of the men are able to be the fathers that they are, and to provide care the way they do, because they have women around them 'opening' the gates and encouraging them to be involved fathers.

*Leaving [Alice]'s school with [Logan], his family and friends after seeing the school's Christmas pageant his daughter participated to, I walk side to side with [Logan]'s mother on the streets of Manhattan. I know she was a black single mother who raised him on her own. I express my admiration, congratulating her on the job she's done with him. She says to me, "it's a tough city. I wanted him to be a good person and a good man for when he was going to meet someone"<sup>29</sup>.*

The fathers are presented in Chapter 3, where I explain how each of them came to become a primary caregiver. This chapter discusses their positions as male primary caregivers in a society that associates care with femininity and motherhood. I argue that the men experience ambivalence, being seen as heroes and/or anomalies for being involved fathers, and that overall being a male primary caregiver is still a stigmatised status. I introduce two categories, the 'Experts' and the 'Apprentices', where the men draw on different discourses of masculinity to make sense of their capacities as caregivers, opening up a discussion about privilege and oppression and what resources are available to different kinds of men.

The men, in talking about the journeys that led them to become primary caregivers, talked at length about the ways in which their caring responsibilities meant a reconfiguration of work. Chapter 4 discusses the men's relationships to paid work, and how they construct care as 'work'. I argue that a lot of the men, in becoming caregivers, experience a shift in

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<sup>29</sup> From fieldnotes.

their identities vis-à-vis work, which becomes secondary. All the while, a lot of the men maintained real and symbolic connections to forms of (paid) work, and most talked about caregiving responsibilities as temporary. I make the argument that men still feel the pull of the breadwinner ideology, a white, middle-class ideal that is not attainable in the same way for all.

What does being a primary caregiver look like in practice? Chapter 5 explores what caregiving means for the men, what they do when they care, and how they experience it. This chapter focuses on the embodied aspects of caregiving, and agrees with the argument made by Connell (2005) that men who care develop other ways of using their bodies than what society had planned for them: they learn to train their bodies as they care and come to experience new pleasures. Finally, I use the example of black fathers doing their daughters' hair to show that care does not involve just the body, or the *bodies* of the father and the daughter, but that practices of care need to be understood within wider contexts of power and meanings.

Who is involved in the primary caregiving process? While some of the men (as discussed in Chapter 3) draw on discourses of autonomy and self-reliance to talk about their role as caregiver, I argue in Chapter 6 that a lot of men draw on resources available to them, financial, familial, friendship, and rely on networks of care. These networks are predominantly composed of women; there are the mothers' children, aunts, grandmothers, babysitters, nannies. In this chapter I demonstrate that these networks are not only familial, but also involve other kinds of relationships as well. The men's 'family trees' are presented in this chapter, and show how the men are connected and who they consider to be part of their families.

Chapter 7 discusses the impact of race and racism in the lives of the fathers. The white fathers did not identify as white, however, they did talk about whiteness and to a certain extent racism, in relation to themselves and their children in indirect ways. The black



fathers' narratives, however, are saturated with race, and this chapter sought to reflect how much space it took up in our conversations and how much it impacted their lives as parents. I argue that race, as an organizing system of difference, has profound implications in relation to masculinities and fatherhood. Black men are caught at the intersection of race and gender oppression, and as a result bear a unique burden as black fathers.

*Walking on the streets of Manhattan, I see a police car parked, with a licence plate that catches my eye. It says that a person who can provide information in the case of a NYC police officer being shot at can be rewarded of 10.000 dollars. And I am thinking, what about the unarmed black men being shot at in the last couple of months? We know who killed them, there are videos from surveillance cameras, or taken with people's phones and posted online, and most of the officers go free. Why is a person's life worth so much, and another worth so little?<sup>30</sup>*

The final chapter, Chapter 8, draws together the discussions brought up in previous chapters to present concluding remarks. It makes the argument that to apply and combine ethnographic and intersectional approaches enables an examination of the complexity and diversity of what it means to be primary caregiving fathers. I argue that men's lives are profoundly structured by wider systems of power and oppression, which results in unequal access to choices and opportunities as parents. I stress that fatherhood, as a salient social location, can be both a location of systemic privilege and/or oppression.

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<sup>30</sup> From fieldnotes.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Introduction

Drawing upon ethnographic methods, this thesis explores the lived experiences of primary caregiving fathers in the United States. This chapter is a review of what the available literature and theory has to say about my focus with particular attention to fatherhood, masculinities, and primary caregiving fathers. To critically engage with data (Coffey, 1999), the fathers' accounts are analysed in the context of broader theoretical frameworks in order to create "a dialogue between theory and data" (Draper, 2000, 5). In this chapter I examine the dominant cultural discourse of fatherhood in the Western world, the 'new man' or 'new father' ideal, a white, middle-class norm that establishes what is expected from fathers. I discuss the concepts of masculinity, 'masculinities' and hegemonic masculinity, and I justify why this thesis combines theories of men and masculinities with an intersectional framework. I investigate some of the claims made in the literature on primary caregiving fathers, focusing on the work of Doucet (2006). Lastly, I explore briefly why fatherhood is a "masculinity issue" (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003, 44).

### 2.2 Contemporary fatherhood

The ideology of the 'new man' or the 'new father' emerged in response to second-wave feminism and more particularly to "feminist critiques of the role of gender within the institution of the family" (Patton, 2014, 156) and of traditional forms of masculinity (Lazar, 2005). The movement had an impact on the role of fathers as it questioned gendered divisions of labour, it challenged essentialist notions that women are 'naturally' better at caregiving, and it asked fathers to be more involved in their children's lives. Feminism asked fathers to be more than "buddies" (Nelson, 2003, 163). This movement was only partly novel as it was grounded on a greater approval of fathers that had developed from the 1920s onwards (Stearns, 1994). It was becoming increasingly recognized that men were paying both an emotional and a physical price for their effort to not appear sensitive (Ibson,

2003, 413). One of the main themes of the men's movement in the 1970s was men's relationships and "proximity" with their children (Patton, 2014, 156).

The 'new man' discourse rejects traditional aspects of hegemonic masculinity. These include "overt physical and verbal displays of domination, stoicism, and emotional inexpressivity, overt misogyny in the workplace and at home" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner, 1994, 207). The 'new man' embraces traits previously thought as 'feminine', he is "caring, sensitive, emotionally skilled and shares household duties, including childcare ... [He] is middle class, well-educated, liberal in his political outlook, sympathetic to the feminist cause" (Milestone and Meyer, 2012, n.p). He is a "nurturing man" (Griswold, 1993, 248).

The 'new father', a recent model of 'good' fatherhood, is rooted in middle-class notions of what it is to be a 'new man' (Carroll, 2001, 137); it has been described as someone who

involves himself in a more expressive and intimate way with his children and ... plays a larger part in the socialization process that his male forebears had long since abandoned to their wives. In short, the new style of parenting blurs the distinction between fatherhood and motherhood (Rotundo, 1985, 17).

This ideal was a way for men after the 1960s "to incorporate ideals of liberal feminism" (Lupton and Barclays, 1997, 15) and also distance themselves from the image of the 'dangerous father' who abuses his children, "frequently designated as poor, working-class or of non-European ethnicity ... The 'new' father archetype ... tends to elide differences between men" and excludes other groups of fathers (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, 15). The 'new father', the white, middle-class, married father, the "nice guy", is different from the 'absent', 'noncustodial' or 'deadbeat dad', code for black and/or divorced fathers (Patton, 2014, 156). "Absence" is an ill defined pejorative concept" and "connotes invisibility and noninvolvement" (Coles and Green, 2010, 3). Absentee black fatherhood, which statistically is a reality<sup>31</sup>, is used in stereotypical and oppressive terms against black men. Because they

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<sup>31</sup> In 2017, 47 percent of black children under 18 in the United States were living with a single mother, compared to 23 percent of Hispanic children and 13 percent of white children (Livingston, 2018).

face unique obstacles that are “produced and sustained primarily by the structure of American society itself” (Hamer, 2001, 2), black men “have historically found it difficult to live up to Western notions of good fatherhood” (13). Low-income black men who do not co-reside with their children are often portrayed as irresponsible, uneducated, unemployed, unwilling to provide, and refusing to pay child support (Hamer, 2001). They are “considered somewhat like phantoms or villains and alleged to have demonstrated little or no real feelings for their families’ well-being” (Hall, 1981, 159).

The discourse of the ‘new father’ is “riven with tensions” (Gregory and Milner, 2011, 14) by

pessimistically, on the one hand, echoing moral panic about the fathering practices of marginalised men and their effect on children, while at the same time, failing to offer a meaningful alternative for these men and, on the other hand, optimistically suggesting that men have changed more than they have actually (Hanlon, 2012, 190).

Similarly, Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003) argue that

the range of perspectives on the emergence of the new father illustrates a gap between attitudes and behaviour, image and reality, or ideology and action. The resulting confusion has intensified the ontological question of whether the new father *really exists*. One of the main difficulties of this approach is that the object of enquiry is reified, translated into a reductionist dual model of bad (traditional) and good (new) categories of paternal behaviour. ... The notion of the new father is probably best thought of as a cultural ideal: normative claims are being made about how contemporary men as fathers *should* behave. (52)

questions about the new father are clouded by a tendency to undertheorize an understanding of social and cultural change. (i.d.)

The model of ‘nurturing masculinities’ (Hanlon, 2012) has become prominent, both in ideology and in practice. Contemporary emotional norms are changing, and men are expected to be more expressive (Featherstone, 2003). This has enabled men to enter new emotional spaces, to form “more intimate and emotionally expressive masculinities” (Hanlon, 2012, 147). Research indicates that fathers are increasingly expected to be

involved nurturers, but also open and emotionally expressive. Goodsell (2008) argues that fathers in the United States are expected to show calmness, patience and stability at all times, including “exercising self-discipline, controlling anger, communicating with children and being attuned to the child and the environment” which in turns require managing their emotions (272-273). Dermott (2008) has identified in her U.K. study an 'emotional turn' that gives way to “an emphasis on the aspects of male parenting that fathers themselves view as most significant: emotions, the expression of affection” (143). She writes that

Emotions are not in themselves a new dimension of fatherhood, but rather that emotional openness and the displaying of emotions have particular significance for our ideas of contemporary fatherhood and doing fathering. (64)

closeness and openness are the basis of good fatherhood (74).

However, Dermott argues that “while an emotional relationship should have some external evidence as demonstration of its existence, it is not obvious what should be expected in terms of caring activity” (75). The fathers in her study displayed what she terms as ‘intimate fatherhood’, which refers to “emotionally close relationships with their children [that is] achieved through spending time together” (Ranson, 2015, 17). The fathers were “selective about which aspects of caregiving they will take on” (14), choosing to spend ‘quality time’ through playing, reading, talking and listening, “reserving for themselves the intimate moments” (84) and leaving the mundane, day to day, more labour intensive-intensive work to mothers. ‘Intimate fatherhood’ could be realised without spending an equal amount of time with children as mothers.

All the fathers in this study drew on the discourse of the ‘new father’: they identified with ‘nurturing masculinities’, they performed ‘emotion work’ (Hochschild, 1979) and were very involved in the day-to-day care of their child/ren. These fathers spent much more than ‘quality time’ which characterizes ‘intimate fatherhood’ (Dermott, 2008), they were doing the work of care that is traditionally associated with motherhood. I agree with Ranson (2015) who studied primary caregiving fathers and who argues that ‘intimate fatherhood’ is “a better fit for these fathers as a description of the exclusivity of their relationships with

their children. These relationships were strong, and committed” (85). The men in my study had more in common with the Norwegian fathers on leave in Brandth and Kvande’s (2003) study (“I have much more faith in quantity than in quality”, one of their participants said) (141), or Will Wall’s (2014) Portuguese solo caregivers, also on leave (“it’s really very tiring looking after a baby all day”) (202).

Fathers are expected to be more present than their fathers were, more hands-on, and emotionally close to their children, however, they also have to navigate a cultural context where mothers are constructed as the “exclusive” parent (Arendell, 2000, 1194). Fathers are seen as the secondary parent, the ‘helper’ (Doucet, 2009), the ‘part-time’ parent or the ‘bumbling assistant’ (Sunderland, 2002). They are portrayed in popular culture as being clumsy, inept at caregiving, either deadbeat, or present but focused on play and fun time; the father is the ‘baby entertainer’ (i.d.) who reaps the emotional rewards (Schaefer, 2015).

One question that this research asks is, *how do men who are primary caregiving fathers negotiate their position as carers and make sense of their role in a society where caring is associated with motherhood and femininity?* I argue that fathers who care construct a form of “de-gendered ‘parenting’” (Ranson, 2015, 19), challenging the idea of maternal primacy. The men did not believe mothers had a stronger bond with the child/ren, or that they were better parents because of their gender. They understood care as “a set of technical acts” that anyone could learn and perform “irrespective of his or her gender” (Merla, 2008, 128). This research also shows that care was constructed as ‘work’; fathers redefined care, gave it value, and made it visible, a strategy “used to minimize their potential illegitimacy” as carers (Smith, 1998, 158). They expressed a ‘compassionate masculinity’ (Hanlon, 2012) and showed empathy for other carers.

Moreover, as Dermott (2008) notes, paraphrasing La Rossa (1997), “the rise of new forms [of fatherhood] do not mean the complete disappearance of older ones” (28). Economic fatherhood, although challenged, is still a hegemonic ideal, which is in turn reinforced and

sustained by work-family policies (Dowd, 2012). American men are “*good* family providers” (Pass et al., 2014, 169). Townsend (2002) in his study on marriage, work and fatherhood in the United States notes the importance of work in men's lives, which includes putting together a “‘package deal’ of work, marriage, home and children” (30). Part of this 'package deal' he notes the importance of “successful” fatherhood which includes “emotional closeness, provision, protection and endowment” (53). He finds that to provide financially for their children is considered to be the most important aspect of ‘good’ fatherhood (120). According to him, the powerful association between 'successful' masculinity' and work – despite the increase in working mothers – has served to explain why in the country “the revolution in family life has stalled” (195). This shows that men too can “feel limited by the power of patriarchal structures and associated expectations” (Miller, 2010, 46).

### 2.3 Men and masculinities

Gutmann (1997) has identified “four distinct ways that anthropologists define and use the concept of masculinity and the related notions of male identity, manhood, manliness, and men's roles”, which are, “anything men think and do”; “anything men think and do to be men”; the third concept is that “some men are inherently or by ascription considered “more manly” than other men”; the last concept “emphasizes the general and central importance of male-female relations, so that masculinity is considered anything that women are not” (385-6). I understand masculinity in this thesis as the attributes, attitudes but also beliefs and bodily practices that are taken to be manlier than others. Masculinity is socially and culturally constructed, and it influences all aspects of social life. It is an unstable category of identity which needs to be constructed, performed and reproduced over time. Masculinity is also a relational construct, that is “produced and situated in relation to femininity” (Draper, 2000, 48).

Manhood is neither static nor timeless. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological constitution; it is created in our culture... . What it means to be a man in America depends heavily on one's class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, region of the country. (Kimmel, 1997, 5)

Connell (1995) has identified a dominant form of masculinity or 'hegemonic masculinity'. She developed this concept to "explore power relations between men as well as to illustrate the disparities and interconnections between cultural norms of masculinities and the realities of men's lives" (Alsop et al., 2002, 140). Hegemonic masculinity has been theorised as a particular form of masculinity which legitimates and sustains hierarchical relations both amongst men and between men and women. It is historically and culturally contingent, it is fluid over time, and it is always contested. It is an "ideal-type" and is "as such an uninhabitable goal for the majority of men" (Alsop et. Al, 2002, 140). Also, "common to dominant ideals of masculinity in Western society is a rejection of both femininity and homosexuality" (i.d. 142). Men, depending on their social positions, relate to hegemonic masculinity in different ways. Very few manage to live up to it; most of men are 'complicit' with it, they benefit from the patriarchal dividend of male privilege; some men are 'marginalised' because "they are disadvantaged by race/ethnic, class, disability or other minority statuses" (Hanlon, 2012, 9); others who are perceived as being less masculine are 'subordinated', such as gay men. Connell's model is "framed in terms of relations between dominant and subordinate forms of masculinity, defined primarily by class and sexuality" (Hopkins and Noble, 2009, 814).

Who embodies the American hegemonic norm? As Goffman (1963) puts it,

there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports... Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself—during moments at least—as unworthy, incomplete and inferior. (128)

In my study, while some of the men embodied certain aspects of the 'unblushing male', most didn't achieve all/most. All, as male primary caregivers, had to negotiate dominant norms of masculinity. As Hanlon (2012) writes, "nurturing practices that are coded feminine signify dependency, passivity, femininity, and vulnerability, the very antithesis of hegemonic masculinities" (63). Traditional masculinity is associated with control, competence, action, independence, strength and stoicism (Seidler, 1989, 1994).



Hanlon (2012) argues that dominant definitions of masculinity give an image of men as “either innately or socially construed with identities, interests, and capabilities at odds with those necessary for primary caring work” (26). Care and masculinity are theorised as antithetical. Masculinity “discourages outward expressions of care and concern for others” (Jecker and Self, 1991, 296). Men can care in “emotionally intimate ways but these feminine-defined emotional practices are subject to negotiation, contestation and resistance in different ways and different places, and internally within men themselves” (Hanlon, 2012, 209). To acknowledge love and dependency challenges their identity which is based on power and dominance (Seidler, 1989, 40). This leads men to reflexively reconstruct their masculinity (Hanlon, 2012, 202). In his study, Hanlon finds that “Carers define their masculinity in terms of primary caring” (26); they develop “a more nurturing and compassionate masculinity” (203). Other studies show also that primary caregivers develop more flexible definitions of masculinity (Doucet, 2006; Wall, 2014; Ransen, 2015). Hanlon (2012) argues that “men are changing and the more they do caring the more they change” (210).

As Connell (2000) notes, there are “different ways of enacting manhood, different ways of learning to be a man, different conceptions of the self and different ways of using a male body” (10); which translates into a concept of ‘masculinities’” (Connell, 2005). Masculinities are “accomplished within a number of different sites ... and may therefore change not only at different times within and across cultures but also within the life course of the individual man” (Draper, 2000, 48). There is a need “to recognize multiple masculinities: black as well as white, working class as well as middle-class” (Connell, 2005, 76), and the relations that exist between them (37). Men, because of their different statuses, have differential access to legitimate resources of successful masculinity; “each subgroup, based on race, class, sexual orientation, or whatever, defines manhood in ways that conform to the economic and social possibilities of that group” (Kaufman, 1994, 145). “All masculinities are not equal” (Lynch, 2009, 412); while men benefit from a system of male privilege, not all are “the main beneficiaries” (Kimmel and Coston, 2017, 107).

This thesis combines the concept of masculinities with intersectionality theory<sup>32</sup>. This research shows that the men's multiple identities intersect to create unique, varied, overlapping social locations that "take on unique forms of privileges and oppressions in various contexts and in the presence of different social identities" (Romero, 2013, 82). Markers of identity "overlap and interact with one another" (Bonthuys, 2013, 92) and shape men's fathering experiences and the meanings assigned to fatherhood. An intersectional approach helps us understand what "shapes people's experiences every day, and limits and constrains the choices they make", and "presents a more nuanced understanding of social inequalities" (Romero, 2017, 16). Masculinities are "relational, contextual, and permeated by multiple and intersecting inequalities", such as class, race, sexuality (Lopez, 2012, 240).

Hegemonic masculinity has been called into question as a concept (Hearn, 2004). It becomes challenged the more ethnographic we become and the more located we become; analyses become more nuanced and much complicated as we look at situated, specific cases. Hopkins and Noble (2009) argue that the concept "tends to reduce the complexity and nuances of what men actually do. [It] implies a typological structure of masculinities which are identified by a series of traits and attributes" (813).

The typological model of hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginalised masculinities is also limited by the priority it gives to the question of power: these categories foreground the nature of the relationship between masculinities as structured in dominance. (i.d.)

They propose that we look at masculinities through an intersectional lens. Intersectionality is "grounded in the lived experience and critique of those at the convergence of multiple stigmatized identities" (Cole, 2009, 179). An intersectional analysis complicates Connell's model, in that it means "recognising that there are a range of vectors of relationality present

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<sup>32</sup> Race, gender, and class are axes of identity that "structure all relationships" (Collins, 1993, 560). They have been identified as the three most salient identities historically, which occur simultaneously and in relation to one another. These categories "have parallels at the macro level of society as systems of racism, patriarchy, and capitalism" and "these systems function in tandem as interlocking systems of oppression" (Landry, 2007, n.p.).

with masculinities in different places and at different times”, write Hopkins and Noble (2009, 812). According to them, there has been a shift in masculinity studies, from conceptions of gender that were sociological, which focused on relations of power, to a cultural model, which “focuses on questions of subjectivity, the discursive construction of masculinity, and its intersections with other vectors of identity, like class, sexuality, race and ethnicity” (813). They recognise that “gender, ethnicity and class are much more complicated than singular relations of identity and power” (815). To combine masculinities with intersectional theory means to recognise that men’s social locations, their class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and so on, “will influence, shape and construct masculinities” (Christensen and Jensen, 2014, n.p.). Intersections produce unique social locations and points of experience. Intersectional theorists argue that gender as a social system cannot be separated from other systems of oppression; they all in fact “mutually construct one another” (Collins, 1998, 63).

Different masculinities co-exist and “it is this diversity and coexistence that creates a space for marginalization” (Kimmel and Coston, 2017, 99). White, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity is the defining norm; masculinity, as a site of privilege, “tries to stay invisible by passing itself off as normal and universal” (Easthope, 1986, 1); whiteness “makes itself invisible precisely by asserting its normalcy, its transparency, in contrast with the marking of others on which its transparency depends” (Frankenberg, 1997, 6). White masculinity “functions dialectically in relation to specific productions of classed, raced, gendered and sexualized identities” (Carroll, 2011, 8). Marginalised<sup>33</sup> men are “lacking masculinity” (Kimmel and Coston, 2017, 102) and are “expelled from the circle of legitimacy” (Connell, 1995, 79). This “unequal membership is produced in the process of making masculinities” (Haywood and Johansson, 2017, 6). However, men from marginalized groups also “have access to sites of privilege” (Kimmel and Coston, 2017, 103). “Privilege is not monolithic”; “among members

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<sup>33</sup> Marginalization refers to “intergroup and/or intragroup relations” (Cheng, 1999, 295) and to “activities between and among groups” (Alderfer, 1987, 190). Specifically, marginalization means peripheral or disadvantaged unequal membership, disparate treatment” (Cheng, 1999, 295). Marginalization “connects a lack of access to social, economic and cultural opportunities and resources to a marginal status” (Haywood and Johansson, 2017, 5).

of a privileged class, other mechanisms of marginalization may mute or reduce privilege based on another status” (i.d. 109). “We are simultaneously members of multiple groups, including dominant and marginalized groups” (Cheng, 1999, 298-99).

Civilization ... constructed manliness as simultaneously cultural and racial. White men were able to achieve perfect manliness because they had inherited that capacity from their racial forebearers. Black men, in contrast, might struggle as hard as they could to be truly manly, without success. They were primitives who could never achieve true civilized manliness because their racial ancestors had never evolved that capacity. (Bederman, 1995, 529)

One question that this research asks is, *how do men’s multiple social locations within the ‘matrix of domination’ (Collins, 1990) impact their identities and experiences as primary caregiving fathers?* Markers of identity “overlap and interact with one another” (Bonthuys, 2013, 92), which in turn shapes men’s fathering experiences and the meanings assigned to fatherhood. Depending on the individuals’ social locations and the contexts men are in, race, gender and class may not be felt as equally significant at all time. I demonstrate in this research that race, as an organizing system of difference, is the most important axis of differentiation in parenting for this diverse group of men. Race has profound implications for the lives of black fathers, as black men, who, across class, experience gender and race oppression, and as black fathers who raise their child/ren of colour in a white supremacist society.

Another question that this research asks is, *if men are encouraged by society to display competence, self-reliance and control in what they do, to what extent do these traditionally masculine qualities translate in the realm of parenting?* This research shows that men from privileged groups mobilize (imagined) traditional masculine resources to make sense of their role as carers, while men from minority groups, in contrast, draw on actual resources that are social, familial, financial, and adopt a discourse of ‘alternative masculinities’<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> “Alternative masculinities ... are critical to exposing the hierarchy within masculinities, the role of other identity factors, and the interaction of privilege and disadvantage. Most significantly, they suggest a less hierarchical, more egalitarian model of masculinity” (Dowd, 2010, 45). This notion is still “largely unexplored” and looks at “non-hegemonic, alternative patterns of masculinity” (Carabi and Armengol, 2014, n.p.).

These findings challenge what the literature has written on marginalized men, who have been described as "the bearers of uneducated, backwards, toxic, patriarchal masculinities" (Bridges and Pascoe, 2005, 294) or "regressive masculinities" (291) who "possess symbolic [masculine] currency that they utilize to secure non-economic forms of capital, such as social status" (Ocampo, 2012, 468).

#### 2.4 Primary caregiving fathers

There has been a growing number of fathers in the last decade in the United States who have become their children's primary caregivers, such as single fathers: 2.6 million households are led by a single father in 2011, a 900 percent increase since 1960 when that number was a little less than 300,000 (Belkin, 2013, n.d.). Nearly one out of three children live with an unmarried parent (Livingston, 2018). Single fathers are, in comparison with single mothers, less educated, "far less likely to be living at or below the poverty line", more likely to be white, and they are older (Livingston, 2013). Some men are also stay-at-home-fathers<sup>35</sup>; they were two million in 2012<sup>36</sup>, a 90 percent increase since 1989, when 1.1 million fathers were at home with their children" (Livingston, 2014, n.p.). If we include men who maintain freelance or part-time jobs, their number is higher (Latshaw, 2009). In the United States, stay-at-home fathers are more likely to be black, then Hispanic and Asian American, then white<sup>37</sup> (Livingston, 2014). White fathers are "more likely than blacks and Hispanics to be living with their children" (i.d.), however, black fathers are more likely than

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<sup>35</sup> "Fathers with children younger than 15 who have remained without a job for at least one year primarily so they can care for the family while their wife works outside the home" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). The definition excludes "excluding same-sex partners, single dads and parents of kids who are older than 15, as well the fathers in families where both parents do not work" (Shifflett, Peck, and Scheller, 2015). Gay fathers are "as likely to be stay-at-home parents as are women in straight marriages" (Sawhill, 2014, 138). Statistics from 2004 show that "of 9,328 same-sex couples with children whose census returns were randomly selected for analysis by the Census Bureau, 26 percent of the male couples included a stay-at-home parent", compared with 22 percent of lesbian couples and 25 percent of heterosexual married couples with children (Bellafante, 2014, n.p.).

<sup>36</sup> The report by Livingston (2014) used a wider definition of at-home fathers and "included fathers of older children (e.g., younger than 18years-old), additional relationship statuses (e.g., cohabiting and married), and fathers who did not work for pay in the prior year, regardless of the reason" (Lee and Lee, 2016, 1).

<sup>37</sup> In the United States, "Black fathers who live with their children are the most likely to be at stay-at-home fathers—fully 13% were in 2012. Among Hispanics and Asian Americans, the share is 8%; and 6% of white fathers who live with their kids are not working outside of the home" (Livingston, 2014, n.p.).

any other group to provide the primary care of their children (Coles, 2002). The men with the lowest levels of education are more likely to become at-home fathers (Livingston, 2014). In the United States, fathers who provide the primary care for their children are more likely to do so in families with lower income, in families with a larger number of preschool children and when the mother works part-time (Helburn and Bergmann, 2003, 90).

Relatively little attention has been paid to these men's experiences of being primary caregivers, as men who are "experimenting with unusual ways of being in the world that contradict the conceptual prejudices that we inscribe on female and male bodies" (Smith, 1998, 139). Studies that have been conducted on primary caregiving fathers have focused mainly on the lives of white, middle-class, heterosexual, married fathers, who care for preschool children. There is an overrepresentation of that particular group of privileged men, which raises "the question of the transferability of results to larger and other social groups" (Merla, 2008, 129). Smith (1998) interviewed 11 at-home Australian fathers, all white, educated, and English-speaking. In her 2006 study on Canadian male primary caregivers, Doucet interviewed 118 fathers, who for the majority were white, heterosexual and well educated<sup>38</sup>. 19 were non-white, and 9 were gay fathers. Merla (2008) who studied at-home fatherhood in Belgium interviewed 21 fathers who were mainly white, well educated, and from middle- and upper-class backgrounds. Solomon (2017) interviewed 26 at-home American fathers, all white, heterosexual and married. Studies on fathers who take paternity leave have focused on men who were "in the high to middle income range" (Brandth and Kvande, 1998, 299; Wall, 2014). The issue with these samples is that it conforms to normative ideals of the 'new father', that is associated with privileged groups of fathers, while low-income families from minority groups and/or fathers from LGBT groups, that depart from the norm, are less represented. "A single-axis analysis of inequalities experienced by parents ... only examines one category of a person's identity

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<sup>38</sup> Statistics from 2014 show that stay-at-home fathers in Canada are more likely to have low levels of education (Uppal, 2015).

and results in a limited, one-dimensional and incomplete understanding of inequality (Romero, 2017, 15-6).

Current exclusions or underrepresentation of different kinds of fathers include: young fathers, older fathers, lone fathers, widowed fathers, ethnic minority fathers, disabled fathers, gay fathers, unmarried fathers and grandfathers. (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003, 60)

We need to recognize that experiences of male caring are diverse and that axes of embodied difference – including age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion and being a single parent – will shape experiences of male primary caring. (Boyer et al., 2017, 58)

Father's work of active caring has been often framed in terms of mothering. “Levels of fathers' family involvement [are compared with] mothers' involvement because mothers are the benchmark for norms in fathering ... This is ... mother-defined parenting” (Aitken, 2009, 25). Some have argued that when men nurture, they develop a “maternal thinking” (Coltrane, 1989); they integrate “feminine characteristics” (Doucet, 2006); they embody a “feminist masculinity” (hooks, 2004, cit. in Hanlon, 2012, 203); they combine “masculine and feminine elements” (Brandth and Kvande, 1998, 300). These rigid categorizations reinforce essentialised 'feminine' attributes, it assumes too much of mothers, implies that there is an 'ideal' kind of mother and that mothers are morally more inclined to become the primary caregivers. Constructing mothers having a 'natural' maternal instinct leaves little space for fathers (Miller, 2010). There is a need to theorize men's caring practices and approaches to parenting in a new light.

Doucet (2006), whose book is entitled *Do men mother?* recognises that the question itself is “flawed” (220) and asking it implies that we look at “fathering and fathers' experiences ... through a maternal lens. Thus, other ways of nurturing are pushed into the shadows and obscured” (222). She acknowledges that because there are multiple experiences of masculinity, “*new ways of theorizing these differences need to be developed*” (Hearn and Morgan, 1990, 11, cit. in Doucet, 2006, 232). She argues that there is

a need to provide ample space for men's narratives of care and to resist the impulse

to investigate and theorize them against maternal standards. Adopting such a stance, with room for theoretical and empirical surprises, indeed offers innovative ways of describing and theorizing men's nurturing practices (234).

Primary caregiving fathers receive both “compliments and criticism” (Lee and Lee, 2016, 7). They benefit from a 'hero like' status (Lynch and Lyons, 2009) for being involved fathers, but they also experience rejection, scrutiny and criticism (Zimmerman, 2000; Doucet, 2006; Hanlon, 2012). The literature (Doucet, 2006; Rochlen, McKelley and Whittaker, 2010) shows that there is still “a stigma associated with being unemployed and a caregiver” (Latshaw, 2011, 129). Studies show that at-home fathers are perceived as being “less competent” (Brescoll and Uhlmann, 2005, 437). Fathers suffer from isolation and ostracism from a variety of sources. They experience the phenomenon of 'maternal gatekeeping'<sup>39</sup>; at-home fathers report incidents of stigma mainly from at-home mothers (Rochlen, McKelley, and Whittaker, 2010; Latshaw, 2011). Also, fathers report getting significantly less support than mothers (Fletcher and St. George, 2011). Because men are taught to be self-reliant and in control (Seidler, 1989), they “are less likely to seek help and support for physical, emotional, and relational difficulties or even to recognise that they need support” (Hanlon, 2012, 75). Primary carers form support groups as they felt originally excluded from mothers' support networks (Smith, 1998; Doucet, 2006). At-home fathers get support from local groups or online support groups, via Facebook, forums and blogs (see Ammari and Schoenebeck, 2016).

Male primary caregivers, writes Doucet (2006), become “abnormal embodied agents” (41) as they enter a female-dominated terrain. They are involved “in one of the most female-dominated and feminine-defined areas of work, practice and identity” (16). Her participants felt “a watchful eye” on them (190) as people were suspicious of their intentions as they entered spaces such as postnatal venues, parks and schoolyards. Men have to face longstanding stereotypes around close relationships between men and children (Hanlon,

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<sup>39</sup> Maternal gatekeeping is defined as “a collection of beliefs and behaviors that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in family work by limiting men's opportunities for learning and growing through caring for home and children” (Allen and Hawkins, 1999, 200).



2012). Restrictive gender norms present women as 'naturally' caring and nurturing while men are defined as "dangerous, violent and sexually predatory" (i.d., 188). They become sexual suspects (Smith, 1998). Friendships with the other mothers as a single father are deemed suspicious (Smith, 1998; Doucet, 2006). Dermott (2008), in her reading of Doucet, writes that "fathers, in entering unusual territory, both literally and metaphorically, were forced to consciously recognise their masculinity and became aware of the way in which they were sometimes viewed as a potential (sexual) threat by other parents" (129). She adds that "the default position which associates intimacy, especially physical intimacy, with a sexual partnership is also responsible for the difficulty fathers face in their parenting" (129).

One question that this research asks is, *if "bodies matter" (Messerschmidt, 1999), how do men's bodies matter in relation to being a primary caregiver?* How "bodies matter in fathering" is largely absent from studies on fatherhood (Doucet, 2006b) and on embodiment (Morgan, 1993). This research seeks to shift the focus back on the (male) body. I agree with Connell (2005) who argues that to be involved in child care "requires *re-embodiment for men*" (233). "To engage with this experience is to develop capacities of male bodies other than those developed in war, sport or industrial labour. It is also to experience other pleasures" (i.d.). This research shows that the fathers talked about, and experienced care, as an embodied practice. "Embodiment matters" for fathers (Doucet, 2006, 209). This contradicts the view that "early fatherhood is largely disembodied" (Doucet, 2009, 91, citing the work of Draper, 2000).

Another question that this research asks is, *how is fatherhood constructed in relation to motherhood? More generally, how does becoming a primary caregiver shape, and is shaped, by the men's relationships with women?* This research concurs with existing research (see Doucet, 2006) that argues that primary caregiving fathers rely on networks of people that are predominantly composed of women. These women are involved in helping the fathers delivering care; they are part of familial and other sorts of relationships that make

fatherhood possible. This research also shows that the men's wives play an important role in 'opening the gates' (Holmes et al., 2013), as opposed to acting as 'gatekeepers' (Allen and Hawkins, 1999), making space for them, encouraging men to be involved fathers, supporting their husbands in their new role as caregivers, trusting their partners, and helping them in feeling legitimate and competent.

### 2.5 Fatherhood and masculinities

Fatherhood is "the ultimate test for ... hegemonic masculinity" argues Vasquez del Aguila (2013, 122). And yet, "it does not guarantee achieving unquestionable masculinity" (i.d.). As discussed previously, fatherhood is part of the 'package deal' men have to put together to achieve successful masculinity (Townsend, 2002). "For an individual, masculine and fathering identities will be interwoven (Dermott, 2008, 39). To father children "provides males with a culturally accepted and highly visible means for symbolically demonstrating masculinity" (Hinojosa, Sberna and Marsiglio, 2006, 112).

Fatherhood is one of the main axes on which today's masculine identity is situated and if a man's children no longer prove that he is virile, the way in which he behaves as a father situates him in relation to models of masculinity. (Castelain-Meunier, 1988, 196, cit. in Allwood, 1998, n.p.)

Going out to work, providing for a family, having power, authority and control over a wife and children, establishing undisputed paternity, have, culturally speaking, been seen as essential and defining characteristics of manhood and, as such, central to the construction of twentieth-century masculinities. (Williams, 1998, 65)

An example of how "paternal masculinities and manhood itself are mutually constructed and maintained" (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003, 44) is the weight of the breadwinner ideology, as discussed above. "Aspects of successful masculinity, such as being engaged in employment ... can be ... imposed on fathering" (Dermott, 2008, 39). Doucet (2006), who studied primary caregiving fathers in Canada, found that when men who take on "strong identities as caregivers such as stay-at-home fathers, who

partially or fully relinquish their identities as primary breadwinners, it is inevitable that processes of personal and social shuffling and readjustment will occur. Perhaps

most notable is that fathers' relation to paid work begins to shift, their meanings of work are dramatically altered. (237)

However, it was clear also that the men continued to “feel judged for not earning enough” (Doucet, 2006, 176). A ‘good man’ provides for his family, and some of her participants made a direct link between not earning and feeling like “a failed man” (183). This was found in other studies on primary caregiving fathers (Smith, 1998; Hanlon, 2012). Hanlon (2012) argues that “having a caring masculinity is a contradictory social and emotional position for men [as] it is caught between the public imperatives of paid work on one hand ... and intimacy on the other” (208). In Doucet’s (2006) study, a lot of her participants stayed connected to (paid) work, working part-time, engaging in unpaid ‘self-provisioning’ work, “doing work on the house” (184), studying part-time or taking a break from work to prepare for a new career. These men are, in her words, “building new models of employment and fatherhood” (229). As their masculinity is questioned, male primary caregivers adopt strategies “to reassure their masculine status” (Hanlon, 2012, 80). Breadwinning “continues to operate as a master discourse; a referent against which their relative involvement in both paid work and caring is imagined, rationalised, legitimated” (i.d. 24).

## 2.6 Conclusions

This chapter provides a brief overview of the literature relating to fatherhood and masculinities in the Western context, with a specific focus on primary caregiving fathers. I show that, to date, the literature on fatherhood, and on male primary caregivers specifically, has focused mainly on privileged groups of men. The analysis presented in this thesis highlights the heterogeneity of the men’s lived experiences as primary caregivers. This thesis explores areas that have been overlooked in the literature or insufficiently studied: men’s bodies, fathers’ bodies, care as an embodied practice; fatherhood and masculinities; masculinities, fatherhood and intersectionality; care and masculinities; primary caregiving fathers. This thesis combines men and masculinities theory with an intersectional framework to offer a portrait of a diverse set of fathers and fathering

practices in the contemporary setting of New York City. Chapter 3 will present the fathers of this study, explain how each became a primary caregiver, and will continue the discussion started here on how primary caregiving fathers are positioned between hero and anomaly.

### 3. Learning to become primary caregivers

#### 3.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter sets out to present who the fathers are and the various routes they have taken that led them to fatherhood. Two patterns emerge: the men who chose to stop working or to work part-time to stay-home while being supported by their partners, or the ‘Carers by choice’; and those who became caregivers because of life circumstances rather than choice, or the ‘Carers by circumstances/necessity’. The following section looks at the paradox and ambivalence of being primary caregiving fathers – positioned between hero and anomaly, which concurs with previous research (Doucet, 2006; Merla, 2008). The research demonstrates that, in response to the ambivalence, men draw on diverse repertoires of forms of masculinity to position themselves as carers. The men from privileged groups, or the ‘Experts’, had recourse to activities and drew on discourses associated with hegemonic masculinity. Men from minority groups, or the ‘Apprentices’, adopted practices and discourses associated with ‘alternative masculinities’<sup>40</sup>. The picture is complicated by middle-class, fathers of colour, who move between these categories, which shows how multiple social locations intersect to create unique experiences of privilege and discrimination, characterised by a differential access to power. The research also points to the ways in which masculinities and femininities are relational, and how the men’s wives in particular influence their caring involvement as fathers.

The men differed from each other in terms of social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and faith (see table below). The table categorises the men in terms of whether they were primary caregivers<sup>41</sup> at the time of research, or whether they were reminiscing about the time they

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<sup>40</sup> “Alternative masculinities ... are critical to exposing the hierarchy within masculinities, the role of other identity factors, and the interaction of privilege and disadvantage. Most significantly, they suggest a less hierarchical, more egalitarian model of masculinity” (Dowd, 2010, 45). This notion is still “largely unexplored” and looks at “non-hegemonic, alternative patterns of masculinity” (Carabi and Armengol, 2014, n.p.).

<sup>41</sup> Primary caregiver here refers to a father who assumes the role of primary caregiver (with no minimum of time required), combining it with paid work, or not. The care that is provided takes on different forms

**Table 1: Table of Participants – indicating status at the time of research in 2016.**

Name	Age	Occupations <sup>42</sup>	Employment Status <sup>43</sup>	Ethnicity	Faith <sup>44</sup>	Marital status	Sexual identity	Social class	Children's ages
PRIMARY CARE GIVER – BY CHOICE									
Paul	40	Geologist/ Stay-at-home father	PT Worker	white	Jewish	Married	Straight	Middle-class	1, 6
Kyle	42	Stay-at-home father	PT Self Employed	white	/	Married	Straight	Middle-class	9, 11
Logan	42	Stay-at-home father	PT Self Employed	black	/	Married	Straight	Middle-class	5
Manuel	43	Work-at-home dad	PT Self Employed	white	/	Married	Queer	Middle-class	<1
Ross	44	Stay-at-home father	PT Self Employed	white	/	Married	Straight	Middle-class	<1, 3
Dale	48	Stay-at-home father	Not employed	white	Jewish	Married	Gay	Middle-class	2
William	49	Stay-at-home father	PT Self Employed	white	Jewish	Married	Straight	Middle-class	13, 16
PREVIOUSLY PRIMARY CARE GIVER – BY CHOICE									
Earl	49	Stay-at-home father	Unemployed	white	/	Single	Straight	Middle-class	1
Pete	42	Teaching assistant/massage therapist	FT Worker	black	Christian	In a relationship	Straight	Working-class	18, 8
PRIMARY CARE GIVER – BY CIRCUMSTANCE OR NECESSITY									
Simon	32	Handyman	FT Worker	black	/	Single	Straight	Working-class	5
Victor	43	Lawyer	FT Self Employed	white	Jewish	Divorced	Straight	Middle-class	8
Silas	47	Stay-at-home father	Unemployed	white	/	Married	Straight	Middle-class	5, 7
Frank	47	Physical chemist	FT Worker some work at home	Asian	Catholic/ Buddhist	Divorced	Straight	Middle-class	8

depending on the child(ren)' age(s), going from being hands-on with a baby to taking care of an adolescent who lives at home. There is no assumption that the father is necessarily co-resident with his child.

<sup>42</sup> Occupations refer to how the fathers self-presented and self-identified. The term 'stay-at-home father' is chosen here, however, some of the fathers used 'stay-at-home father' and 'primary caregiver' interchangeably. All men were or had been primary caregivers; stay-at-home fathers were staying home specifically, which does not exclude paid work from home like in the cases of Paul and Manuel. Manuel preferred the term 'dad' rather than 'father'. Simon for instance, a full-time worker, called himself a 'full-time father'.

<sup>43</sup> The men's employment statuses are defined by the researcher which are based, in the cases of the part-time, self-employed men, on the language they used ("I work for...") and the activities they did on the side of staying home (selling paintings, having a business, being sponsored by brands, and so on).

<sup>44</sup> Faith is indicated only when it is known by the researcher.

PREVIOUSLY PRIMARY CARE GIVER – BY CIRCUMSTANCE OR NECESSITY									
Mathias	46	Recruiter	FT Worker	black	Christian	Divorced	Straight	Working-class	25, 23, 21, 13
Bradley	56	Architect	FT worker	white	Jewish	Divorced	Straight	Middle-class	22, 25

PT: Part-time. FT: Full-time.

had been primary caregivers. The men’s caring roles at the time of research had changed for some. The table also divides the men into two groups, those who made the choice to be the main carer, and those who became one as a result of circumstances such as a separation or a divorce, or out of necessity, such as being unemployed. 7 out of 15 men were a privileged group of fathers and represented what is the most studied group of stay-at-home fathers, namely white, heterosexual, middle-class, married, men. Significantly, however, the group of fathers also included working class fathers; African American and Asian fathers; a transgender dad, and a gay father; divorced or separated fathers; Jewish, Christian, Buddhist men.

### 3.2 Becoming primary caregivers

The categories ‘Carers by choice’ and ‘Carers by circumstances/necessity’ focus on the men’s different routes *into* fatherhood: all the men reflect back on how they came to be fathers, and primary caregivers more specifically, the two not necessarily happening simultaneously.

#### *3.2.1 ‘Carers by choice’*

9 out of the 15 fathers had chosen to stay home and to become primary caregivers; they either put their career on hold, were transitioning between jobs, or were working part-time from home. A pattern that emerges is that most of these men agreed with their partners

they stay home until the child(ren) is/are old enough to go to kindergarten<sup>45</sup>, which starts at 5 years old; we are talking about a period of 4-5 years, more if the father stays home with children of different ages. For the at-home fathers with adolescents, often these men are part-time, self-employed on the side. These fathers differ from the second group, the 'Carers by circumstances/necessity' because they had recourse to a *language of choice*; they rationalise the decision for them to become a primary caregiver and often to stop working or to reduce work as a choice. The second group does not and speaks mainly about the life circumstances that led them to not have a choice to become the main primary caregiver, in their words. There is however not a rigid boundary between the two groups; to stay home for Logan for instance was not his first choice but was a second-best choice should his first not work out.

Logan was heterosexual, middle-class, married, and black. Already with a career of almost 20 years in education, his job was unfulfilling. He decided to apply for jobs "that made sense". He and his wife Leone agreed that if he did not get them, he was going to stay home with Alice, their daughter, which is what happened. "it was the greatest backup plan in the history of backup plans", he says to me, with a smile.

Paul, a heterosexual, middle-class, white, Jewish man, was married; he was working part-time from home, while being an at-home father; staying home was for him a "lifestyle choice". He had been asking his bosses to work remotely for three years so as to have a greater flexibility taking care of his oldest, Tim, until that finally worked around the time Paul's wife was expecting their second child, Marie.

Kyle was a heterosexual, middle-class, white, married man, at-home father for 11 years. On

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<sup>45</sup> Kindergarten "precedes the beginning of formal schooling" (Fromberg, 2007, 4676). In 2018 18 states required students to attend kindergarten; it is not compulsory in New York (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).



a panel<sup>46</sup> ‘Pursuing a parenting partnership’, he and his wife, Lila, explain how they had both anticipated that Kyle would be the one staying home. They both valued having a parent at home, having been raised by at-home mothers. Moreover, his wife, the main earner, had never pictured herself staying home. They have two sons, Jo and Martin.

William, a heterosexual, middle-class, white, married, Jewish father, has been an at-home father for 16 years. His two children are adolescents. He wanted to become a writer, and his wife was earning a comfortable income, which played a part in the decision for him to stay home with their two children, while working on his writing and eventually publishing. Originally from New Jersey, he lives with his family in California.

Dale is a gay, white, Jewish, stay-at-home father. Married, he and his husband Matthew live comfortably upstate New York, and have had a son through surrogacy, with the surrogate mother living in Pennsylvania<sup>47</sup>. Dale says his husband, a “traditional male”, identifies with work and earns a lot of money; it was decided that Dale would stay home. Dale had been staying home for two years with their son Benjamin.

Manuel is transgender; he<sup>48</sup> is a queer, middle-class, white, stay-at-home father, married to a woman. From New Jersey, he and his wife live in Boston; they had one son through IVF, using a sperm donor. Manuel left his job to work on his own business from home, which coincided with the birth of their son, Collin; he identifies as a ‘work at home dad’ and appreciates that he “gets to stay home”.

Ross is heterosexual, middle-class, white, married; he has been a stay-at-home father for three years, doing some odd jobs on the side, “to stay busy” he says, and adds, “and it’s New York, you always need the money”. His wife Veronica was already earning the main income,

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<sup>46</sup> It is a filmed conference on ‘Why fathers matter: Creating successful parenting partnerships’ organised in 2015 at the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan (Livestream, 2015). Kyle and his wife were both invited to talk on the panel.

<sup>47</sup> Surrogacy is illegal in the state of New York (Carangelo, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> Manuel indicated he prefers the gender pronouns he/him/his.

which was a factor that went in the decision for him to stay home: “that equation was easy”, and “I wasn’t working that much”. They have two daughters, Natasha and Zoe.

Earl, a middle-/upper-class, white, heterosexual father, had stopped working and was a stay-at-home father for the first 7 months of his son’s life, while having other sources of income on the side, until a series of events with the law led to the separation with the mother and she got custody of their son. When I met him, he was seeing his son Joshua only on supervised visitations at 200 dollars an hour.

Pete, an exception in this group, is a black, heterosexual, working-class, Christian man. He left a job where he was earning 60,000 dollars a year to stay home with his second-born son for two years. He identified as both ‘primary caregiver’ and ‘stay-at-home father’. His –at the time– wife was often absent, traveling for work, and earning the family’s income. His sons Guy and Brian were 18 and 8 when I met Pete, the younger one living with his maternal grandmother, and Pete’s current girlfriend was pregnant of his third child. Pete had not always co-resided with his children, having had two sons with two women he was no longer with when I met him. He had been providing primary forms of care for them at times. When he separated from the mother of his first son, she officially had custody; in practice, he says to me, “I actually had more custody than she did”: he was seeing his son every day, taking care of him, feeding him, helping him with his homework, putting him to bed, “I was there 24/7”, he tells me.

The choice to become a primary caregiver was a privilege<sup>49</sup> accorded to (some) of the men because, but not only, of their gender. Men as a group “have a greater power to choose the parameters of their involvement in family life” (Miller, 2010, 172). Hanlon (2012) writes that “men can afford to define caring as a choice ... because men are more likely to have the privilege of not having to do the caring unless women are not available” (193). “Choosing

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<sup>49</sup> Bailey (1998) describes privilege as “systematically conferred advantages individuals enjoy by virtue of their membership in dominant groups with access to resources and institutional power that are beyond the common advantages of marginalized citizens” (109).

caring as a 'free choice' is a privilege unavailable to those compelled to care" (Hanlon, 2012, 98). Women, on the other hand, "face a greater moral imperative to care" and are more likely to be seen as "neglectful" parents should they prioritize work (i.d. 106-7).

The narrative of choice is in many ways morally safe, in the sense that it locates the source of action upon free-acting individuals unencumbered by structural constraints. ... Care 'choices' are facilitated by a gender regime that legitimates what is desirable cultural and emotional capital for men and for women, which itself is the product of nurturing work we have inherited. (i.d. 98)

Class privilege enabled the 'Carers by choice' to leave the workforce and to stay home, while the family was relying on a single income. Come into the decision to stay home (i) the costs of child care, which is expensive, especially in New York City<sup>50</sup>, (ii) parents value the idea that children are taken care of by parents, as opposed to a nanny or a day care; these couples respond positively to the socially valued discourse of the stay-at-home parent (Dillaway and Pare, 2008). The choice for the father to stay home is (iii) a calculated one "on the basis of the benefits and costs of their withdrawal from paid work" (Merla, 2008, 120). This choice is decided with their high-earning partners: the men are the ones who earn least and so they decide together that the man is the one to stay home, usually until the children go to day care or kindergarten. (iv) The men's attitudes toward paid work; the men were transitioning between careers, or had achieved successful careers and wanted to spend time with their children and thought "their time investment in paid work prevented them from being the fathers they dreamed of being" (i.d. 119), or left a job with low careers prospects or poor working conditions. (v) Stress is another aspect factored in the decision where a second child on the way like it was for Paul and his wife led them to reconsider their lives, Paul asked his boss to work part-time from home.

Additional factors come into play in the joint decision: (vi) the men's wives' attitudes to paid work: none of them wanted to stay home, and (vii) combined with the belief that the man

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<sup>50</sup> The state of New York is ranked as the fifth least affordable state for center-based care for a 4-year-old in 2017 (Child Care Aware of America, 2018, 31). Massachusetts, where lives Manuel, ranks first in the least affordable states for center-based toddler care in 2017 (i.d. 30). California, where William lives, ranks first in the least affordable states for center-based infant care (i.d. 29).

is better suited to stay home. Logan, talking about his wife Leone, says, smiling, “my background in education gave her a peace of mind at the idea of me staying home. She often jokes about how I am the one better suited to be home with her”. Hanlon (2012) writes how “aided by an individualist ideology of free choice the unequal division of love and care labour can be rationalised on the basis that carers have chosen care work because it fits their psychological makeup, social interests, and self-identity” (91). Sitting down one morning with Leone, she remembers when Logan came up with idea of staying home,

‘Why don’t I stay with [Alice]?’ he said. We *never* really talked about it before that, and I was like, ‘you want to do that?’ I didn’t have any desire to do that, I’m not sure it would have suited me at all, even to this day if I have to spend 3 days in a row with her I’m kinda like ‘ok, time for me to go to work, do something else’ [she laughs]. Not that I’m not interested in spending time with her but as her primary caregiver, now would be the time, now that there’s a teaching component in it. ... I was like ‘if that’s what you want oh my gosh’, cause for me, selfishly, I was like ‘that would be amazing’, because while I’m at work and she’s at day care, going, ‘I wonder if she’s ok, what are they doing? Should I call and check in?’, I was in constant want of information about how she was, there was this level of anxiety and distraction that I had I didn’t quite recognise until, it was like a switch. She went to stay with him at home, and I became incredibly exponentially more productive at work, for comfort. I have an incredible and implicit amount of trust for [Logan].

Research shows the importance of the partners’ support in the men’s feeling legitimate in their role as primary caregivers (Smith, 1998) or in taking up paternal leave (Haas, Allard and Hwang, 2002). Holmes et al. (2013) write about the mothers’ influence on paternal involvement:

Some mothers may serve as "gatekeepers" to fathers' relationships with their children by regulating fathers' involvement either as gate openers (mothers whose beliefs and attitudes encourage father involvement in family work) or as gate closers (mothers whose beliefs and attitudes hinder father involvement). ... Whether undermining or supportive, mothers control fathers' active involvement with their children [and] fathers' parenting behaviors. ... Some mothers ... actively encourage fathers to be involved in parenting. Women's ideas about the role of fathers affect father involvement ... wives who prefer their husbands to be involved in child care after they become parents tend to have husbands who engage in more child-oriented activities. (n.p.)

Lila, Kyle’s wife, at the same panel on parenting partnership with Kyle (see note 46), explains

about the decision to stay home, “I didn’t want that for myself, it felt like too much responsibility”. She recognised they both wanted “somebody who’s there, shaping and influencing the children directly”, and “we knew one of us would stay home, even before we got married, if both of us would have guessed, it would be [Kyle]”; Kyle looks at her, and nods his head in agreement. Veronica, Ross’s wife, says that “he’s doing a great job” and she is “really happy” that he is staying home. Paul’s wife and I were once chatting at the playground opposite their son’s school on the Upper East Side, she says, smiling, “I am more likely to forget things behind like a bottle at the park”; “he is much more organized since he is the primary caregiver<sup>51</sup>”. She explains that her background in education made her aware of the benefits for children to be raised by both parents, which made the decision for Paul to stay home an easy one.

### 3.2.2 ‘Carers by circumstances/necessity’

6 out of the 15 men became primary caregivers because they found themselves in situations where, in how they understand it, there was not much of a ‘choice’. Some decided with their partners to stay home because they lost their job and their partners had a stable job. Some separated with their partners or divorced from their wives; two of the men in that category were left to take care of a baby by themselves; others either shared custody or lived with their adolescent child for a time.

Silas, a middle-class, white, married, heterosexual man, became an at-home father because he was fired from his job; “that ended my career”, he says. Child care is expensive where they live in Colorado<sup>52</sup>. His wife’s wage of 100,000 dollars a year “is not as much as it might sound like”, Silas says; they are “running debts” since he became an at-home father. Silas remains unemployed because he has been out of the workforce for 6 years, and he has been experiencing discrimination to find a job.

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<sup>51</sup> From fieldnotes.

<sup>52</sup> Colorado is ranked as the fifth least affordable state for center-based infant care (Child Care Aware of America, 2018, 29).

Similarly, Mathias became a primary caregiver when he became unemployed after 9/11, although he did not identify as such at the time<sup>53</sup>. “Money was tight”, they were living in Florida far from their support networks in NYC. They valued kinship care, “I’m not putting her in the hands of a stranger”, he says to me. His –at the time—wife had 6 weeks of maternity leave, “and after that I had to be there”. He tells me that that time with his daughter made him “more nurturing”; I ask him why, to which he replies,

Because *I had to be*, there was nobody else in the house. Before I moved back, when I was at home, I had to be nurturing. I had to change her, I didn’t have anybody to say ‘hey mum, the baby took a crap’, cause that’s what I would do; I would pick up the baby and say ‘mum’ and every once in a while I’d *have to*. In a week of being with (summer) I changed more diapers than I changed with all the boys combined. It was like whatever, the crap doesn’t bother me anymore.

Mathias also lived with his teenage son, in Florida, and in New York for 2 years. He was “messing up, skipping school, doing drugs”, and “his mom didn’t him in the house anymore”. Mathias says regretfully; “the only time I’ve been a value in parenting is when discipline is involved”. He identified as a ‘long-distance dad’, with his 4 children living in Florida when I met him, himself living in New York.

Mathias stepping up because no one else was around echoes the argument that men “only undertake caring when there are no women available to do it for them” (Hanlon, 2012, 48). We notice here again also the role mothers have in ‘opening the gates’ and giving men the space to be involved fathers. A rising number of men became at-home fathers following the 2001 and 2008 recessions because they lost their jobs (Chesley, 2011), men such as Mathias and Silas. Their taking on the work of child care attests of important changes in terms of masculinities; “in previous generations, men who were laid off from their jobs did not take up carework to replace paid work<sup>54</sup>” (Solomon, 2016, 9). Also, Mills (2010) argues African-American men are “predisposed to fluctuations in the labor market” (343), an aspect

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<sup>53</sup> “I don’t know if that label [of stay-at-home father] existed [in the 1990s], it probably did”, Mathias says. He says he identified as ‘work-from-home professional’; then later on over the course of the year, he says he was ‘a stay at home dad working from home’.

<sup>54</sup> They “often plunged into depression, and turned to substance abuse to self-medicate” (Solomon, 2016, 9).

discussed more at length later on in this chapter and in Chapter 4.

Victor, a middle-class, heterosexual, white, Jewish father, is a lawyer, married to another lawyer. They have been trying to get a divorce for years, fighting over custody of their 8-year-old son, Jim. He had his son 40 percent of the time when I met him. Being a lawyer and having gone through the court system himself, he tells me, “it will cost you a hundred thousand dollars just to have a fighting chance”.

Frank is an Asian, middle-class, heterosexual, Buddhist father. His ex-wife left him and their son Sam when the latter was young, only to return years later to ask for full custody. “I didn't expect to be a single dad. I thought we were gonna get pregnant and work through stuff if we needed to”, Frank says to me. In a custody battle with her for 5 years, he and his son both have a stormy relationship with the mother; since she came back, Frank has spent 110,000 dollars in the maintenance of his son's custody.

Simon, a black, working-class, heterosexual father, had a similar story. Separated from his daughter's mother, he asked for custody when she threatened to take her away from him. He had Lola during weekdays since he was the most stable parent. Simon left work and was supported financially by his family and was benefitting from social assistance. The mother left her child with him without giving any sign of life for months, to return later on and ask for custody. Simon has fought to keep custody ever since.

Bradley, was a middle-class, white, heterosexual, Jewish, divorced father. A few years back his teenage son was struggling with mental health issues that put his life at risk. His son's relationship with his mother deteriorated, Bradley took him in and they were living together for two years, until he finally made a full recovery. Bradley's long-time best friend, Irina, recalls how “his whole life was dictated by his son, he would come home at lunch to see him, he had no personal life, no girlfriend, no nothing”.

### 3.3 Heroes vs anomalies

Men's gender "can be viewed as an added barrier to parenthood in light of stereotypes of mothers as essential to child development" (Goldberg, 2012, 61). The men's statuses both as fathers and as primary caregivers were at times trivialized and marginalized, and their care was often devalued compared with mothers'. Primary caregiving fathers are "exposed to a series of reactions and reminders of the "lack of legitimacy" of their investment in fatherhood" (Merla, 2008, 125). Fathers are affected by "restrictive gender norms surrounding caring" (Hanlon, 2012, 188). Maternity is imagined in the West as a 'natural fact' (Holy, 1996, 22). Women's care is naturalised, put on a pedestal, and invisibilized. "While mothers struggle with a cultural model of maternal presence that many feel they can't match, fathers exceed the model of father absence easily" (Walzer, 1998, 62).

As a result, fathers who do a lot of the primary care sometimes benefit from "a 'hero-like' status", they are "glorified" in the media "if they change nappies" (Lynch and Lyons, 2009, 100-101). Earl, for instance, did have that experience; I ask him whether he had good experiences with the mothers' groups he spends time with regularly, or whether he encountered resistance from them, he replies,

when you're a guy like this, especially if you're a good dad, most women are really attracted to you, they're like 'wow' ["they're admiring", I comment] yeah, because most dads don't do that. When they see one who does it really well, they respect that.

Silas also talks about people looking up to him, telling him "wow, you're doing great! That's wonderful what you are doing!". However, he also experiences stigma and feels isolated; he has no fathers' groups to join where he lives in Colorado. He became friends with 3 mothers, his "true parenting group". Paul once heard two mothers saying, while he was feeding his daughter, "wow, you've really got this down!", "yeah! you look like a sitcom!". One parent asked him once, "And how's Mr. Mom<sup>55</sup>/Mummy?".

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<sup>55</sup> A comedy that "derive[s] much of [its] humor from men's *incompetence* in caring for children" (Lynch and Kilmartin, 2013, 63). It "narrate[s] the ameliorative transformation of male parenting towards a model of domestically capable and emotionally articulate fatherhood" (Hamad, 2013, 13).



Most of the other fathers experienced parenting spaces as ‘estrogen-filled worlds’ (Doucet, 2006). Kyle explains how back in 2005 when he became an at-home father, “moms had their community” and there were “not many other dads around”; “when there was one at the playground it’s not like I’m gonna go there and say hi!”. He developed camaraderie with other people, “outsiders”, “older women who were not in their late 20s in yoga pants”, and “women from ethnic backgrounds who were isolated”. Dale also got closer with a grandmother in his building who watches over his grandchild. Victor shows interest in the various fathers’ group I talk about, saying, “it would be good to have some dads around”. He does see mothers at the playground, “we get along well, we’re friends”, however, “it’s probably not ideal for them to have me there”. I ask him why, and he says, “the girls’ talk goes on, it’s not ideal to have a guy there”. Paul has a stay-at-home father friend, who is not always available, and he developed good relationships with some of the mothers and nannies. He also feels isolated at times, and talks about feeling like an outsider at the playground where he spends a lot of time,

The other day I was sitting on the bench there with a mum, we were having a nice conversation, but then more came and they have a tendency to click, they started talking about family stuff, things I didn't know about and they were excluding me, or at least that's how I felt. A lot of the mums here are not from the same social background as us<sup>56</sup>.

Logan, a black father, remembers having felt isolated and ostracized at a class or at an event “because I was the only father”. He continues, “it doesn’t always feel good, it’s nice to have other people around that have a similar experience. That continues to be a challenge”. His status of being the only father at parenting events is reinforced by his marginalized statuses as a black man. He talks about Alice’s school, a private, all-girl catholic school on the Upper West Side in Manhattan:

On top of that, I’m black, there is already that lack of comfort. It’s predominantly white schools, there’s a lot of white mums there, I don’t think they know what to do with me. A lot of female caregivers, I don’t think they know what to do with me for playdates [he laughs]. They will all talk about playdates, they have that level of

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<sup>56</sup> From fieldnotes.

rapport, I'm often on the out. So we kind of struggle with that.

People are having issues with me because I'm black, not because I'm staying at home. There's another at-home dad, [at the school], he's one of the most popular parents in the school<sup>57</sup>.

I don't dwell on feelings ostracised and isolated. Cause [as a black man] I kinda got used to that. I was the only or one of the only for so long in my academic career as well as my professional career, it's just the same.

Once Logan tells me about a group of stay-at-home fathers –who for the most part were white--, who lashed out on social media in response to an article a woman wrote about commonalities between at-home fathers and at-home mothers. He says, “they're insecure. These guys experience what it is to be a minority for the first time in their lives. I've been a black man all my life. I can't take it off. You can omit you're a stay-at-home dad, hide it. I can't hide it”. The stigmatised status of being a male primary caregiver intersects with Logan's marginalized masculinity, and race, as a black man. This echoes Dow's (2012) study on middle-class, black mothers, who recognise that “their racial identity is the primary category through which they ... are viewed”, and that their class “privileges are mediated through their racial identity” (79). “Well-off people of color cannot “buy” their way out of racism” (Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009, 349). Men are not starting from the same cultural stereotypes or cultural representations of fatherhood. A long-held assumption of bad fatherhood is attached to black male bodies. Black fathers in the United States are often stereotyped “as absent or deficient” (Rollock, Gillborn, Vincent and Ball, 2015, 24) or as “lacking, uninvolved, uncaring” (Connor, 2011, n.p.).

Men from other minority groups, such as gay men, like Dale for instance, are not only oppressed by their gender, but also by their sexuality: they face more obstacles in order to become parents, leading to a “parenthood gap” among gay and lesbian parents (Kimport, 2013, 83);

Their gendered bodies have different relationships to sexual identity oppression, relationships that have been informed by gendered history -- such as the AIDS

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<sup>57</sup> From fieldnotes.

epidemic for gay men -- and by social assumptions about gender -- such as beliefs that women can solely parent the children they bear. (i.d.)

A lot of the men received the message that they were inadequate or incompetent caregivers. Studies show that stay-at-home fathers are perceived as being “less competent” (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005, 437) and “less affectionate toward their child and less involved in tending to the physical needs of their child ... than stay-at-home mothers” (Fischer and Anderson, 2012, 16). Fathers are read through the “Fun, Laughter, and Incompetent Clown Dad” lens (Ranson, 2015, 121). Their care is invisibilized, and there is also the assumption made that, because they are men, they do not know what they are doing, and that they need help. Logan says he regularly receives unsolicited advice

from people who feel that they just know better. They don't know my kid better. That's the thing that's tough for at-home dads, there are people who always feel they know better because there are parents and dads who aren't as good as doing it.

At Alice's school, “assumptions are being made” that Leone, his wife, is the primary caregiver. She for instance gets questions about their daughter he never gets. Logan tells me,

[Leone] is treated as if she's the parent. She will usually say, ‘that's a better question for my husband, he's [Alice]'s primary caregiver’, [he laughs]. She would just remind people. It's like they're waiting to ask questions to her when I'm not in the room kind of thing. It is what it is.

Male primary caregivers face “social stigma and scrutiny” (Doucet, 2006, 170); they feel “a watchful eye” (190) as if they were novelties, that assumptions are being made that they are babysitting, on their day off or visitation weekend. Silas tells me how people look down on him for being an at-home father: “people beat it as a stigma, as a sign of my unworthiness or inability, or my lack in some significant area”, stigma that he understands as connected to his unemployment and his inability to be provider, an aspect that is explored further in the next chapter. “It's less likely although possible that someone comes across a mom and disparages *her* for taking care of her kids full-time”, Silas says.

Frank recalls that one time when he wanted to get a passport for his son at the Public Library

in Brooklyn. He went there with Sam, he remembers, “everyone was suspicious of me, you see the looks, the attention. The security even came over”, he says to me. As a result, he is always carrying official documents on him, proof that he has sole custody; “I’m the one who’s at fault, I’m the one who’s at risk”, he tells me, “I’m an anomaly in every way, shape or form”. Men “can be subjected to varying degrees of suspicion, monitoring, and surveillance” (Doucet, 2006, 34) and that is evidence of “residues of a social fear around close relations between men and children” (209).

### 3.4 ‘Experts’ vs ‘Apprentices’

To experience this kind of ambivalence led the men to find spaces for their care to be talked about, to be displayed, and to be acknowledged. Finch’s (2007) concept of ‘display<sup>58</sup>’ is useful as it helps us understand how fathers ‘do’ and ‘display’ family relationships. Citing a “fluid environment” where boundaries of who counts as family are more porous and are changing over time, Finch argues that “a fundamental driving force in presenting families to an external audience is to convey the message ‘this is my family and it works’” (70). While acknowledging that all “family relationships need to be displayed” (67), Finch argues that there are “degree of intensity in the need for display” (72); the latter is more likely to intensify “in circumstances of change or renegotiation of relationships ... as well as for non-conventional family relationships” (Assmann, 2018, 35). The men sought to draw attention to themselves as carers and to display their nurturing capacities and knowledge for institutions, for themselves, and for others, including I as a researcher. Forms of displays will vary for different kinds of men, displays that will have unique and varied significances “across and within diverse families” (Heaphy, 2011, 20). The men’s narratives are understood here as a ‘tool’ for display; which are “stories which people tell to themselves and to others about their own family relationships” (Finch, 2007, 78).

“Did you read books?”, “did you ask anyone for advice?”, “did you have concerns about

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<sup>58</sup> “Display is the process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant audiences that certain of their actions do constitute ‘doing family things’ and thereby confirm that these relationships are ‘family’ relationships” (Finch, 2007, 67).

caring for a newborn?”, were some of the questions I asked the fathers, seeking to uncovering “the process by which it happens – the physical, cognitive and emotional learning they must do to become competent caregivers” (Ranson, 2015, 27). Most of the men were ‘apprentices’ (Wacquant, 2004) or ‘novices’ (Crossley, 2007), they had not had previous experience of caring for children. How did they acquire a “repertoire of caregiving skills” (Ranson, 2015, 135) and how did they feel about their competence as hands-on fathers? While most of them wanted to become fathers, most had not envisioned becoming primary caregivers. Hanlon (2012) argues that “men do not expect to be primary caregivers, and, therefore, do not prepare for it and feel hard done by when they have to do it” (210). How about our fathers, how did they feel about the work of caregiving, not having had much experience themselves? Silas is in neither category since the topics of confidence and competency did not come up.

This section shows that two groups emerge, the ‘Experts’ and the ‘Apprentices’. The ‘Experts’ display conventional traits of masculinity, drawing on discourses of self-reliance and of competency. These fathers, who occupy positions of privilege, have access to a large number of resources (financial, familial, etc.); they, however, cut themselves off from these actual resources in favour of hypothetical resources of masculinity. The ‘Apprentices’ belong to minority groups and draw on discourses of ‘alternative masculinities’: they challenge hegemonic norms in admitting vulnerable feelings in relation to being fathers, such as fear, doubt and failure, and they reach out to others for help. Two fathers, Frank and Logan, two middle-class men of colour, blur the boundaries between the ‘Experts’ and the ‘Apprentices’, which demonstrates but not only the strength of ethnography: getting to know these men over an extended period of time often yields different results as trust develops.

#### *3.4.1 The ‘Experts’*

Kyle, a white, heterosexual, middle-class, stay-at-home father, relied on a discourse of self-reliance. “From a parenting standpoint I never had a moment of doubt”, he says to me. He did not read any parenting books. He explains,

None of it is rocket science. I had never changed a diaper before, but it's not difficult to change a diaper [he laughs]. It's not at all difficult to change a diaper, you just do it. You do it 3 times, you do it wrong 3 times, you figure out what works and what doesn't. ... The worst thing that can happen if you do it wrong is that you have a mess and you clean it up and you do it again. I don't like the idea that there's some right way to do anything, or that there's such thing as a good parent, or that any of it takes some innate ability to figure out, which I guess is the opposite of seeking help; it's not that I already knew it, it's just that I'm the kind of person who figures things out as I'm going along... It's not that I don't feel like other people are smart but... I don't need to read in a book how to discipline my children. ... so obviously I'm picking that up along the way but... We all have in us to be the parents we need to be, you pick things up. If we're having a problem with our son, I'm not gonna go to the internet find a blogpost or a book that's gonna help us, we're gonna talk about it and find the best way to approach it. ... I don't look to other people for how I do much of anything. ... I'm not one of the guys looking to the group for support or advice. I'm not bragging about that, it's not a good quality. My wife and I will talk about how we're parenting.

"Humility", writes Seidler (2007), "is often a difficult virtue for men who can feel that they ought to know. It can be difficult to admit doubts or feeling unsure of what is going on emotionally" (15). Hanlon (2012) argues that men are "conditioned to feel independent, invulnerable, and self-reliant" and that "male caregivers are not necessarily an exception to this" (76). In his view,

Male caregivers can find it difficult to seek support because it means admitting vulnerability and they can also have less extensive friendships and care networks to draw from than women. They also feel it is their responsibility to manage the home situation alone. ... It is a problem for men to admit need or vulnerability in caring because they have inherited a strong sense of autonomy. (i.d.)

Men often find it easier to care for others and "to participate more in ... childcare" than to connect to their "own emotional needs" (Seidler, 1989, 159) and "caring adequately for self because it exposes their vulnerability and dependence which is at odds with their vision of self" (Hanlon, 2012, 76). Men are supposed to display competence in what they do; "we are failures who need to prove our adequacy through showing that we are more able or competent than others" (Seidler, 1997, 199). Moreover, to emphasize autonomy and control in the interview context could be understood as a way for men to "signify a creditable masculine self" (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001, 212).

Neoliberal discourses of self-sufficiency and parental responsibility (Allen and Osgood, 2009) may also play a role. Middle-class parenting in the United States has been associated with values of individualism, self-reliance and independence (Chambers, 2012, 57). Hansen (2005) writes that

The impulse to describe oneself as a can-do, go-it-alone, self-sufficient parent is a typical one. Many, perhaps most, Americans would describe their actions in several realms, including child rearing, in similar terms. ... American families are assumed to be small, self-reliant units. (1)

She adds, “the image of the privileged middle-class family connotes self-reliance, implying that it does not engage in networks” (i.d. 5), a myth that this thesis explores further in Chapter 6.

Other (middle-class) fathers did research and read parenting books before they became fathers. Middle-class parenting is associated with a ‘culture of expertise’ where parents are supposed to develop “skills” and “expertise” (Jaysane-Darr, 2013, 104). The one book being mentioned the most was *What to expect when you’re expecting* (Eisenberg, Murkoff, and Hathaway, 1984). Earl, a white, heterosexual, upper-class father, had lots of parenting books in his apartment when I visited him; he talks about one in particular entitled *The conscious parent* (Tsabari, 2010); he went to see her at a seminar, “I’m listening to all of her tips”, he says to me.

Bradley, a white, heterosexual, middle-upper class father, who identifies as “an information junkie”, also read books

At that time, *the* book was *What to expect when you’re expecting*. Also, I cook. I made all of the baby food at home, from scratch, I made it all frozen in ice cube trays so the kids had organic yogurt and fresh... from cubes of whatever I had made. We had a book interestingly called *Mommy Made*<sup>59</sup> which is about how to make your own baby food. I’ve noticed it in the stores, now it’s called *Mommy Made and Daddy Too!*. But Daddy made all the mommy made food [in a sarcastic tone]. I was very

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<sup>59</sup> (Kimmel and Kimmel, 1990).

involved. [My ex-wife Jenny] was a very committed breast feeder, I was very supportive of that, I thought that was great, and I think that the kids really benefitted from that and continue to benefit from that.

Victor, a white, heterosexual, middle-class, Jewish father, was one of the few fathers who had previous caring experiences. He grew up in a Jewish family in Brooklyn. One of 7 children, he describes his childhood as being “difficult” and his mother having children and “she was done after she had the kids”. As a result, “we learned to take care of each other, like research shows with neglected kids”. Being the 4<sup>th</sup> child, he took care of his younger siblings.

I was taught to feed them, change the diapers, bathe them before I was 10 years old. Mum went back to school when we were old enough to take care of the younger ones. I was babysitting when I was 7. I remember taking care of my sister when she was 2 weeks old. I remember taking care of new-borns. ... I grew up taking care of kids. There is no way to prepare for a new born. No sleep for months on end.

His –at time time– wife’ pregnancy brought a lot of tension in the relationship, which worsened after the birth. Victor recalls being hands-on with their son straight away, however, he says, “it was hard ... I had hands-on experience. I was good at this stuff. [My wife at the time who had not previous caring experiences] was resentful, she had had no other siblings to take care of”, he says to me.

#### **3.4.1.1 A discourse of ‘instincts’**

Some of the ‘Experts’ drew on discourses of ‘instincts’ and ‘nature’ to explain their aptitudes at understanding their babies’ wants and needs. The discourse of ‘instincts’<sup>60</sup> is generally associated with motherhood, feeding into the myth that women are ‘naturally’ more caring than men; they are “expected to be (naturally) knowledgeable in this reproductive domain” (Miller, 2010, 71) while men are “not necessarily expected to experience or express an instinctive ‘bond’” (129). As discussed more in depth in Chapter 5, the men did not believe the mothers of their children to have a stronger connection with them; they did not believe

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<sup>60</sup> “The myth of maternal instinct refers to the belief that good mothers intuitively or instinctively understand the exact nature of their children's needs and the best way to meet them, and represents this special capacity as biologically determined” (Stadtman Tucker, 2010, 304).



their caring was different from their partners' caring; and they did not anticipate their partners to have 'mothering instincts' as it was found in other research (see Doucet, 2006; 2013). The men did not talk about 'instincts' suggesting the idea of protection, which supports "traditional patriarchal and gendered ideas of fatherhood and protection and 'being strong'" (Miller, 2010, 93); they talked about 'instincts' in ways that are "much more associated with women and expectations of maternal instincts and identities" (91). They are claiming that their capacity to care is inscribed in their biology, "in ways that would be unnecessary by mothers because it would be assumed" (i.d. 100).

early father involvement is 'a socially constructed performance' set within a complex of changing expectations and norms of behaviour which encompass (new) claims of biological determinism (men's paternal instincts) and which are relationally managed and played out in everyday performances: they are not 'genderless' but at best provide indicators of gender being done differently. (i.d. 176)

William, a white, heterosexual, middle-class, Jewish, stay-at-home father, draws on this discourse of 'instinct', referring to his 'chemistry' to describe his need to be close to his children:

I had the understanding to educate myself, *allow my instincts too*, really, but also to educate myself in what I was doing, which was appreciating a human and not necessarily following the rules. The rules of being a dad after the World War II, my god, it's not warm, and in the South in 2016, it's standing around the TV, planning a golf trip for four hours on Sundays. I did play baseball for hours and hours on Sundays before I had kids, but then it was like... all I'd be doing was thinking about, 'well what are *they're* doing?'. *My chemistry makes me want to be with them.* (my emphasis)

Ross, a white, heterosexual, middle-class father, also talks about 'instincts':

I was reading chapters or anything that [Veronica] would give me to read. I started a lot of books, they didn't seem to be telling me anything I didn't already guess, it seemed to be... I don't if it's gonna work that way ... most of taking care of [Zoe], the learning thing was *instinctive*, or it was really really broad things, maybe specific issues at a time that I'd maybe look something up or [Veronica] had some ideas or things she'd read, we should do this instead of that, I said 'ok', it sounds great. ... If something weird comes up, we'll look it up then, but until then, I'm not gonna worry about it and it can't be that hard. ... Nobody wrote books on childbirth 200 years ago, or maybe 400 years ago, and I doubt there were childbirth manuals before that

... I doubt there's anything that's gonna surprise me or that I'm not gonna be able to handle or figure out without the need to read too many books. (my emphasis)

Because men are more encouraged to display competence, self-reliance and control, the fathers positioned themselves differently than mothers vis-à-vis an intensive parenting discourse where parents are “expected to acquire detailed knowledge of what the experts consider proper child development” (Hays, 1996, 8). They, in fact, distance themselves from the idea that ‘good’ parents rely on external knowledge. Shirani, Henwood and Coltart (2012b) whose male participants drew on discourses of autonomy argue that doing so “may offer some insulation for men against the potential vulnerabilities induced by intensive parenting, such as undermining of parental confidence” (11).

Male primary caregiving fathers challenge traditional gender expectations (Snitker, 2018). They are in Wetherell and Edley's (1999) terms ‘gender rebels’; however, they argue, even if the ‘gender rebel’ thinks of himself as an “original”, he is “precisely enmeshed by convention; subjectified, ordered and disciplined at the very moment he rehearses the language of personal taste, unconventionality and autonomy or ordinariness and normality” (33). As Yarwood (2011) argues,

the ‘gender rebel’ they construct is embedded within hegemonic masculine values of independence, autonomy and assertive courage. Thus even if they construct themselves as a nonconformist, this process is packaged with a language of hegemonic masculine values and practices. (165)

The characteristics of the ‘Experts’ contradict what the literature says on the ‘new man’<sup>61</sup> who “project an image of egalitarianism” by displaying emotions (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner, 1994, 214). This group of men may be emotionally close to their children, which is the basis of contemporary ‘good’ fatherhood (Dermott, 2008), however, they avoid

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<sup>61</sup> The ‘new man’ embraces traits previously thought as ‘feminine’, he is “caring, sensitive, emotionally skilled and shares household duties, including childcare ... [He] is middle class, [white], well-educated, liberal in his political outlook, sympathetic to the feminist cause” (Milestone and Meyer, 2012, n.p). The ‘new man’ discourse rejects traditional aspects of hegemonic masculinity. These include “overt physical and verbal displays of domination, stoicism, and emotional inexpressivity, overt misogyny in the workplace and at home” (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner, 1994, 207).

vulnerable feelings vis-à-vis their roles as caregivers. “Power is ... a cover for men’s vulnerability” (Hanlon, 2012, 86). Seidler (2007) argues that because dominant masculinity “still defines itself as independent and self-sufficient, it can be difficult for men to acknowledge their emotional needs” (16). Men are socialised to distrust emotions, which are associated with femininity and weakness and losing control.

Often men feel that they have to conceal their vulnerabilities if they are not to “lose face” in front of others. They have learned that emotions are a sign of weakness and that male identities are to be affirmed through showing self-control” (i.d., 13).

#### **3.4.1.2 The women as ‘gate openers’**

That men feel competent in their abilities to care for their children also depends on their partners acting as ‘gate openers’ (Holmes et al, 2013, n.p.), as discussed previously. Logan says that when it comes to Alice, “I have conversations with my wife. For the most part I make a lot of the calls”. In an interview with Leone, she remembers feeling that she needed to “tell him what to do” when Alice was small, asking him “did you do this? Or did you do that?”. Looking back, she identifies feelings of guilt; “that was on me. I was feeling *I should* ... you know, fighting the societal pressure that *I should* be doing that. But I don’t do that anymore”. Things were going differently at the time I met with her:

He’ll check with me, and I’m like ‘why is he even asking me?’ but I mean he’s conditioned to ask me probably because we’re partners, and he’s respectful that way. But also, sometimes, if he doesn’t ask me, I’m like ‘what? why didn’t you ask me?’ [she laughs]. But then there are times when he asks me and I’m like ‘why is he asking me that stuff?’. ‘Should she wear this coat or that coat?’, there was a moment when she was little where I would have said ‘why did you put that coat on her?’, does it really matter? He can look at the temperature just like I can to make a judgement on what coat to wear.

She recalls Alice’s birth and how she was “out of it” and Logan “had to do everything”. She says,

He was amazing, he was amazing. He’s a very clean person, he doesn’t like mess. He was like, ‘alright’, he went right in. He changed her first diaper. He changed so many diapers. And some of the kinesthetics, you know, holding the legs up to wipe the

bottom, he didn't know, I knew, but he learned. I always trusted, it was really easy. ... he was meant to be a dad. ... *he was born to do this.* (my emphasis)

Very similarly, Lila, Kyle's wife, at a conference on fatherhood (see note 46) where she and Kyle are invited to talk on a panel on parenting partnership, says

I don't like my boss at work second-guessing my work, I don't like anybody second-guessing my work, I've learned over this 9-year-process that I'm not gonna second guess what's happening at home. I'm not *there*.

Holmes et al (2013) describe how men's feelings of competency matter in them taking up childcare duties at home; they argue that

the most consistent predictor of a husband's sense of fairness was his sense of competency at family work combined with his wife's sense of his competence in performing household and childcare activities. The more husbands thought their wives viewed them as competent, the more husbands contributed to both housework and childcare. (86)

The tendency of any spouse -- whether traditional or egalitarian -- to engage in more childcare activity in part depends on their perceived skills ... Fathers who feel skilled with regard to parenting are more involved in child-oriented activities than are those who feel unskilled. (88)

### 3.4.2 The 'Apprentices'

Manuel, a white, middle-class, transgender dad,<sup>62</sup> had no experience with children before he became a parent. "For 3 months before he was born, I was half the day working on my business, half the day consuming information about parenting, researching things to put on our registry, consuming everything, researching everything<sup>63</sup>", he says to me. He started a Facebook group 5 months before his son was born, and started posing questions there. He explains,

I was looking for books, I was trying to figure out what are the best practices, the best parenting philosophies and how do I find my way through this. And by the time my son was born I had gotten enough confidence from that to... not only to know there that is a way to do this, but to know that there are lots of ways of doing this. I

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<sup>62</sup> Manuel prefers the term 'dad' than 'father'.

<sup>63</sup> In a skype interview.

read a book called *Raising bebe*<sup>64</sup>, a woman from the US who was living in France and raising her child. She's able to really reflect on the differences. French children are raised to sit patiently in restaurants and American children like can't do that. ... It was really about a whole culture around that. What it helped me understand was that ... there's more than one way and you can take from a little bit of this and a little bit of that, and that's what we did. *We're still trying to figure it out.* (my emphasis)

"When do you have an issue, do you ask for help or advice?", I ask him; he says,

Yeah. The online community of parents has been really helpful, early on when we had really different kinds of questions, things to buy to a year old for their birthday, birthday theme ideas.

Dale, a white, gay, middle-class, Jewish, at-home father, also recognises finding himself in situations where he needs help and does ask others for advice. He goes to his husband, and they talk about it, and he also has friends he can ask. There is a grandmother in their building he befriended; "she's accomplished in education, she has amazing patience, she's very good with her child, she watches the child 2 or 3 days a week".

Both Manuel and Dale reach out to others, thus distancing themselves from the normative idea that 'real men' are autonomous. Berila (2011) writes how "masculinity takes on different meaning when it is performed by transgender individuals who are often targets of oppression" (n.p.). "Alternative masculinities trouble ... meta-narratives" of both "patriarchy and the norm of heterosexuality" (i.d.). Manuel tells me, "I appreciate that I get to expand the definition of what men are". Goldberg (2012), in his study of gay fathers, argues that

sexual minorities, because of their marginalized status in society, are in a unique position to engage in "queering processes" -- that is, to engage in acts and put forward ideas that challenge ... binaries [embedded in heteronormativity] and therefore expand our ideas about gender (11).

Mathias, a black, heterosexual, working-class, divorced father, has learned to reach out to others throughout the years. He identifies as a 'recovering know-it-all'. The 'know-it-all

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<sup>64</sup> (Druckerman, 2012).

mask<sup>65</sup> “covers up our ignorance and insecurity. It lets us walk around with a bit of emotional armor in place, based on the little bit of knowledge we have acquired in our life” (Howes, 2017, n.p.). Mathias has been part of the Fathers’ Group for 7 years. He recognises that, as a father, “I no longer have to do it by myself”. He continues, “I owe my relationship with my children a lot of the experience of being part of the [Fathers’ Group]”. “We’ll still make mistakes and we’ll still go through stuff”, he says to me, and to the men at one of the monthly meetings, “when we leave this place, we don’t leave as perfect dads”. He often says in every day conversations, ‘it takes a village to raise a child’<sup>66</sup>. The group is part of his ‘village’; he talks about “the collective wisdom of fathering” as one of the things he looks forward to in one of the group meetings. Pete, friend of Mathias’, a black, working-class, heterosexual, divorced father, in the group for 2 years and present at that meeting, hears him and says, “I agree 100%, this helps in so many ... ways that I don’t even think we know”. Self-help groups “challenge the traditional male ideal of independence and self-reliance” (Mankowski and Silvergleid, 1999-2000, 285). Men who are part of support groups and discussion groups “are constructing a new masculinity, one with a softer side, one that connects them to other people on an emotional level” (Levit, 1998, 183).

On meeting Simon in a coffee shop one day in Brooklyn for our first interview, Mathias was with me beforehand and chose to stay a bit to meet him. Simon was not part of any fathers’ groups, which he did not know existed. Mathias sought to get more people to join the Fathers’ group. “Have you heard it takes a village to raise a child?” he asks Simon, “Who makes up your village?”. Simon replies “right now me, my mother, my brother, my two best friends, uncle [Phil] and uncle [James]”. Mathias says, “so immediately you understand you’re not on your own”. Simon replies, “Right, I just recently had to acknowledge that, I *do* have support, sometimes I’m like aaaah, but people are there”. Mathias says,

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<sup>65</sup> The know-it-all mask is worn by a man who is “not only physically dominant but intellectually dominant too. if you don't understand why that is, a man is happy to explain it to you -- along with all the other subjects he's an expert in. He went to a top school, he watches the news, and he knows *all* the answers. He certainly doesn't need your --or anyone's-- help. He knows it all.” (Howes, 2017, n.p.)

<sup>66</sup> From Clinton’s book (1996) *It takes a village and other lessons children teach us*.

With the [Fathers' Group] we help men becoming better guys by soliciting that village philosophy and the collective wisdom of dads. We all help each other, we don't tell you how to parent but in that solidarity sometimes you find your own solutions without panicking around.

"Oh! cause that's what I've been... I've had moments of straight panic", Simon shares with us. He sounds relieved at the idea there could be a place for him to be supported. When Mathias explains how often they meet and how the meetings are structured, Simon sounds enthusiastic:

Oh my god, I'm gonna be going to that man, I swear! Oh man! ... I like that, I like stuff like that, I've been doing it [doing mentorship programs] for a long time. I need something cause oh man! I didn't know there was any of that. I thought that everybody was like 'every man for himself'. Ok... yeah I'll come, maybe they'll have some advice.

Simon was always vocal about needing help and guidance with the raising of his daughter; he would say to me, with a heavy heart, "yeah, being a dad man... I don't know what I'm gonna do". Similarly to Mathias, he was part of mentorship programs as a teenager and was seeing a therapist for 2 years, telling me "I do many different things to improve myself not only for myself but so that I'm a better parent". He recognises having vulnerable feelings, remembering the time his ex-partner got pregnant, "I was very angry, in denial, scared", scared for himself, but also scared because his father was a minister and had traditional views about how people should be married before having children. Simon is also one of the very few fathers who acknowledge having done "unconventional stuff" with Lola, such as co-sleeping with her, which contradicts normative middle-class childrearing practices that emphasize autonomy and independence (Wolf et al. 1996). Care, as a normative practice, produces dominant, "collective reflections on doing care in "the right way"" (Drotbohm and Alber, 2015, 9), which indicates that there are "systems of oppression in operation" (Romero, 2017, 20). Studies show that co-sleeping is common among populations of lower economic standing across ethnicities. Among all ethnicities it is most practised in African-American families (Koinis-Mitchell and Evenhart, 2013).

In my last conversation with Simon, he had joined the group and had attended some of the meetings. He thanks me for having introduced him to them, shares that he called once Mathias in-between meetings when he was “stressing out”. When I ask him what he got out from the group so far, he says

A deeper connection with my daughter ... a deeper connection with myself as a parent. As a father I gained a little bit more confidence and appreciating other men around, those 3 things, and understanding that it's a process, it's not an overnight thing, I'm gonna make mistakes, she's gonna make mistakes and to learn and to grow.

Pete is also one of the very few fathers who acknowledges vulnerable feelings in relation to becoming a first-time father at 22. He says,

I wasn't ready to be a dad. I embraced being a father but I was scared as shit, I was scared to death, retrospectively. I was scared, so scared. I knew what I couldn't do, that I could just leave my kid, I couldn't not be there for him, I knew I wasn't going to be on drugs [like my father]. There was no turning back, you're in it.

Leath (2017) writes how “many young African American men report feeling unprepared and worried about their new fatherhood roles” (7). African-American fathers are often led by a “drive to be the kind of father they [did not have]” (Coles, 2002, 10). Also, young fathers are often motivated by “a sense of duty and the desire to be good fathers” (Bade, 2012, 41); “many young fathers are proud to become fathers and have high expectations of themselves in this role” (i.d.). I ask Pete whether his son Guy was an accident, which he tells me he was not. “We wanted to have him’, he says to me. “Why were you scared about becoming a father?”, I ask him; he replies,

It was uncharted territory, it was the unknown, I didn't know what to expect, what to look forward to. To have something that is absolutely you, that you have created, ‘this is me’, ‘I did this’. To have an actual breathing living being that is actually you is a whole other level of life, of responsibility, of everything. I was on my own at the time, I had no blueprint, I was far from my family, not physically but I don't call them, when I need something, ‘can you help me?’, no, the flipside of that feeling is not cool, there are regrets that come with it.

He also says, “I could call any of my friends or any of my family, but I chose not to because



of how... I prided myself on not having to ask them for anything. I was on my own you know." He had left home, got himself an apartment, had a job; home and work are one of the components of the 'package deal' of "successful masculinity" (Townsend, 2002, 202). However, later on in the conversation, Pete also recognises not having had the help he would have wanted: "my family was not as helpful as I would have liked". Pete eventually grew confident over time and became more knowledgeable as a stay-at-home father with his second son. He remembers that time, "I'm comfortable now knowing how to know if this is too hot, the bottles and things like that". "Doing becomes a kind of knowing" (Walzer, 1998, 43). Pete also acknowledges having had moments of 'failure' as a father, telling me

I didn't do a bad job, but I had some nights he'd fallen out of my arms. I called my mum scared, she said, 'boy you fell so many times, I dropped you so many times, just put two pillows on both sides'. I'm like, 'what'? [he laughs].

While Pete values normative masculine traits of autonomy, he also identifies with nurturing and "emotionally expressive masculinities" (Hanlon, 2012, 147), explaining that he has "always been a sensitive dude ... I had sensitivity issues, I was more sensitive than guys my age, or guys period. Even in grade school I was the crier". "The masculinities of men of colour" are characterized by both "resistance and acceptance of hegemonic norms and cultural/racial traditions" (Dowd, 2010, 46).

The 'Apprentices' contradict what the literature says on marginalised masculinities who are supposedly "the bearers of uneducated, backwards, toxic masculinities" (Bridges and Pascoe, 2005, 294) and of "regressive masculinities" (291) and who "possess symbolic currency [masculinity] that they utilize to secure non-economic forms of capital, such as social status" (Ocampo, 2012, 468). Low-status men "hold more rigid ... definitions of masculinity that denies vulnerability" (Hanlon, 2012, 75). This group of men draw on actual resources, social, familial, financial, to support them as primary caregivers. This confirms the argument made that minorities "tend to be more dependent on social, emotional, cultural, and economic support from their ethnic/racial communities" (Ocampo, 2012, 452).

These men reach out to others, ask for advice, and admit vulnerable feelings. These findings confirm that “as there are different masculinities so there are different ways of relating to emotional lives” (Seidler, 2007, 13). As Hanlon (2012) argues, “we cannot understand power and dominance without also appreciating men’s emotional lives” (66). If “doing dominance” means “to deny weakness” (i.d. 69), what does it tell us about this group of men, who admit weakness? Marginalised men, in being ‘marked’ as black, homosexual, transgender, and so on, “have disadvantaged unequal membership” (Cheng, 1999, 295). Their masculinities are ‘feminised’, or formulated in another way, they do not have the ‘right’ amount of masculinity (Reeser, 2011). Simultaneously, “the intimacies of care relations can expose men’s vulnerability” (Hanlon, 2012, 88). To be a male caregiver when society does not expect you to may open up spaces for these men to express their vulnerable sides and perform counter-hegemonic masculinities. A strategy adopted by marginalised<sup>67</sup> masculinities “to neutralize stigma” (Coston and Kimmel, 2012, 100) is to “form their own standards for masculinity” (i.d. 102).

#### *3.4.3 The example of Frank: Between ‘Expert’ and ‘Apprentice’*

Logan and Frank, the two middle-class, men of colour of the study, use activities, practices and discourses from both groups. They draw on a discourse of ‘instincts’ and will project an image of confidence and competency, however, they will also admit vulnerable feelings as new parents. This section will focus specifically on Frank.

Frank, an Asian, heterosexual, middle-class, divorced father, tells me the first time we meet that he did not take most advice he was given when Sam was born because “there was no need. Every child is different and it was my responsibility to figure out what this little boy wants and it was just easy, I mean I can’t explain to you ... you really do feel it”. He adds, “You’d be surprised how quickly you learn. You have to throw yourself in there and do it.

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<sup>67</sup> For Cheng (1999) marginalisation refers to “intergroup and/or intragroup relations”, to “activities between and among groups” (Alderfer, 1987, p. 190). Specifically, marginalization means peripheral or disadvantaged unequal membership, disparate treatment” (295). Marginalisation “connects a lack of access to social, economic and cultural opportunities and resources to a marginal status” (Haywood and Johansson, 2017, 5).

You can read all you want but nothing can prepare you for that". Once in a Prêt à Manger in Manhattan, with his son with him, he says to me,

The hands-on aspects of parenting was never an issue. Feeding him the bottle or changing the diapers, it was something that needed to be done, I just did it. At first when you have your child you worry you do enough, but after a while I thought, 'well this is how I do it'<sup>68</sup>.

When I ask Frank what he was the proudest of as a father, he replies,

just being a father. That's reason enough to be proud. As a parent I know I'll do anything and everything for my son, but that's something that's universal, every parent should do that. If you can't, then there's something wrong with you. Every mammal just takes care of their children you know, *it's inherent to our nature, it's in our DNA*. I'm proud to be a father. If he was not in my life, the void would be so huge, I wouldn't be able to function. If he's not in my life I would do everything to get him back. ... as long as I can take care of him, I can die in peace. (my emphasis)

While he admits he worried whether he did "enough" or not as a parent, the recurrent response that keeps coming back in our conversations is that it is something one learns it, and that it was "easy". In another conversation, he talks about the possibility of having had a daughter, which was his original wish as a prospective parent; "so many things I would not have known with respect to how to raise a daughter". I ask him what would have been these things, to which he replies,

I'm sure I would have learned everything, everything from braiding hair to buying the clothing she would need and her needs are different you know. If I have to raise a daughter I know I can, I'm 100% confident I can do it, it's not issue, whatever I would need to learn I would just do it. Raising my son in some ways was so much easier, or it seemed that way from day 1, I never had a question about anything, whether it was changing diapers, doing everything, it just made sense. I never had an issue.

Frank oscillates between displaying confidence and having doubts as a new parent, the former weighing more in the balance. Remembering Sam's birth, he says, "I made myself a promise at that point. I'm like I don't know what I'm gonna do but it's not going to be what was done to me. I didn't know what to do but I knew what not to do, and the rest will just

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<sup>68</sup> From fieldnotes.

fall into place". He also says, "I'm confident in my ability as a parent, there is no way anyone can question it". When asked what his biggest regret as a father was, he replies, "I have no regrets as a father". Frank relies on a discourse of self-reliance and independence when he says, "I'm accustomed to do everything on my own".

It is after having met several times over the course of 11 months, meeting with his son and spending time with them, spending time with Frank separately also, that he and I reached a level of trust and comfortability; "I don't usually let people in easily. With you, it's different, I know I can trust you. But in general, I'm very guarded<sup>69</sup>", he says to me one day. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) write that

Once men have been allowed to signify a creditable masculine self ... they may be willing to return to topics and reveal more uncertainty, confusion, vulnerability and weakness. ... they may be more willing to give accurate accounts of their experiences. (212)

In our very last conversation, Frank opens up about not always knowing what to do when he was caring for his infant son:

In the past, early on, I was always concerned with the thought that I was doing something wrong, that I'm not doing it right, parenting per se, when he was really small. Because you always go back to how you were raised. I just thought so many things were wrong about the way it was done. Even though I knew what not to do, I did not know what to do. Even then at the very least I had those negative imperatives to avoid that helped and the rest is just learning and developing ... trusting myself to do what I think is right for my family.

"So you did have doubts", I say to him, to which he replies,

I had doubts in the beginning because I guess every parent has doubts, my god, this little life that is depending on you, but then you realise of, it's easy, we are human beings. Even if we make mistakes, we have to be open to self-reflection, self-criticism and sat, hey, I could have done this differently.

Come into play Frank's origins with a Filipino mother and a Porto Rican father, and the cultural stereotypes he encounters as a male caregiver. He opens up about his maternal aunt,

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<sup>69</sup> From fieldnotes.

who “has been de facto [Sam’s] mother”; Frank created his ‘chosen family’ (Finch, 2007) after his divorce, redefining the contours of what ‘family’ means to him. She is the person who validated him as a ‘good’ father:

She’s like, ‘oh you’re doing a good job!’ [he laughs]. She told me she didn’t believe I was capable. She has standard Filipino bias; Filipino men do not take care of their children. She knows me as a person. Her concern was, ‘does he know what he’s doing?’. She actually told me that I proved her wrong. All the men she’s known in her life do not take care of their children. [“You’re the exception to the rule”, I say to him.] In her eyes, yes. She’s like ‘that’s not the Porto Rican way of doing things, that’s not the Filipino way of doing things. Filipino men, they get divorced, ‘ok I’ll pay for child support and I’ll visit every once in a while. Go out, do your thing, have as many mistresses as you want, it’s insane. That’s our Spanish legacy. That’s what she expects.

She has been helping him with the raising of Sam since he was born. Frank, in fact, does not do “everything on his own” like he told me the first times we met. He tells me,

I owe her. I can’t possible quantify it. Yes of course I could have done things on my own, but the outcome would have been a little different, and things would have been a lot more difficult. You have to understand my history, I had to do everything on my own, it’s an issue of pride, but also not knowing how to me gracious. I had to learn to be gracious over time. After a while you have to appreciate what’s there. It is something you have to learn, that’s what’s family is for.

Frank acknowledges the issue of pride, which got in the way of him asking or accepting help and advice from others; however, he also cites his personal experience, talking about “absentee” parents, and having to “grow up quickly”; “I didn’t have the benefit of the rest of my family, so that’s where I learned to be ridiculously self-efficient, even if it was detrimental to me”, he shares with me.

The ‘Experts’ and the ‘Apprentices’ and Frank’s example illustrate how fatherhood and masculinities shape and are shaped by one another. Men are not starting from the same position. The ‘Experts’ start from a position of power. They are used to thinking of themselves from their professional lives as being in control, having achieved what they achieved in life because of their own individual qualities, rather than confronting their

privileges. They draw on traditional masculine resources to regain something that they have lost in terms of power and privilege as they became primary caregivers. To take on a caregiving role “results in giving up ... power and status” (Hunter et al., 2017, 4). In contrast, none of the ‘Apprentices’ can possibly live without continuously recognising and confronting their oppression daily. “The oppressed”, writes Frankenberg (1993), “can see with the greatest clarity not only their own position but also that of the oppressor/privileged, and indeed the shape of social systems as a whole” (8). Finally, the example of Frank shows that “we are simultaneously members of multiple groups, including dominant and marginalized groups” (Cheng, 1999, 298-99). “A matrix of domination contains few pure victims or oppressors. Each person derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from multiple systems of oppression which frame everyone's lives” (Collins, 1990, 229).

### 3.5 Conclusions

This introductory chapter introduces who the fathers are, and the routes that led them to become primary caregivers. The ‘Carers by choice’ opt for a narrative of ‘choice’ that is “morally safe” for men (Hanlon, 2012, 98), when these men are also constrained by their circumstances and staying home is not always a first choice. These men have partners who support them in their caregiving roles. The choice to stay home is often an economic decision made with their partners who are the main earners. The ‘Carers by circumstance/necessity’, in contrast, became primary caregivers either because they lost their jobs, they separated or got divorced, or were left to care alone for their child/ren.

Men who care experience ambivalence, positioned between ‘heroes’ and ‘anomalies’; most describe feeling “a watchful eye” (Doucet, 2006, 190) as they move in “estrogen-filled worlds” (41). They navigate a context where they are still treated as the ‘second class’ parent (Sunderland, 2000) and struggle with the cultural assumption that mothers are ‘naturally’ better at caregiving. Men with marginalised status(es) were more likely to feel like anomalies; men from minority groups such as Dale and Logan, and the unemployed fathers who felt they were judged on their inability to be providers such as

Silas and Mathias.

This research shows that the fathers want to be taken seriously as caregivers; it matters to them to be recognised as competent carers, which contradicts the argument that "men's skills in child care ... is less central to the cultural definition of what it means to be a man" (Holmes et al, 2013). It resonates more so with Brandth and Kvande's study (1998) on Norwegian fathers on paternity leave for whom "being hopelessly clumsy with children is not considered particularly masculine" (309).

This research indicates that parenthood intersects with existing social inequalities. Men with multiple privileged identities continue to be privileged in terms of choice and opportunities as fathers; they draw on hegemonic masculine language to maintain their dominant positions. In contrast, men from marginalised groups face more constraints and barriers both as men and as fathers; these men draw on discourses of 'alternative masculinities', challenging hegemonic norms of masculinity that emphasize emotional inexpressivity and values of autonomy. These findings expand our scholarly understandings of the 'new man', but also of 'marginalised' and 'alternative masculinities'. It also illuminates the ways in which "men's emotional lives are also structured through relations of power that work through differences of class, race, ethnicity and sexuality" (Seidler, 2007, 11).

This research points to the ways in which motherhood and fatherhood are relational concepts. I agree with Dowd (2000) who writes that "the strong role of mothers as gatekeepers and mediators of men's relationships with their children suggests that they are central to any new redefinition [of fatherhood]" (n.p.). I argue that the men's wives played an important role in 'opening the gates' (Holmes et al., 2013), giving the fathers space, encouraging them to become involved, trusting their abilities to care, supporting them in their new role, and validating them as 'good' fathers.

## 4. Work, caring masculinities, and the work of fatherhood

### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the ways in which the men felt judged and excluded as fathers and as caregivers; this chapter is about the ways in which the men felt judged as earners, and more largely about the “complex sets relations” (Doucet, 2004, 277) men establish between paid work, unpaid work, and their sense of masculinity. This chapter begins with a discussion on the decline of the breadwinner model and presents 3 fathers who were working full-time, or the ‘Working Fathers’. The rest of the chapter looks at a larger group of men who had a more flexible approach to work: while being primary caregivers, they were either working-full time or doing odd jobs on the side, or were out of the workforce; we call them ‘Work-from-home Fathers’ and ‘Break-from-work Fathers’. The research agrees that the breadwinner model is less of “a key component of late modern fatherhood” (Dermott, 2008, 29) as men who care shift their priorities vis-à-vis work and caregiving; simultaneously also, “the breadwinning figure never really disappeared” (i.d. 28), as illustrated by a majority of the men who maintained real and symbolic connections to forms of paid work and understood caregiving responsibilities as temporary. To not work for pay, whether they chose it or not, affects most men, and that also, low-income men of colour in particular have less access to resources to make up for their marginalised positions. They seek to reach white, middle-class breadwinner ideals (Gavanas, 2004, 75); these ideals “might work oppressively” (i.d.) for low-income, men of colour who have unequal access to the same choices or opportunities as other fathers. This chapter also demonstrates that men who care construct care as ‘work’ and express a ‘compassionate masculinity’ (Hanlon, 2012).

### 4.2 The decline of the breadwinner model

The public world of paid work has been identified as “the source of masculine values and identity (Wright, 2016, 211). Griswold (1993) writes that across race and class, “male breadwinning has been synonymous with maturity, respectability and masculinity” (2).



Breadwinning was as “a distinctive male responsibility” from the 1830s until the 1970s (Potuchek, 1997, 3). Breadwinning responsibilities have been directly connected to a man’s role as a father; it was in most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century an important component of what a ‘good’ father is, and still is today “a continuing force” (Dermott, 2008, 28). Work is one of the four components of ‘the package deal’ men have to put together, financial provision being the most important aspect of their fathering according to the men Townsend (2002, 53) talked to.

However, “the very notion of what it means to be a man is ... always in flux” (Lane, 2009, 687). The rising number of women in the labour force<sup>70</sup> who share breadwinning responsibilities and increasingly out earn their husbands<sup>71</sup>, combined with globalization; increasing rates of unemployment and underemployment, -- men’s jobs were more affected by the 2008 recession<sup>72</sup>--, “the stagnation of men's social mobility” (Zuo and Tang, 2000; 29); changing ideas and ideals about fatherhood and masculinities, but also about motherhood and femininities; all have contributed to decline of the traditional breadwinner model. “No understanding of motherhood and fatherhood is now possible without a reckoning with market forces” (Connell, 2011, 57). Griswold (1993) writes that “nothing has changed and continues to change fatherhood more than the collapse of men's monopoly on breadwinning” (4). Kimmel (1993) writes that

Men who are now 30 to 50 years old are the first U.S. generation to be less successful than their fathers were at the same age. As one of the major trends of the past two decades this economic decline has caused many men to reevaluate work in a harsh new light (n.p.)

The breadwinning model is eroding, and as a result, “masculine identity is increasingly disaggregated from men's identities based on paid work with men choosing from a range of

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<sup>70</sup> The percentage of married women with a child under 6 working rose from 39 to 63 percent from 1975 and 2014 (Peoples and Bailey, 2018, 265).

<sup>71</sup> 29 percent of married women earned more than their husbands in 2015 (that number was 18 percent in 1987). They are 38 percent to out earn their husbands when only one partner is employed (Cross, 2017, 90).

<sup>72</sup> “The Great Recession has affected men’s employment more than women’s, with 69 percent of the jobs lost held by men” (Smith, 2012b, 1).

masculinities” (Chapman, 2004, in Hanlon, 2012, 46). The meaning of ‘good fatherhood’ is shifting, the emphasis is put on ‘being there’, and on showing emotional closeness and openness with their children (Dermott, 2008).

#### *4.2.1 The ‘Working Fathers’: ‘Ideally, I wouldn’t work now’*

3 out of 15 fathers combined full-time paid work and being a primary caregiver. They were working full-time when they became primary caregivers, a situation that no longer applied for Bradley when I met him since he was no longer a primary carer. Frank and Victor are categorised as ‘Working fathers’, despite having gone through short periods without working. They did not stop working when they became fathers and worked for most of the time they had been and still were primary caregivers.

Victor, a white, middle-class father, remembers “there was no money in the house” growing up in a large Jewish family in Brooklyn, his father working 2 or 3 jobs and finding excuses when Victor asked him for money as a child; “I didn’t want my kids to go through that” he tells me. To have a career was a priority at first: “I wanted to provide for my family”. Married to another lawyer, they have been trying to get a divorce for years. He describes his ex-wife as “a good mother, but she’s not caring for him”; he mentions her drinking habits that she kept after she became a mother, and her leaving their son with other people – neighbours, grandparents, boyfriend -- when he is at her house. In reaction to that, Victor decided to stop working so that he could take care of his son and asked for full custody. “What is a good father to you?”, I ask him, “somebody who’s involved and available, involved in their kids’ lives”, he replies. Ideally, he would like to become an at-home father like two of his brothers who have 8 children and 1 child respectively. He says to me, “Mommy’s focus right now is on her career, my focus right now is not my career, I explain to my son”. Work is not a priority anymore, “it’s when I have the time”. He has been relying on savings for a while, but he needs to cover divorce related expenses (“it will cost you a hundred thousand dollars just to have a fighting chance” he told me). Victor says to me,

My goal was not to earn money, my goal stopped being to earn money a long time

ago. Partly because I'm comfortable with the fact that his mother works and has a decent job. So I could be a more involved father. I wanted to be at home with my kid ... The mother makes good money. Ideally, I wouldn't work now. But there is mortgage, food.

Frank, a single, middle-class, Asian father with sole custody, changed careers so he "can be at home to take care of my son, help him do his homework, picking him from day care or school"; "it was a major paradigm shift for me", he says. He went from earning 175 000 to 80 000 dollars a year and climbed his way back to 115 000 dollars, "it's still good money. I have to pay all the things for him, plus the lawyer and other court related expenses all these years". He was when I met him a project manager who worked part time from home, being 2 to 3 days a week at home; "I'm very flexible in terms of hours, I take him to school and pick him up work from home more often", he explains. On a separate occasion he says to me that staying home is "isolating" because he is "used to seeing other people at work", but he also explains that his "priorities have changed"<sup>73</sup>. He does not like the work he is doing, "but at least I'm able to support my son", he says to me. In a custody battle with his ex-wife, he paid 110.000 in lawyer fees in 5 years. He remembers having taken time off work for 1.5 years while doing his second master's degree and relied on his savings, while also taking care of his son. Already separated with his ex-wife, she was "bragging about making more money" than him, to whom he said, "I'm rocking the unemployment, I'm taking it easy, I don't care", he says to me, laughing.

Both Victor and Frank wished they were not working, or that they worked less. They changed jobs, took important pay cuts, stopped working temporarily, wanted to have flexible hours, or to work from home, so that they could spend more time with their children. Class privilege is an important resource that enables them to do all these things, like relying on savings. They made careers sacrifices like more mothers tend to do (Walzer, 1998, 30). Like a lot of mothers, they did "tend to question the need to go to work" and saw "their

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<sup>73</sup> From fieldnotes.

work demands as affecting their identities as good parents” (27). They did experience “conflict between their paid work and fathering” (148). Work was seen a necessity, rather than a priority. Their “commitment to employment was instrumental” (Dermott, 2008, 39).

Bradley was a white, middle-class, divorced father. At the time of the divorce, his ex-wife chose to stop working and he had to leave his self-employed job and go working for someone else as an architect in order to cope with child support payments. “I hated going to work. I was desperate”, he shares with me. His wife got full custody of their children—in the 1990s—and Bradley could only see them every Wednesday and every other week-ends. This lack of contact and having to work at a job that made him unhappy made Bradley very vulnerable; he plunged into a depression. “Can't they make her work? Why do I have to pay all this money?” he asked his lawyer. He says to me,

She has complete freedom in terms of what to do with her career, but let's say I would want to work in non-profit and take a huge pay cut. I would have to go to court and renegotiate. I *have to* be making forever more money.

Bradley struggles with “the cultural restrictions imposed by hegemonic frames of masculinity and fathering which prioritise paid work over informal care” (Yarwood, 2011, 164).

masculinity is sustained when men are fathers to their wives' children, when they are providers for their families, and when they act as protectors of their wives and children. This is a strong cultural construction and provides a framework in which to understand [men's] resentment regarding being 'reduced to a paycheck' after divorce. Perhaps when fathers' role as financial provider is separated from their role as resident father, the former role becomes a source of resentment and perceived victimization rather than a demonstration of culturally sanctioned masculinity. (Catlett, Toews and McKenry, 2005, 112)

These three men, Victor, Frank, and Bradley were single fathers; single fathers are more likely to feel “conflict between commitment to paid work and commitment to parenting” (Barker, 1994, 130). As divorced men, they felt the pressure to be earning to cover lawyers' fees or child support payments.

#### 4.2.2 The 'Work-from-home Fathers': 'I like that I get to stay home'

4 out of 15 fathers were, at the time of research, primary caregivers, at-home fathers, and were working flexibly from home. They were working part-time from home (Paul), working on their business (Manuel and William) or doing some odds jobs on the side (Ross). They were the secondary earners. As discussed in the previous chapter, these men planned to stay home until the child(ren) is/are old enough to go to kindergarten, which starts at 5 years old; we are talking about a period of 4-5 years, more if the father stays home with children of different ages, like it is the cases of Manuel and Ross.

Manuel, a white, middle-class, transgender dad, left a successful career of 10 years because he wanted “a different amount of time at home<sup>74</sup>”. He had a “busy life and a busy job”, and “a lot of changes had to take place for me to be ready for a family”. He identifies as a ‘work-at-home dad’, staying home with his son, and developing his business on the side as a speaker and business strategy coach. “I am still working, but not getting paid as much”, he says, and his income depends on getting speaking gigs and publishing and how much he spends on his business. He also gets the support, financial and emotional, of his wife, who earns 65,000 dollars a year, and who “has believed that I always had more earning potential than her”; Manuel is aiming for 100,000 dollars a year. He explains,

I was already home. I wasn't making a ton of money and it was all about having the time and space to work on my business. My wife was very supportive of the idea that this business was important and eventually I will be able to bring home a lot of money for us, and while making a difference in the world and it might take longer if I'm at home with a kid than it would be otherwise.

“Talk of retooling careers is complicit with men's roles as providers” (Medved, 2016, 21). As a transgender, queer, at-home dad, Manuel's identities deviate from normative definitions of masculinity; however, he does not fully escape hegemonic norms that assign value to the breadwinner role. Simultaneously, he likes his job because “I get to stay home”. He wants to be an ‘engaged and active dad’. He says, smiling, “I'm gonna be a PTA dad. I am, I knew that

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<sup>74</sup> Extracts from 2 skype interviews.

3 years ago”, he says to me with a smile.

Some of the men had had a career where opportunities to progress had failed or had had low-satisfying jobs. Ross, a white, middle-class father, had had a “bad history of bosses”, he talks about “personality differences” with them. Working in communication “doesn’t necessarily pay well”, “there’s too many people that can do what I can do”. He evokes the possibility of going back to work when the oldest is in pre-K<sup>75</sup> and the second one is in day care. I ask him whether his choice of staying home was a financial one; he replies, “I wasn’t working that much. There was no point where I had something I’d give up, like I had to stop working for this”. Ross was an at-home father for his two daughters and was doing some writing jobs on the side, “to stay busy”, and “you always need the money, it’s New York”. He wants to be able to show he did not completely stop working while he was at home should he decide to go back to work one day, because he knows he could be penalized. In Hanlon’s terms (2012) Ross would be categorised as a ‘Nothing to Lose’ Carer, which refers to men who had little “opportunity to construct themselves as paid workers and, therefore, as dominant men in these terms”, and so had no conventional masculinity to sacrifice (201-2). When a man’s identity not tied to employment, unemployment can “be experienced in a more complicated, less emasculating way” (Lane, 2009, 687).

In the most expensive city in the country to live in (Coli, 2018), to stay home to save money on day care is a reality that many parents have to face. When Ross tells people he stays home, “most people understand”, some say “it’s great, I do that too” or “my wife/my husband stays home”. He continues,

Especially for New York, it’s too much of an economic reality for people not to see that as something to do. ... Husbands making tons of money, some of them get it, not everybody is making money. Some are like, ‘oh!’. Some at 30 can be a bit old-fashioned. In Brooklyn [where they live] it’s a bit more hip, people go on alternative paths, either stay at home or both parents stay home, they’re creatives, they have home offices, they understand partially, some are working remotely or in freelance. [‘What about Manhattan?’] some understand, some don’t. Those who will never

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<sup>75</sup> Pre-school in the United States, from 3 to 5 years old.

worry about money, dad works, mom stays home, because they can, they understand that people don't. 'Oh why don't you get a job and [Veronica] stays home?', I've never had anybody ask me that. I think there are too many who are doing it for it to be streamed as something like they never heard it before.

What these fathers have in common is that they maintained connections to paid work for economic reasons. Despite being of a middle-class background, 3 of the 4 men and their families could not rely on a single income. Ross could not work and not earn money, however, he wants to go back to the workforce eventually and he knows he could face discrimination, an aspect that is discussed later on.

#### *4.2.3 The 'Break-from-work Fathers': 'The greatest backup plan in the history of backup plans'*

8 out of 15 fathers were, when they were primary caregivers, that is, at the time of research or previously in the past, on a break from paid work. Some made the choice to not work and to spend time with their children (Logan, Kyle, Dale, Pete, Earl); others were studying for a new career (also Dale). These men also, similarly to the 'Work-from-home Fathers', planned on staying home until the child goes to kindergarten. Other men did not take a conscious break from work: they were laid off (Mathias and Silas), or they found themselves having to care for a baby (Simon).

Logan, a black middle-class father, had a career for 18 years before he became an at-home father. He had outgrown his old job and "needed to do something else". He decided to apply for jobs "that made sense", and he and Leone agreed that if he did not get them, he was going to stay home with Alice, which is what happened, he did not get the job he "really wanted". He would stay home until Alice starts kindergarten; he compares it to "a sabbatical". "It was the greatest backup plan in the history of backup plans", he says to me. Kyle, a white middle-class father, also had had "a great career", he says at a conference<sup>76</sup>;

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<sup>76</sup> It is a filmed conference on 'Why fathers matter: Creating successful parenting partnerships' organised in 2015 at the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan (Livestream, 2015). Kyle and his wife were both invited to talk on the panel 'Pursuing a parenting partnership'.

he explains he then had to opportunity to teach, “which gave me an entirely different mindset onto the world”, and this “opened up the door for me to change roles again and be home with our kids for the last 10 years”. He recognises he could not have been the father he envisioned to be while being the teacher he wanted to be, “it wasn’t gonna work with the life we wanted to create”.

Logan and Kyle had been able to construct a “conventionally legitimate masculinity through paid work” (Hanlon, 2012, 160) making it easier for them to put their careers on hold, to spend their time differently, exploring other routes such as blogging as described later on, and “letting go of dominant masculinity” (79). They had developed “a sense of competence, self-esteem, and self-fulfilment” (Lockart, 2015, 51). The social status acquired through being an earner allows men “to cross the border to caring with less shame/suspicion” (Doucet, 2006, 203, cit. in Hanlon, 2012, 80). Talk of a “sabbatical” is a way for primary caregivers to maintain a link with paid work (Merla, 2008). Also, Logan’s and Kyle’s and their wives’ class privileges provide them an “access to resources and corresponding choices [that] are greater than those in less advantaged groups might enjoy” (Miller, 2010, 3).

Other fathers were less privileged; they became primary caregivers as a result of circumstances rather than choice. Simon, a young black working-class man, asked for partial custody of Lola since the mother was threatening him to take Lola away, which was awarded since he was the most stable parent with a house. He stopped working to take care of Lola; “I was not working, I gave [Lola] my full, full, full attention”. After the court decision, the mother stopped giving any sign of life, which lasted for months; Lola was less than a year old. Simon describes that time as “one of the hardest times as a parent I have ever faced”. He took care of Lola full-time until she was able to go to subsidized day care at 2 years old. He was receiving the financial support from his immediate family who told him “do what you gotta do with your baby”. Simon’s mother moved back with him in the family house to help with the rent, and Simon got assistance from social services, he received help with day care, food stamps, Medicare, rent support. Before he became a father at 25, Simon had



studied different subjects at university but did not finish; he was doing drugs, “I was hanging out all the time, partying, I wasn’t concerned with any of that stuff, responsibilities”. Simon could also be categorised similarly to Ross as a ‘Nothing to Lose’ Carer (Hanlon, 2012), not having had constructed his masculine identity through work, therefore “did not sacrifice a conventional masculinity” when he became carer (201).

The majority of the men from the last two categories maintained a connection to paid labour, either in working part-time, doing some odd jobs, studying, or transitioning between jobs. They were supported financially by their spouses or by their families, and had traded “cash for care” (Hobson and Morgan, 2002, 1), but only temporarily: all intended on going back to work. They were fathers “in transition” (Doucet, 2006, 90). “Taking on a primary caregiving role results in giving up ... power and status” (Hunter et al., 2017, 4), and framing it as temporary serves to “counter the illegitimacy” (Smith, 1998, 163). “With a view of establishing a new career in the future, [they are] preparing for a later re-entry to the male world of work, a legitimate reason for a temporary period engaged in home duties” (i.d.). This indicates that “the breadwinner ideology is still in play” (Doucet, 2012, 306), and even when men “have rescinded a strong or full-time attachment to the labor market, fathers still feel judged as primary breadwinners” (i.d.). Moreover, it is also clear that some of the men sought to maintain a link with paid work out of economic necessity, their partners being the mains earners and the men’s supplementary incomes were needed. An indication that the men maintained in effect a connection with paid work is that, as indicated in the table in the last chapter, the majority of the men at the time of research were either working full-time or part-time; only one was not employed, Dale, who was going to night classes and was training for a new job, and two fathers were unemployed, Silas and Earl. This shows that 6 men had gone back to work, half of them out of economic necessity, and the other half to stay “connected to traditional sources of masculine identity” (Doucet, 2006, 186).

#### *4.2.4 Giving up the breadwinner identity*

What happens when men are out of the workforce, however temporarily? For the ‘Work-

from-home Fathers' and 'Break-from-work Fathers', their positions as primary caregivers were often poorly understood and were met with reactions of incredulity and disbelief. Men are "judged as earners" (Doucet, 2006, 209) and when they deviate from that role, "community onlookers ... cast a critical lens on this disruption to the smooth functioning of contemporary gender regimes. This social gaze ... reinforces moral assumptions that link being a good ... father to earning" (Doucet, 2004, 295).

Logan heard from several people that it was "career suicide" to stop working and stay home with his daughter. He says to me, "I just thought that was outrageous to say something like that. Like, this is family, that has to come first". He continues, "some people to this day believe I was fired from my old job, that I didn't walk away on my own. Like *what?* They don't believe it". Paul, a white middle-class father, very similarly, talks about the assumptions people seem to make regarding his situation

A lot of it was that people didn't get it or understand what, and probably still don't. Never took the time to ask me the questions, 'why are you home?' 'what are you doing?' 'What's your life about?'. It's like, 'what happened, I failed in a career? I wasn't making enough money? ... And in part, sure, all of that is kinda true in some way. [They are treating me] like, 'what are you about?'

Hanlon (2012) writes that in men's perspectives

The interests and identities of men ... are constructed in ways that make becoming a primary carer incomprehensible to men. Why would men want to undertake work that is typically unpaid, undervalued, and defined as unproductive women's work ... ? Being a primary carer means living a life of economic vulnerability which is counter to hegemonic masculinity. (78)

Some of the fathers recognize that taking time off work to stay home does weigh on their chances of finding work again, and ultimately keeps them unemployed; they find themselves penalized for not 'working'. These men get the 'fatherhood penalty'<sup>77</sup>, and

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<sup>77</sup> The concept originally applies to mothers, who face 'motherhood penalty': maternal leave, pregnancy, leaving the workplace for periods of time impact women's "likability, hostility, test score, hiring, salary, and promotion" (Benard and Correll, 2010, 630) and career progression; mothers are viewed "as less competent and committed to paid work than nonmothers" (617).

experience “normative discrimination<sup>78</sup>”, aspects which have received scarce attention in the literature on at-home fathers. “When career advancement is predicated on visibility, fatherhood is rendered invisible, employers lack recognition that fathers are capable and interested in childcare” (Brumley, 2018, 228-9).

Kyle, an at-home father for 11 years, recognises that he is in a “precarious situation” of being the supported spouse, and he does not recommend parents “going all in”, staying home and “not having their mind on something else”. He heard of some at-home fathers who had not worked in years and who were left by their wives. Kyle has not earned money in more than a decade. “I’m taking a bet on our marriage”. Silas is in a similar situation, not having worked for 6 years, he is facing return to work discrimination, which happens “no matter how good you are and how qualified you are”. He says,

There’s the impression that if a man does this [stays home and takes care of his family], they are unmotivated, they’re not hard workers, there’s something essentially not grade A about them. I discovered it first-hand. I got a call from a recruiter online, [Olivia, his daughter] was two. ‘You are exactly what my client is looking for, they want you to get it for an interview. But I need a more recent copy of your resume’. I say, ‘that is my most up-to-date resume, I’ve been at home for two years’. There’s a long silence. ‘That’s gonna be a problem. It’s not that what you’ve been doing is not important but you’re not working, you haven’t shown yourself to be working for two years. That’s not gonna look good to a client’. I never heard back. ... We’re running debts with me as an at-home dad ... I worry about my ability to make up for the fact that I became an at-home dad.

Silas, a middle-class man, became an at-home father because he lost his job, and has been unable to find work ever since, which is experienced as a failure. Feelings of failure and of shame emerge when men “feel when they fall short of hegemonic expectations” (Hanlon, 2012, 70). “The hegemonic script of masculinities instils an expectation or promise of privilege creating a sense of indignation when unrealised” (i.d.). Failure to perform

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<sup>78</sup> ‘Normative discrimination’ “occurs when employers discriminate against mothers because employers believe, perhaps unconsciously, that success in the paid labor market (particularly in jobs traditionally considered masculine) signals stereotypically masculine qualities such as assertiveness or dominance. These qualities are inconsistent with those culturally expected of mothers, such as being warm and nurturing” (Benard and Correll, 2010, 617).

masculinity "risks being defined as feminine" (i.d. 62). In a study on gender role differences and unemployment, Forret, Sullivan and Mainiero (2010) have found that men with children are more likely to "perceive unemployment as a defeat", which they link to "the pressures and strain many men feel to provide for their child" (660), and women with children as "an opportunity to spend greater time caring for children ... [or] considering new career options" (i.d.).

Kyle went back to work part-time at the school where he was originally teaching while being at home with his sons, not for the money, but to feel valued and recognised. "The public realm of work ... is the arena that counts in men's sense of achievement and self-esteem" (Seidler, 1997, 47). Men "find it hard to take seriously the idea that they might have to give up work completely in the public sphere, since this is so crucial to sustaining their identities as men" (i.d. 126). Kyle says to me,

I needed to have something else, being other than being [Jo]'s dad, not for financial reasons. Looking back, I lost any sense of myself as someone other than [Jo]'s dad, my confidence definitely diminished, this is what I recognize after. I wasn't doing anything that required my education, my skills. I enjoyed staying at home, but you don't get any feedback when you're a stay-at-home dad. ... I was not fulfilling the expectations that I had for myself, that everybody else had for me, I'm a smart person that has this degree and I had a great career, two great careers, why I am not doing that?

Seidler (1991) writes,

Morality can be an important form of disciplining our masculinity when it gets us into thinking and feeling that the moral law -- doing what is 'right', or even what is 'expected of us' -- is always more important than identifying and living out our own wants and needs" (85).

Hanlon and Lynch (2012) argue that "unpaid care work underwrites male power" (52); nurturing masculinity is "challenged by the devaluation and invisibility men experience" (Hanlon, 2012, 141). Silas also struggles with this,

I worked so hard to get an education, believing I would... *be somebody and do something*. And I'm nobody, doing a job that's largely thankless, or largely unseen,

that will have a massive impact for them, as they play their role in the world. I thought I miss out on any impact for me though. I feel bad that I even think about that. (my emphasis)

Men "learn to value success and achievement in the external world" (Seidler, 1997, 50). Seidler (2003) writes how "spending time with small children can be difficult [for fathers], for it involves 'slowing down' in a society that "teaches that people have to 'speed up'" (218). Hanlon and Lynch (2011) argue that

The imperative to realize masculinity through valued paid work can result in a sense of panic when faced with spending time with self or family in "non-productive ways" (hooks 2004) ... Men's emotional resistance to change are exacerbated within an individualist society that views dependency as burdensome because there is pressure to sacrifice caring to personal aspirations. (51)

#### 4.3 Ambivalent feelings in relation to earning

Both the 'Work-from-home Fathers' and the 'Break-from-work Fathers' had partners out earning them. Within that group, middle-class fathers said they were comfortable with that equation, which had always been the dynamic in their relationships. Paul, who works part-time, says to me, "I'm not like I'm not a worthy male because my wife makes more money than I do", he says, laughing. I ask him if that made him feel uncomfortable; he replies, "maybe at the beginning. She sort of always made more money than me. That's just part of my personality too. Communication is entrenched in our relationship, we just make it work. It's a partnership". Logan too does not mind that his wife earns more than him; he says,

unless I became a head of school, my wife was going to out-earn me. She works at a pharmaceutical company, they have stock options. It's totally different than it would be in education. She's way past what I... it's not even close.

Similarly, Ross' wife was "already making more than I was, that equation was easy". "Had you envisioned becoming a stay-at-home father before you became one?" I ask him; he replies,

I did. I had a girlfriend, we were both paying rent, but she was making more than I was. That part of being the second and lesser wage I was already aware of. She had

the higher salary because she was working longer hours and had greater responsibilities. She got home later and more often. I had more freedom. I was doing the same kind of work. I was cooking a lot more, I liked cooking more than she did. I had a little bit more freedom. ... That was the prelude of being the supported spouse. I definitely was making less. I was computing half the things to a certain point and then it was hers.

“Did that make you feel uncomfortable in any way?”, I ask him, to which he replies, “not really. Maybe I’m just selfish. ... Maybe I’m selfish but I don’t care being supported, that she’s making more than I am, that’s just how it is”. He adds, “I’m now used to not working”. These men were not “fixated on achieving the role of the male breadwinner, or even equal co-earner” (Lane, 2009, 686). The decline of the breadwinner model among middle-class couples “has lessened men's obligations to provide financially -- or at least to be a sole financial provider -- for their families” (Lane, 2011, 127), this added to a move towards egalitarianism (Zuo and Tang, 2000). “Men of lower breadwinner status and women of higher status are less likely to hold conventional gender ideologies” (i.d. 30).

[At-home fathers] appropriate the cultural model of rebellious masculinity (Holt and Thompson 2004). Through their collective veneration of a rebel dad persona, at-home fathers portray themselves as a gender vanguard who is breaking free from the constraining mandates of breadwinner masculinity and as paving the way for other (middle-class) men to enact a more rewarding and socially redeeming model of masculinity and fatherhood. (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson, 2013, 37)

What emerged from some of the men’s narratives was the reframing of language around money. When I ask Kyle about how he feels about “not earning money”, he replies, slightly defensive,

*I do have money, and we’ve never ever thought about her money as her money. She would not be able to do her job in the same way if I weren’t doing what I do ... We need money, here is how we’re going to get that. ... She’s been able to progress in her career because I’ve been the backstop, more than the backstop ... It’s concerning if you think that it’s somebody’s money just because there is name on the pay check. It’s not seeing the family as a whole ... I’m not thinking it’s her money I’m going to have a hamburger instead of a steak. We trust each other. We’re partners in all of it.*

At a filmed conference in 2015 (see note 46), Kyle and his wife were invited to talk on a panel ‘Pursuing a parenting partnership’. On this issue of money, he recognises that they are “in a

fortunate position that the income is coming in, that I can forgo that income for now<sup>79</sup>". He explains their vision of money,

We've always looked at our life as a whole. When we were both working, before we had kids, this is our money ... [Lila] has always made more than I have ... we're making decisions based on the resources that we have, the time we have, the energy we have ... we've never looked at money as [Lila] is the breadwinner so she's the decision maker around money, I need her permission to buy the arugula versus the kale, it wouldn't even cross my mind.

Lane (2009) writes that "within marriages conceived as egalitarian partnerships ... the ideal of self-sufficiency can be reconceptualized as 'couple self-sufficiency' (Townsend, 2002, 10)"; "getting by as part of a couple, rather than as an individual breadwinner, is the yardstick by which one's success is measured" (687). To rely on a partner becomes "a badge of their forward-thinking attitudes to marriage and gender roles" (688). Men opt for "comforting rationales", "pointing out that child care and household care made valuable economic contributions to their families, paralleling an argument that feminist advocates have long made with regard to women's domestic labor (Gimenez 1990)" (Coskuner Balli, 2013, 32). Lane (2009) in her study of unemployed men argues that men's

conceptualization of marriage and self-sufficiency reframes the experience of relying on a spouse's income. Believing that marriage is a partnership and that men should respect and support their wives' professional achievements—along with the twin assumption that employed middle-class women should be comfortable assuming the role of primary breadwinner—allows unemployed men to reconceptualize relying on a partner's income, at least temporarily, as evidence of their masculinity, rather than a challenge to it (697).

Kyle's wife, Lila, on the panel also, a middle-class, Indian woman, confirms his vision of a partnership, saying how "when we made the decision for [Kyle] to stay home, I very consciously made sure to change my language choices, like *our* pay check, *our* bonus, because it was ours, I can't do without him certainly, it's very shared". Studies of couples where the woman is a main breadwinner show that women "have to compensate their husbands for the loss of status" (Pahl, 1991, 50); "whenever possible male powerlessness is

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<sup>79</sup> (Livestream, 2015).

concealed by the sharing of resources” (57). In Stamp's (1985) study on breadwinning wives, “women held back from exercising as much power as they might, given their financial contribution” (Pahl, 1991, 50). To frame one's income as 'our money' and to pool the woman's money follows an ideology of equality; McRae (1987) writes that in dual-earner couples, when women have

more secure jobs, greater chance for promotion, greater status ... [to regard] both incomes as joint funds - family funds - allows these differences to be smoothed over in family life, allows an ideology of equality to surmount a reality of inequality. ... an attempt is made to ensure husband and wife are equal within the home, whatever their standing outside however, it conceals the reality of economic inequality. (121)

One could also argue that Lila, as the breadwinner, acknowledges that the money that she earns is not only enabled by herself, but it is enabled by what other members of the family do, in that case her husband taking care of the house and of the children. She is recognising and valuing Kyle's indirect contributions as a homemaker. Rather than seeing her husband's labour as an autonomous entity, Lila recognises that her earning capacity is dependent on it, thus signalling the decline of the breadwinner model. This echoes the domestic labour debate of second-wave feminism and arguments made by Marxist-feminists that domestic work, that is both housework and childcare, is a "major contribution to the production and reproduction of the labour power of the collective worker required by capital" and that the woman is "*indirectly productive* of surplus value<sup>80</sup>" (Campioni et al. 1974, 10). More recently Glucksmann (2000) argues that “at any given time a particular form of structural division and connection exists between [the market and the household] such that they are articulated in a particular manner. They are interdependent ... distinct but not autonomous” (19).

Similarly to Kyle, Ross says he is contributing to the “partnership as much as I can”. He understands his role as contributing to the household: “I'm contributing in time and my

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<sup>80</sup> “Some argued that by providing services to male labourers (cooking, washing and cleaning), which otherwise would have had to be provided commercially, housewives were directly contributing to capital accumulation by keeping down the level of wages, thus allowing capitalists more profit” (Bradley, 2007, n.p.).



effort and the money we'd otherwise spend somewhere else. I'm saving us money and earning some extra money to supplement". If he went back to work, they would have to pay somebody to take care of their two small children which would represent the same amount of money he would make working full-time, that is roughly 40-50,000 dollars a year. He and his wife made an economic choice, and both drew on a discourse of the stay-at-home parent (Dillaway and Pare, 2008), as discussed in Chapter 3.

Ross' wife, Veronica, a white, middle-class woman, earns 125,000 dollars a year. She adopts the same rationale as Lila, saying to me, "I know there's no way in hell that I could be doing that if he wasn't here being my partner in it, so he's helping me earn that money just as much as what I'm doing is actually earning that money". She does identify as the financial leader, "but that's not about me making the money, that's our personalities", she says. Should he start working for pay and should she quit and become an at-home mother, she would still make most of the financial decisions. I ask her how they handle the money; she replies, "I think it's important for him to feel like he has his own money and not be reliant on... 'honey can I have some cash?' [in a high-pitched voice], what a horrible spot to be in". Her pay check is split between their accounts, and the bigger amount goes to hers since she is the one paying the bigger bills. "How about when you want to pay for personal things?" I ask. "We take that out of our own pocket", and they communicate on what they plan on buying. She will give him "a heads-up" about buying herself a new sweater "so that he's aware and doesn't get resentful like, 'she shops all the time and I never get anything new'". She continues, "I try to give him enough that what he has can cover his... I try to give him more so that he has his own mat money... if he wants to treat [Zoe, their daughter] ... he's not completely busted broke".

Studies point to the mother's influences in the decision for the husband to stay home; the lengths of time he stays home; and the men's levels of enjoyment for being an at-home father (see Fischer and Anderson, 2012). Leone, Logan's wife, is very supportive of him staying home. She remembers feeling reassured knowing that he was home taking care of

Alice, instead of her going to day care; this made her in turn more productive at work. She is the one now who discourages him going back to work:

I have an incredible and implicit amount of trust for [Logan] and every time I'm like 'you should really look for a job now', he's like, 'I should', and I'm like 'oh no but what if your job is more demanding than my job, then I'm gonna have to'... this selfish I'm-very-comfortable component to like every time we're like 'maybe it's time', 'do you want to have a job? What does that look like?', I'm like, 'no don't do it!', selfishly [she laughs] 'we'll just keep figuring how to make it work'.

She has had ambivalent feelings about her role as a provider; she says to me she gets "frustrated" occasionally, "but it's so rare and it's often because there's something else I'm annoyed about". The only time she got "really frustrated" and "angry" with her husband and said "it's *my* money", it was immediately followed by a "no, we're a partnership, it doesn't matter where the money comes from, here's the pot we're gonna use for our life". She gets teary as she continues

And I believe it so strongly, that the relationship that he has with [Alice], the work they've been able to do together is *priceless*. There is not a price tag, I *cannot* put a price tag on it. Every time I shift from that I come back being like 'how much do I value that?'. It's unmeasurable, it's the most amazing, beautiful thing I've ever seen and I feel very proud that I can provide that to them and if that means I gotta work every day, I'm the one who does that, that's beautiful, I feel really proud that that's my contribution [she wipes her eyes].

A minority of fathers, such as William, a white middle-class man, felt pressure coming from partners to earn money to supplement the family income. With two children in private school in California, "we're still trying to make ends meet, but we're not complaining in any way", he says to me. He is an artist, an at-home father for 16 years, and a published writer. Now that his children are teenagers, he is doing a "mid-life search", through making music and painting. Meeting him in a coffee shop in Greenwich village, he says,

My wife is weary of yet another field of dreams. I've sold paintings, on a high level, large abstract pieces to rich people, that proved her that... when I started doing it, she gave me the same look, ... 'I need you to contribute, blablabla'. But 'give me a second', I said. And then did a painting that impressed her. ... How she felt when I shifted from arts, and recently to music, I had to do the exact same thing, prove.

His brother, who is also a stay-at-home father, experiences more pressure coming from his wife; “his wife didn’t like it as much, she’s the breadwinner but doesn’t bring home as much ... she was bringing less money; it was more stressful on their marriage, she wanted him to contribute”, William tells me. It happens that it is “sometimes it is a wife, rather than the husband, who embraces the masculine breadwinning ideal” (Chesley, 2011, 655). Women can exert “a potentially conservative normative force that reproduces rather than challenges the gender order” (Smith, 1998, 163).

Other men found it difficult to not earn any money. Silas was in a very different situation than the others living in New York City; he lived in Colorado, with no fathers’ groups around. He knows of two at-home fathers but because of conflicting schedules does not see them. When he went to the National At-Home Dad Network Convention for the first time, he says, “I became aware that there is an at-home identity. That it’s not an aberration... that there is a word for it, not ‘unemployed’. A way of framing it that’s positive. It gave me an awareness that they were other men doing what I do<sup>81</sup>”. Because of his marginalization as an at-home father, Silas is more affected by the isolation and the social stigma attached to his role, and by normative ideals of male breadwinning. “Men often face a diminished sense of self when unable to meet “caring about” breadwinner expectations” (Hanlon and Lynch, 2011, 51-2). Silas says to me,

The amount of self-hate that comes with still being an at-home dad, being unemployed, I still see that future in me that I’m unemployable. There are people who look down on me. Some people look up, to me, ‘wow you’re doing great, that’s wonderful what you’re doing’, others who beat it as a stigma, as a sign of my unworthiness or inability, or my lack on some significant area.

Pete, a black, working-class father, also found it difficult to not make money. Pete liked staying home with his son, “I had no problem with [staying home], I was comfortable with that, very comfortable”, he says to me, which contradicts the view that “men from low-status groups often find doing primary caring to be particularly emasculating” (Hanlon and

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<sup>81</sup> In a skype interview.

Lynch, 2011, 50). However, he struggled with the fact that his wife at the time was earning a lot of money, “and she made sure I felt that, I knew, not purposefully”, he tells me. Emerged from that situation “feelings” that he “couldn’t tell anyone”, feelings that he wrote down on paper and put that in a story line, which eventually became the premise of a book. “I just poured out my feelings. 200 pages of my feelings”, he tells me. His ex would also talk to him in a “commanding manner” and would demand things of him, instead of asking him. This created in Pete feelings of anger and frustration that he would place in his “dungeon savings account in an attempt to keep the peace” he writes in his memoir<sup>82</sup>. He also writes,

Along with the comfort of having everything paid on time and balances being close to zero there was the personal sting of having to rely on my girlfriend to keep our family’s financial status leveled. Not only did she fill the role of head of household she seemed to revel in it. I felt as if I were one of the children asking for permission to be myself.

I wanted to gain control but I never wanted to confront the lack of control I held within my own life. Watching Rudy’s career grow, from the sidelines, hurt my soul even more than I knew. I felt as if I was less than a man. Not only because she was stepping into the role of head of household but also the fact that she was in direct connection with her true gift. She seemed to revel in her comfortable power.

Pass, Benoit and Dunlap (2014) write how “the concept of the breadwinner in America is founded on the belief that men are in control of their destinies, independent of any historical, institutional, or structural” (169), a model that is out of reach for (especially poor) black men who are more likely to experience discrimination<sup>83</sup> in employment and disproportionate incarceration<sup>84</sup>. Low-income black men experience gender, racial, and class oppression. “Race and racism work with and through gender, ethnicity, class,

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<sup>82</sup> Non-published, fictional piece of writing based on his real life that he shared with me.

<sup>83</sup> For instance light-skinned black men, “who appear less threatening to whites” have better job prospects and have a better chance “to achieve a more prestigious socioeconomic status” than darker skinned black men who have “fewer opportunities to demonstrate competence in the breadwinner role” (Thompson and Keith, 2006, 62). More on colourism will be discussed in chapter 5.

<sup>84</sup> Black men “have the highest rate of incarceration of any other group” (Mouzon, 2014, 153). “One of every three black American males born today can expect to go to prison in his lifetime” (The Sentencing Project, 2013, 1). Incarceration “further marginalizes [black men’s] participation in the labor market” (Mills, 2010, 342). “Having a felony record removes possibilities for obtaining a student loan, housing, credit, and even employment. In some states, the removal of voting rights further disenfranchises many African American men, reinforcing their position at the margins of civic society” (i.d., 343).

sexuality ... as systems of power” (Howard, 2014, 41). Black men are more than twice as likely as white men to be unemployed<sup>85</sup> and black men across classes to face lower wages than white men<sup>86</sup>. African-American men are "predisposed to fluctuations in the labor market" (Mills, 2010, 343). White middle-class men “have been privileged over poor and African American men throughout their “entire multigenerational history”” (Gavanas, 2004, 73) and black men “have been “playing catch-up”” ever since (76). After the 2008 economic recession, it was young black men without a high school diploma who were impacted the most and experienced disproportionate high rates of unemployment in New York City: only 1 in four men aged 16-24 in 2010 had a job in the city (Holder, 2010).

For working-class men, "the breadwinner role is often a source of particular pain" (Williams, 2000, 28), especially for men of colour. "Since whites defined 'achieving manhood' as the ability of a man to be a sole economic provider in a family", write hooks (1981), black men in the 1950s were often perceived as "failed" men" and black women “measured black men against a standard set by white males” and “were angry” (178) that men were not “assuming the patriarchal role” (180). Majors and Billson (1992) argue that

Even in the face of crushing poverty, most black males have accepted the basic masculine goals of wanting to raise and provide for a family. This inclination to take this road to manhood is strong, despite obstacles to supporting families; children are an important statement for declaring manhood. (16)

achieving masculinity is complicated by the threats of marginality and anomie that plague his race, and if he is of lower-income status, his social class. The subcultural press toward innovative and rebellious modes of achieving success in the face of remarkable odds shapes his pursuit of masculinity (i.d. 7)

Studies on working-class and middle-class black fathers show that the former put more “emphasis on the provider role” writes Cazenave (1984, 645), while the latter place a heavier emphasis on “the husband role”. He argues that “higher status men may be in a better

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<sup>85</sup> 15.2% of black men were unemployed in 2011, 9.5% of Hispanic men and 7.1% of white men (U.S. bureau labor statistics 2011). “Black men and White men with the same level of education are still more likely to be unemployed than White men” (Mouzon, 2014, 155).

<sup>86</sup> In 2013 “at the highschool diploma level and higher, Black men earn between 27% and 36% less than White men” (Mouzon, 2014, 155).

position to take the economic provision component of masculinity identity for granted and to demonstrate their masculinity through their job achievements and in other ways” (645). Working-class masculinities are typically associated with the breadwinner model (Beynon, 2002) while the men who are fathers are also often more involved in the daily care of children than fathers from other classes (Pyke, 1996; Shows and Gerstel, 2009). In dual-income couples, women’s higher wages represent a challenge to “men’s masculine self-identity” especially “for men with less prestigious occupations and lower income” (Zuo and Tang, 2000, 30).

In one passage of Pete’s memoir, the main character has a wife who went back to travelling for her work two weeks after giving birth, despite doctors’ advice. She had left a couple of hundred-dollar bills on the table as usual. The passage says,

I stared down at the 5 crispy hundred-dollar bills. Ben Franklin’s giant face on each bill looked as if he wanted to laugh at me but was just waiting for the right time. I felt as if I was being paid to be silent. ... I felt the need to support her, even with me agreeing with the professionals. I could see, and feel, her hurt whenever she was home. Rudy’s soul remembered the child as if she had gone a full nine months, given birth, and nurtured the baby to health before it was taken away. I, too, felt an emptiness knowing that our creation was not given a fair chance to fight for life. Instead of confronting the pain we both stayed silent and tried to go about our lives, fearing that returning to the pain would mean we both would have to relive the day. Although I needed the money my pride wouldn’t allow me to pick it up from the table. She left no note, not a single message to go along with my “hush” money. I knew it was mine strictly because she’d placed it in the usual spot on the table where my allowance was left. I gently ran my fingers over each note, feeling its power and ability to take me out from the financial strain I was under. I shook my head in disgust as I stepped back denying myself the pleasure of feeling a little more debt free. ... Feeling like less than a man I snatched the money up from the table and crawled out the door en route to another unproductive day at the plantation<sup>87</sup>.

Although black women have always been working and earning money (hooks, 1984, 133), to find himself being the dependent one is a point of emasculation for Pete. This echoes the words of Mathias, a working-class black man, who poignantly shares with me that “as a

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<sup>87</sup> Metaphor for ‘home’.

married dad with money, it was different than a married dad without. As a divorced dad losing everything, I didn't find value in myself. I had thoughts of suicide". Simon, also with working-class background, had not established a strong work identity before he stopped working to be home, and thus did not have so much to 'lose'. To not work is experienced differently for Logan, a middle-class, black, man who had already achieved successful masculinity in white standards, and who via his class identifies with egalitarianism.

Since the time of slavery, black men have had to face pervasive stereotypes of them being "lazy and shiftless" (hooks, 1992, 90). Black men reside outside of white hegemonic masculinity, and as a result do not "receive maximum benefit from this system" (i.d., 102). Franklin (1994) writes how "adult Black males have been Black 'men' for only about twenty years. ... even during this time Black males have not been recognised as 'societally approved' men" (275). Black men bear the "stigma of weakness attributed to men who cannot support their families", writes Collins (2006, 93). She argues that

African American men bear the brunt of this stereotyping of poor men who lack financial means. Within mass media, black men are frequently depicted as pimps and hustlers who live off women or other family members. Black men without money are routinely depicted as irresponsible, with the number of children they father with their unmarried partners often used as evidence for their sexual irresponsibility and refusal to grow up. (84).

#### 4.4 Childcare as 'work': 'Every day I get home from work and it's like I have another job'

Men understood care as 'work'. The work becomes "visible to them as they lear[n] how to do it" (Ranson, 2015, 97). To care enables men "to identify women's caring burdens and appreciate how difficult, complex and underappreciated caring work can be" (Hanlon, 2012, 203). Men "have a greater appreciation of the minutiae of the physical and emotional burdens and complexity of caring" (i.d. 202). The fathers in this study expressed a 'compassionate masculinity' (i.d., 200), showing empathy and expressing admiration for other carers. "Sharing care work is a real 'cultural revolution' because it allows men to empathise with the invisibility, lack of recognition, and the emotional burdens of gendered

and subordinated world of caring” (Castelain-Meunier, 2002, cit. in Hanlon, 2012, 206).

For Simon who became a single father when he originally did not want to have children, taking care of his baby daughter was, “*very hard work*, very very hard. Like I say, I have to take my hat off for anybody who’s done that, cause it’s amazing”. Men who “do not expect to become primary caregivers ... do not prepare for it and feel hard done by when they have to do it” (Hanlon, 2012, 210). Simon once met Mathias and I in a coffee house in Brooklyn; Mathias wanted to meet him and talk to him about the Fathers’ Group. On hearing that Mathias has four children, Simon looks impressed and sounds full of admiration; he says, “wow, I have to take my hat off for anybody who has more than 2 or 3 kids”. Simon remembers “the routine process, the feeding the baby bottle, the whole getting up at night, the diaper changes, the feeding, it’s exhausting. Every day I get home from work and it’s like I have another job”, echoing Hochschild’s (1989) concept of ‘second shift’ referring to women’s shift of doing housework and being involved in childcare after having had done their shift with a full-time job outside the home.

Similarly, Paul says he “knew it was gonna be work”. He says that childcare is “a lot of work”. He continues,

It’s a lot of work, and even some of the women I’m referring to, the kindergarten parents, when I have these conversations with them, they’ve been like, ‘it’s hard’. My first awakening was to the single parents, single parents in general. Wow, how does a single parent do it? Like, it’s crazy, I don’t know how it can be done. These people do it! The first time I had this realization of like ‘this ain’t no joke’! [he laughs].

The fathers were doing a job “that is not valued ... because it is [usually] work done in a subordinate position by people who have the general status of subordinates in society” (Delphy and Leonard, 1992, 136). “The hard and largely externally unrecognised and undervalued work of nurturing and raising a child can –and often does– come as a shock to anyone becoming a parent for the first time” (Miller, 2010, 44). Yet, the work of caring was seen by some of the fathers as deeply meaningful, very important, and invaluable. The



fathers were having to, like most commonly mothers do, “undertake ... ‘ideological work<sup>88</sup>’ to make their own positions liveable” (Faircloth, 2014, 28), “to make sense of their current positions” (Hays, 1996, 133). Silas would say to me, “the value of what I do with my kids is not... you can’t tally it in dollars”; “I’m doing a more important job than I have ever done anywhere else, a job that’s actually meaningful”. He also says, “I feel like a nobody. I’m such a nobody. That really hurts actually”. “Is it about professional recognition, or making an impact?”, I ask him. He says,

I consciously or unconsciously link professional development and professional impact on the world. I do feel like I vanished. In some respect I feel like I am a janitor of society. I keep things clean so everybody else go about and do their things, but no one thinks it’s very important and they never would ever have to live in a world where I let trash pile up and floors get messy.

In becoming a primary caregiver, "the lack of recognition can also be experienced as a sense of invisibility" (Hanlon and Lynch 2011, 50). Hanlon (2012) writes that men

realise how undervalued caring is when they experience their caring being unappreciated. (205)

Taking on dirty, demanding and unpleasant chores of child care and losing leisure time are aspects of current prescriptions of fatherhood that make it hard for most men to conform. (119)

Very similarly to Silas, Earl says, “it was the most important and the most fulfilling job I ever had in my life”; “I thought I was doing the best work of my life, ever”. He stopped working - - while still renting out two of his apartments -- when his girlfriend got pregnant.

I was building the house and being an at home dad. That was my full time... and all the cooking and the cleaning, which, you know, is a full-time job. Women haven’t been acknowledged for that for many decades, but it’s work, all day long.

I ask him whether he ever got negative feedback for not having a job for pay. He replies,

not once. It never emasculated me, it never made me feel like I wasn’t contributing something very valuable. I was very bonded with my son, through the work I was

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<sup>88</sup> ‘Ideological work’ is the “work of containing or managing contradictions within an ideological formation” (DiQuinzio, 1999, 4).

doing with him, every day, every minute of the day that I spent with him was valuable.

In Pete's memoir, the main character is an unemployed, stay-at-home father. One passage says,

I had been out of work for a few months and my power was indisputable, as I had come to grips with my true career of being a writer. I had begun to put some of my memoirs into story form and was extremely proud of the progress I had made. Even though I didn't bring a regular income into my household I knew that my contributions were beyond any monetary value. I rested well knowing that I was [Jojo]'s primary care giver and a damn good one I might add.

Fathers, across class, were affected, had absorbed and appropriated ideological elements of intensive parenting culture. "Men are asked to enjoy their fatherhood" (Vuori, 2009, 54). In a 2018 episode of the American television show *New Girl*, one of the male characters has been a stay-at-home father for 3 years. He goes back to work, he "crushed it", but decides he wants to stay home because "it's the best job I've ever had" (New Girl, 2018). 'Good' parenthood means self-fulfilment and making an important social contribution (Fox, 2009, 192). This contradicts the view that there is "no ideology of intensive fathering or even a somewhat gender-neutral and equal ideology of intensive parenting" (Strong, Devault and Cohen, 2011, 370) (see also Hook and Chalasani, 2008).

Within the ideology of intensive mothering, motherhood is constructed as "the best and most important thing a woman can do with her life" (Tucker, 2006, 186). This "cultural insistence ... keeps women in the home through the sly insistence that motherhood is much more valuable than any job that women could have in the public sphere" (Valenti, 2012, 71). "Good mothers should regard their children as priceless" and sacred, (Lois, 2013, 8), as being "emotionally and morally outside the scope of market valuation" (Hays, 1996, 8). The sacrificial devotion to one's family "promises women fulfilment and meaning when they devote themselves to the care and nurturing of [their family]" (Bianchi, Robinson and Milkie, 2006, 10). Valenti (2012) writes

We *must* believe that parenting is the most rewarding, the hardest, and the most

important thing we will ever do. Because if we don't believe it, then the diaper changing, the mind-numbing *Dora* watching, the puke cleaning, and the "complete self-sacrifice" that we're "locked in for life" is all for nothing. (64-5)

The fathers start from a place of power, benefitting from male privilege, and for some from class and racial privileges, and find themselves doing a labour that is unremunerated, "often invisible, ignored, or radically undervalued as a legitimate form of labor" (Carroll, 2015, 178). By calling childcare a 'job', fathers redefine care, give it value, and make it visible; it is a strategy "used to minimize their potential illegitimacy" as carers (Smith, 1998, 158). Ross understands staying home with his children as a job,

Yeah, it has to be. It's a job in that... in terms of our relationship with [Veronica], to some extent I have to call it a job so that psychologically we're both pulling our weights. If I'm just sort of home, then it's almost more unfair. If it's my job, it's my part of the partnership, if I can keep that in my head, semantically calling it a job makes [Veronica] feel better that I'm doing something, not just sitting here. ... I call it a job because it makes you feel better, to say 'I have a job', it's a better way of looking at it, it sort of gives yourself more responsibility and more realization of how important it is, so you pay attention to it. From the outside, when people ask me what I'm doing, I would say that yeah, I'm doing a job, that's what I do. ... I start out with 'stay-at-home dad'. ... It's possibly not my finest era.

There is the perception that stay-at-home mothers are "lazy and bored and watching television all day", "mindless and unproductive" (Hays, 1996, 136) "useless" (i.d. 133) and "incompetent" (Johnstone and Swanson, 2003, 23). Research shows that the same discourse is applied to at-home fathers (Merla, 2008). The home is associated with ideas of passivity, domesticity, consumption, while the public sphere is connected to more valued ideas of action, power and productivity. At-home fathers counter these messages by developing a 'professionalised' fatherhood persona, as discussed in the next section.

#### *4.4.1 Professional dads*

Parenting was for 3 of the middle-class fathers not only a job, but was constructed as a profession, something they invested themselves in. Beynon (2002) argues that for middle-class men, employment is "not something they do for remuneration", they are "prepared to invest more of themselves in it than their working-class counterparts" (21), an investment

that I argue they apply to their parenting. Middle-class intensive parenting culture encourages parents to make “a tremendous investment” and “invest much of their time, labor, emotion, intellect and money in their children” (Hays, 1996, 130). The dominant conception of children is that of 'sacred children', "precious entities ... deserving the very best from us" (Nippert-Eng, 1996, 203). “Parents actively seek to produce the perfect child, for the child has come to stand as the tangible outcome of parental labour and care” (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, 20). This connects to the notion of ‘parental determinism’ where parents believe they “make their children, that they determine their children's futures” (Lazerson, 1992, 42).

To people who ask Logan what he does in life when at the playground, he points to Alice playing and says, “*this* is what I do”, he tells me, smiling. He shares that

Parenting is hard work. If we decide to be lazy about it, there are going to be consequences and I’m responsible for this child until she’s ready to go out into the world on her own. It is my job to spend that time and put that time and effort into making her the best kid she can be and that means there are teachable moments, I’m gonna stop and we’re going to have those discussions, no matter how hard they are. There are people who just want to be buddies to their kids, that’s not me.

It connects to “the notion that children are planning objects, requiring the investment of much care and attention as well as economic resources on the part of their parents invest in children” (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, 20). Parenting has become "important as performative practice, with the outcome a child whose demeanour, appearance and achievements are strongly linked to parents' own subjectivity, their presentation of the self to others qua parent" (i.d.). Pete, in his memoir, calls the main protagonist a “child-care specialist”, and a “stay at home Dad”. Men are “becoming professionalized as fathers” (Ranson, 2015, 167). Hanlon (2012) argues that carers “take a professional and task-oriented approach to love labour” (141). He adds that “to cope with low status and emotional burdens”, some men “take on board a professional caring persona,” where they “experience emotional gain” and “feel competent and accomplished in that role” (i.d. 202).

Logan and I once talk about the National Convention for at-home dads he did not attend that year. I comment on how many fathers handed me business cards, indicating what they do on the side of being an at-home dad, cards with either the name of their parenting blogs, podcasts, their degrees, what job they do outside of staying home, to name a few. Logan comments,

The interesting question is how many people will say that first when they meet someone outside of that community. I know for me, I struggled with that because I'm so used to saying 'oh I work at a school' or 'I teach'. ... [When I was staying home] I would say 'I *stay* home with my daughter', 'I'm the primary caregiver', that's usually the phrase I would use. Cause I think *that sounded a little more professional than an at-home parent.* (my emphasis)

Logan created a blog when he became an at-home parent, originally to capture his experiences "as a dad, as an at-home father, as a black man, as an African-American dad", he says to me. In his blog, he wrote about what he was doing with his daughter, "how I was feeling about that", and his reflections about fatherhood. He now identifies as a writer. His blog, and him living in New York City, has opened doors for him in terms of visibility and writing opportunities: he has written articles for parenting websites, and got sponsored; he participated to the Dads 2.0 summit conference where he was the blogger spotlight one year; he was on the board meeting of an at-home dad national group; he was interviewed about fatherhood, child care, at-home fathers, and masculinity, for television, online magazines and podcasts; has was featured as one of the 'top dad bloggers' for a blog for mothers he collaborated with; he was profiled in parenting magazines; he has contributed to a book on 'modern fatherhood'; he was featured in a famous brand's Father's Day campaign; he, his wife and daughter were featured in a parenting magazine; he has been invited to speak on a panel on paternity leave, event that I attended as well; he started working on the side for the Center for Parental Leave Leadership. "I didn't start any of this to potentially become an advocate for fathers or at-home-fathers, but all of that stuff has been the case ... It's been nice to reinvent myself", he says. He continues,

It's become increasingly important to me, if I'm given an opportunity to talk about fatherhood in a positive light, I'm gonna do that and do my part. It's not so much

about me, it's much more about fathers in general. It has become one of the most important things that I do.

When Logan and his family were featured in a parenting magazine, he received emails from at-home fathers, some of them men of colour, thanking him, saying, "it's so great to see someone who does that and who looks like me". The following extracts come from various conversations with Logan:

If I don't do it, who's going to do? If I don't put myself out there. I want to empower others to come out and talk about their experiences about being stay-at-home dads and dads of colour ... I want to do bigger things ... I want to work with dads who want to change the cycle so that they don't end up like my father<sup>89</sup> ... I really want to represent all the things that my dad didn't provide for me.

It is not uncommon that at-home fathers choose writing as an alternative career route (Ranson, 2015). Both William and Pete wrote about their experiences of being at-home fathers and were published authors. The writing of parenting blogs specifically is a middle-class phenomenon<sup>90</sup>, a field until recently exclusively populated by mothers (Ranson, 2007). We talk about the 'mamasphere' or 'mommyblogs' (Petersen, 2015) or 'mumpreneurship'<sup>91</sup> (Ekinsmyth, 2011). A large majority of mom bloggers are highly educated, white, heterosexual, and married (Dubriwny, 2013) and often they do not work outside the house. Social media is a new feature of "the professionalisation of family life" (McRobbie, 2013, 130). Blogging has become for some mothers "a field of work" (Makinen, 2018, 129); they use their skills and competence developed in previous jobs often in "journalism, communications or marketing" (131) ; some have become 'professional' or 'semi-professional' bloggers (130) who earn money through working with brands and the promotion of products, challenging "the assumed boundaries between paid work and leisure as well as between paid work and mothering" (129).

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<sup>89</sup> Who left him and his mother and has a history of taking drugs, going to jail and fathering multiple children.

<sup>90</sup> Blogging requires "the labor time, the ability to control the digital means of content production, and multiple gadgets and resources that those from higher classes are more likely to have" (Schradie, 2012, 557).

<sup>91</sup> Ekinsmyth (2011) defines a mumpreneur as "an individual who discovers and exploits new business opportunities within a social and geographical context that seeks to integrate the demands of motherhood and business ownership" (105).

Kyle, similarly to Logan, became a 'professional' at-home father. He originally was uncomfortable with the identity: "after home for three years, I hated calling myself an at-home dad". When he introduced himself to people he would say "I'm at home with my kids right now but I was a teacher, or I've been working part-time at the school. There was always something else". After 3 years of staying home, he co-created the New York Group with another stay-at-home father, which started out as a meet-up group for at-home fathers, and became over time a "group for all dads". It has grown as a business, and a national organisation, with other groups created under the same model all around the country. The group had close to a thousand and five hundred members in 2016, organising weekly and monthly events, from parenting classes to new fathers, dads' nights out in a bar, to events in Central Park with dozens of families gathering together. The group has a podcast, partnerships with brands and organisations; Kyle and the other co-creator go speak at conferences on fatherhood and parenting.

What Kyle got from the group is "to have an identity outside of being [Jo]'s and [Martin]'s dad". Over time, he grew "very comfortable" with the at-home identity, and became "a proponent of being an at-home dad, many years being out in the world, being the face of that world ... I made a name for myself for being an at-home dad", he says to me. He now says to people, "I'm at home with my boys, taking care of everything at home, but I've started a dads group that's keeping me busy". He continues, "I'm not self-conscious anymore, I'm proud of the choices I made and of the work we are doing". He enjoys it, "we're building something"; he explains that they are on a mission to create "a community of active and engaged dads" and to "open people's minds". He feels that the group is part of something larger than themselves, they are "part of this change", "part of a movement"; they are "changing the conversation about fathers", influencing the Today show to change the name of their parenting segment from Today mom to Today parents, and asking for a fathers' lounge with changing tables at a show for new and expectant parents. However, "influencing the dads that we meet is the most important part". Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013) argue that

at-home fathers vigilantly watch for mass media representations and advertisements (particularly those involving national brands) that positively acknowledge their collective identity ... They interpret these intermittent moments of recognition as nascent signs that they are gaining, albeit slowly, normative legitimacy in the commercial marketplace. (37-8)

“Male carers often adapt to caring work by drawing on a professional model that defines caring as an occupation, allowing men to emphasize traditional practical, instrumental and managerial skills” (Hanlon, 2012, 99). In creating fathers’ groups, stay-at-home fathers gain in visibility, recognition, and legitimacy as carers. It is a compensatory strategy “to buffer stigmatising reactions” and to fight stigma (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson, 2013, 31). They “forge a collective identity, based upon their shared experiences of marginalization, and ... build cultural legitimacy for their unconventional performance of masculinity and fatherhood” (i.d. 24). “Many men are attempting to negotiate being more involved carers without losing their sense of masculinity but this ultimately depends on them continuing to have a role in the public sphere”, writes Hanlon (2012, 208). Seidler (1989) argues that “as men, we learn to identify our sense of individual self and achievement with our work lives. It is as if our egos are built for the public realm” (161). Kyle’s entrepreneurial initiatives feed an ‘identity myth’ (Holt, 2004) that men

seek to propagate and materially establish in the marketplace: by capitalizing on their creative ideas and hands-on parenting knowledge, men can escape the confinements of the corporate world, build a fraternal community where men help other men, control their own financial destinies, and be involved fathers at the same time. (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson, 2013, 30)

[The myth] also affirms that men can perform their at-home father roles in ways that are enterprising and socially consequential without having to conform to the norms of breadwinner masculinity (i.d. 31).

Although most mom blogs do not “pursue a political agenda” (Langner, Greenlee and Deason, 2017, 186), blogging is for both Logan and Kyle a space to connect with and bring attention to larger political issues, from installing changing tables in men’s rooms, to being mindful about a little girl’s hair with mixed origins and what hair means for black people (an aspect that is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). There is a perception shared by a lot of



the fathers in this study that fathers do not have access to equal content and resources that exist for mothers, and these men articulate a clear need for that. Logan and Kyle are similar to the fathers' blogs Ranson (2015) studied in that her participants often spoke from a place of (class) privilege, and "were explicit in their intention to reframe conventional understandings of fathers and fathering, and to position themselves as competent caregivers who are deeply engaged with their families" (Ranson, 2017, 8). There is also an element of display (Finch, 2007) as well in that Logan and Kyle want to "change the conversation" about fathers, to quote Kyle, and to display a certain type of fatherhood that counter general messages that fathers are incompetent, or that black fathers are irresponsible and absent.

#### 4.5 Conclusions

This chapter explores the ways in which the men, in becoming primary caregivers, redefine the meaning of both paid work and unpaid work. The research finds that men who keep on working full-time while being primary caregivers demonstrate behaviours more commonly associated with working mothers (Garey, 1999; Cooper, 2000; Roxburgh, 2006), in that they are concerned that their work demands could affect "their identities as good parents" (Walzer, 1998, 27), and not the other way around; they make adjustments to their work schedule, they take pay cuts, they reduce their hours, they make career sacrifices; not only do they think less about work, but they do work less also, and they want to spend more time with their children. These behaviours have been found in egalitarian heterosexual fathers (Coltrane, 1996; Henwood and Procter, 2003) and in gay fathers (Mallon, 2004).

The other fathers also have a "tenuous" relationship to work (Doucet, 2004, 296) when they convince their boss for them to work part-time from home or leave their career to stay home, showing a shift in their identities and a greater focus on family. Still, the weight of the breadwinner ideology remains present, as the men see their caring responsibilities as "a temporary alteration to normal working practices" (Shirani, Henwood and Coltart, 2012, 280). The research shows that all plan on going back to work, even though some could afford continue not working, being supported by high-income partners. It is clear also that the

fathers carry the weight of social scrutiny for not working, which confirms the argument made in the literature that “mothers’ and fathers’ ‘moral responsibilities’ as carers and earners remain differently framed and experienced” (Doucet, 2004, 278). Research shows that mothers “feel judged for not caring enough” and men who are primary caregivers “feel judged for not earning enough” (Doucet, 2010, 176). It is thus not surprising that some of the men wrestles with the idea of not working and ‘letting go’ of dominant masculinity (Hanlon, 2012, 79).

Within that group, when we look closely, we notice “varying notions of masculinity and fatherhood” that are going to depend on class, race, age (Hamer, 2001, 22). Men like Pete inherit class and racial ideologies which put more value on the breadwinner role; simultaneously, their positions as working-class black men leads them to face more structural barriers to achieve ‘successful’ fatherhood as defined in white middle-class standards. Not all men start from the same positions.

Lastly, the research says that fathers develop a ‘compassionate masculinity’ (Hanlon, 2012, 200) and come to empathise with the burdens of care work, thus adding “their voices to a large chorus of generations of women who have argued for the valuing of unpaid work” (Doucet, 2004, 294).

## 5. Everyday caring practices

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the men's practices of care; how they understand care, what they do when they care, and how they experience it. It aims to answer the call for more research to "document and theorize the changing ways in which carers think and feel about the tiny bodies they care for, the practices in which carers engage and how they negotiate the strong emotions engendered by this caring" (Lupton, 2012, 48). The first section focuses on the ways men understand and talk about care: care as routine; care as responsibility; care as selflessness; care as worry; care as 'emotion work'; and care as rewarding. The next section focuses on care as an embodied practice, a strong theme that emerges in the fathers' narratives and the observations made of them with their children. There is in studies of embodiment, as Morgan (1993) notes, "a somewhat one-dimensional picture of men and their bodies emerges, one over-concerned with hardness, aggression and heterosexual performance, a kind of 'over-phallusized' picture of a man'" (71). In research on fatherhood, "fathers' bodies are not the focus" (Ranson, 2015, 3). The body in this chapter is a tool of display (Finch, 2007) where the men display care and caring relationships, for them and their children, but also for others. Finally, the last section looks at the example of doing hair, and more precisely of black fathers doing their daughters' hair. In a cultural context where black hair is devalued, hair remains a sensitive topic. It becomes in the hands of the fathers, on top of being a bonding ritual, a vehicle for nurturing their children's self-esteem and racial pride. "[W]e cannot understand the experiences of [black people] without attending to the role of race and racism" (Pollock, Gillborn, Vincent and Ball, 2015, 171). This chapter looks at fatherhood and masculinities through an intersectional lens, because "care is not only about gender" (Tronto, 2013, 12), it is also "deeply marked by all other cultural and social values and formations, including *race/ethnicity* and *class*" (68).

## 5.2 The nature of caregiving

Care<sup>92</sup> was recognised by some of the fathers as something that is ‘innate’ and ‘instinctual’, as discussed in Chapter 3. Overall, the men drew on a discourse that presented childcare as “a set of technical acts that can be accomplished by anyone, irrespective of his or her gender” (Merla, 2008, 128). The men constructed a form of “de-gendered ‘parenting’” (Ranson, 2015, 19). Mothers were not believed to have a stronger connection with the child/ren because they are women, as it was found in other studies (see Doucet, 2006). The fathers in this study did not seek to “distance themselves from the feminine”, like Doucet found with her participants (231). They did not seek to “reconstruct ... kinds of masculine care” (158), distinguishing their care from “maternal care”, by drawing attention to the “masculine qualities of their caregiving”, promoting for instance risk-taking, outdoors activities, independence, fun and playful activities (195). The men in this study did not seek “to distinguish themselves as men, as heterosexual males, and as fathers, not mothers” (194).

Kyle, on a panel<sup>93</sup> with his wife Lila, gets questioned by the mediator, “a mother is a mother, a father is a father, but everyone’s a nurturer, does that resonate with you?”; he responds,

That’s the kind of stuff that is a given, that we’re both gonna be nurturing, that we’re both gonna love our children, care about our children, be able to take care of our children, be able to do the laundry, be able to make them dinner, both of us are capable of all of that.

Most of the men identified with a caring and sensitive masculinity before they became parents. William says “my own definition of my own masculinity is very very solid and isn’t written. It has nothing to do with a template, zero; [it means] capable of being a nurturer, and an altruist”. Dale identifies as ‘gentle’; “I like languages, gentle people do that. I’m a

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<sup>92</sup> Care is understood here as both ‘caring about’, a feeling, an “other-centred disposition of identity that caring work engenders”, and ‘caring for’, an action, a set of activities, broadly defined as the “provision of personal care services”, dimensions which are often interrelated (Hanlon, 2012, 31).

<sup>93</sup> At a filmed conference on ‘Why fathers matter: Creating successful parenting partnerships’ organised in 2015 at the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan (Livestream, 2015). Kyle and his wife were both invited to talk on the panel, ‘Pursuing a parenting partnership’.

sensitive person”; “[younger] I was the gentle one ... I was sensitive and gentle”. Silas describes himself as an “emotionally, sensitive person”. Paul is a “nurturing, emotional, sensitive person”. Earl is “a caring person”; he says, “as a child, I was always very sensitive and very emotional about things”. Frank says he is “generally nurturing”, despite people’s first impressions of him as a guarded person. Pete says,

I’ve always been a sensitive dude, being raised by women. My grandmother, my nanna, my sisters, they built a certain amount of sensitivity in me. ... I had sensitivity issues, I was more sensitive than guys my age, or guys period. Even in grade school I was the crier.

Care was understood as routine. The “every day and the routine” capture the process of ‘doing family’, where” individuals constitute certain actions and activities as ‘family practices’” (Finch, 2007, 66). Frank, a single father with sole custody, describes his routine with 8-year-old son:

I put him to bed by 8.30, after he's done his homework. If he finishes his homework early we can play some video games. I put him into bed, we sit and talk, give each other a couple of hugs and he's in bed between 8.30 and 9. I wake him up at 6.45-7 in the morning, get him dressed, piggy back ride to the kitchen, sit down, he would have breakfast, right now I don't know he's weird he's mirroring me, my breakfast consists of orange juice, toasts or bagels so that's what he wants, as opposed to having cereals like he used to [he laughs]. We'll talk about assignments due for the day or whatever he wants to talk about, whatever is on his mind. We're out the door by 7.30, we'll listen to music [in the car], pick him up from school later, go home, make diner. Fridays it's usually pizza night. So he has this little framework that he finds solace in and he know he's loved that way.

Routine can look a whole different for fathers who are not co-resident with their children. Pete’s first son, who he cared for as a stay-at-home father his first two years, was at some point living in a different county. The mother had officially custody but in practice, Pete tells me, “I actually had more custody than she did”.

I saw him every day, work was 5 to 10 minutes away from him. He lived in Westchester, I would take him to the Bronx with me, it’s a 20-minute ride. I would take him with me home, we’d do homework, he goes to bed, we wake up, I take him to school or we go to McDonald’s to get him his breakfast, I take him to school and I go to work.

The only time he was not with his son was at night. And even then,

He called me every night, 'I just want to be with you daddy' [he says in a whiny voice]. I would stay on the phone until he went to sleep. Or I would drive up, let him go to sleep, put him in his bed, let him rest on my shoulder, then I would leave. I was there 24/7. It was me and him.

An aspect of routine that was the most recurrent in the men's narratives was centred on food; making the food, feeding the children, sharing meals as a family, in, or outside the home. While the task of 'feeding the family' is highly gendered (DeVault, 1991), food was an important form of caring work for the fathers, from the planning of meals, food shopping, serving the food to cooking certain foods to please their children. It was clear that their ideas and practices were influenced primarily by class, from making baby food from scratch, supporting breastfeeding, concerns that their children eat nutritious and 'healthy' foods, to going to McDonald's for breakfast. Some fathers like Simon had anxieties about his child being a picky eater, recognises he needs "help with her food"; others like Kyle with older children were not enjoying routine, day-to-day cooking, having to adapt his cooking to each of his sons' preferences, while cooking a whole different meal for him and his wife; fathers like Paul plans ahead and cooks for two or three days or for the week, and describes the routine of making breakfast for his 1-year-old, and loving that "she's been loving it, she eats the whole thing". This contradicts studies like Devault (1991) in which she argues that men's cooking is a way to emphasize their creativity, rather than them expressing care, and that cooking is a space of leisure for men who "feel little of the anxiety and guilt that women associated with feeding the family" (Ashley et al. 2004, 132).

Care was understood as a responsibility. Some of the fathers with younger children described a "minute-to-minute, pervasive sense of ultimate responsibility" (Walzer, 1998, 28), which is a kind of thinking and feeling about the baby that is more generally associated with motherhood (i.d.). Pete talks about a "whole new level of responsibility" which made him more "focused"; "it was all about him. My whole purpose was making sure he was alright in one way or another". The next paragraph is a composite of extracts from conversations I had with Frank, a single father:

This is what I have to do ... it's always been this is what I have to do and it's fine. It was obvious, it was never a question, there was no transition where I was unsure it had to be done ... It's just an incredible responsibility, one that I accepted wholeheartedly, I didn't care, this is what I want to do, you approach it without question, which is normal. In any loving family that's the way it should be ... you know you have responsibilities and once you get a child, forget it, he's the boss, everything is about him, and that's the way it should be. ... We are all adults, we all have a responsibility that we chose to undertake whether we were ready for it or not, and you can never be 100% ready for that. You have a family and boom! [he snaps his fingers] face that responsibility with alacrity and joy.

Closely connected to that is the understanding of care as selflessness; the "idealised carer [is] constructed ... to embody a selfless, sacrificial, duty-bound, and dedicated disposition orientated to family and community" (Hanlon, 2012, 99). Were found in fathers' narratives elements of intensive parenting ideology, which expect that, most commonly mothers, "see the child as innocent, pure, and beyond market pricing. They put the child's needs first, and they invest much of their times, labor, emotion, intellect, and money in their children" (Hays, 1996, 130). Paul explains how responsibility is about "always making sure or trying to make sure all the kids' needs are met, family's kids are met, [his wife's] needs are met, but it's always at the expense of me". Frank says to me "I hope that when [Sam] grows up, he realises what I've done for him, what I gave up". William told me, "I gave a great amount of myself" as an at-home father, and that he has become more "selfish" now that his children have grown. Also, the phrase 'Our children are a top priority in our lives' is part of the principles of the Fathers' Group, principles that are read at the beginning of each meeting. It is clear that some of the fathers took up "the notion of the 'sacred child'<sup>94</sup>, seeing other people and demands as secondary to the priority of meeting what they perceived to be the child's needs" (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, 143).

Care also meant worry. The fathers described experiencing worry in ways that are "more typical of mothers" (Walzer, 1998, 34). To worry is part of the 'invisible' load of "mental

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<sup>94</sup> Sacred children are seen as "precious entities entrusted to adults' care, deserving the very best from us" (Nippert-Eng, 1996, 203); "In its extreme form, 'sacred-child parenting' places children (especially infants) on a pedestal of the highest magnitude. Here, a parent's life is utterly devoted to a child's needs and desires, subordinating all other goals, actions, claims, and people to the child" (204).

labor<sup>95</sup> (i.d. 32). Fathers for instance experienced 'baby worry'<sup>96</sup>, when their children got sick for instance. Some fathers like Silas and Dale who cared for small children, experienced stress about not being needed as much, and not seeing them as much one day; "I'm really scared about the day that's coming when they're not gonna need me much anymore, as they become teenagers", Silas shares with me, tear-filled. Paul described a type of mental labour that resembled "a more general sense of relentless responsibility and expectation" (Walzer, 1998, 31). He tells me how he "knew it wasn't gonna be sitting on the couch eating bonbons. ... I knew it was going to be work, being a primary caregiver. ... I don't think I fully understood to what degree of attention and focus and scheduling and planning". His routine at home echoes "the image of running at full capacity, and full capacity not being enough" (Walzer, 1998, 31). Paul explains,

The hardest thing is probably that... you get your routine, the baby eats, the diapers get changed, the baby naps or doesn't. ... But the hardest part really is that you're always on high alert, I'm talking with you but I'm listening to her, I'm turning my head and looking for her on the floor, you're always paying attention to the small details ... there's never really time to unwind. So when does that happen? That happens after the kids go to bed, after the kitchen's been cleaned up for the night. After Mandy and I have had some chance to sit together the two of us ... I'll sit and troll through Facebook until too late ... oh it's midnight now, I should probably go to bed. ... [I miss] the time for myself, to just like relax and unwind. ... I always feel like it's constantly shifting gears. This is the phase of the morning where everybody is still at home, [Mandy] and [Samuel] have to get out the door, sandwiches have to be made. They're out, it's a bit calmer now, it's good. Ok, feed the baby. Oh oh nap time nap time nap time. Ok she's napping. Feed myself ... it's always shifting gears to the next thing. Ok she's up from her nap and now I got to feed her, if she doesn't eat now she's gonna be cranky, this is her time to eat, ok we eat, and play, and when do I get my work done? Now it's 2 and I got to get out the door cause [Simon] is gonna be done with school. ... ok it's dinner time, I got to get dinner on the table, did she nap this afternoon?, has she got to be in bed early? It's always constant, constant ... As if

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<sup>95</sup> Walzer (1998) discusses three categories of mental labour, which are "worrying, processing information, and managing the division of labor"; the concept aims to capture "the internal and interpersonal work that is part of infant care" (32). Is included in this category what has been termed "emotion work" (Hochschild, 1979).

<sup>96</sup> 'Baby worry' refers to "the scheduling of medical appointments, babyproofing, or a change in the baby's diet. What I refer to as baby worry is generated by the question: What does the baby need? And babies need a lot. [It] is usually performed by mothers because they tend to be the primary caregivers; however, it can also be carried by fathers in cases in which they take primary responsibility for their babies" (Walzer, 1998, 34).



to prove a point [his daughter in the park is crying while we're eating lunch at the table in dining room, he goes check on her]. It's the hardest part for me, never a chance to relax, and unwind, not have to constantly be *thinking* about the next thing. Cause if this doesn't get done now, when is it gonna happen? Then everything gets compounded. (my emphasis)

Paul "learned to carry out a "need-oriented" care practice letting the routines of childcare determine the content of what [he] did during the day" (Brandth and Kvande, 2016, 76). His favourite summer holiday memory that year was when he was in the kayak with his sleeping daughter, in the middle of the water; "I wasn't on, I wasn't thinking, I wasn't doing, I wasn't planning", he says to me, nostalgic.

Victor is another father who worries too, "I have a hard time not worrying about him" he tells me. He also describes a kind of visceral attachment (Lupton, 2012) towards his child; it can be experienced as "a sense of absence when the baby is not around" (Ranson, 2015, 58). "It's never easy to go into a kid's bedroom and he's not there, at night" Victor shares with me. He has never left Jim with anybody. "I'm sure I can, but I've always been paranoid; what are people going to do with my kid?". He recalls once leaving him with his own mother for a short time; "it wasn't a good idea", she was already questioning the child why he had long hair; "I wasn't comfortable" he says to me. This resonates with Furedi's (2002) 'culture of fear' where parents sometimes do not trust their family and 'good parenting' is "associated with monitoring [children's] activities. An inflated sense of risk prevails, demanding that children should never be left on their own" (5). He likes his gym in Brooklyn because they have childcare and monitors everywhere so he can watch him while he is working out. "So you did leave him with other people then" I say to Victor, to which he replies,

That's why I joined this gym, every 5 minutes I would go and see him, my exercise was walking up and down the stairs to see my kid. At the time the woman working there was living around the corner, I could see her with her children at the schoolyard, I was more comfortable. I have a hard time not worrying about him. Even when he was with the nanny I was uncomfortable, when he was a new born, leaving him with someone else.

Victor tells me that he knows this behaviour as a father is not “healthy”. I ask him why, and he says,

I have to be able to let go and he should be experiencing... he’s very clingy with me. I love it but I know it’s probably not a good idea growing up like that. He has to be his own person (...) I wonder if I damaged my son by making too much time for him. You’re never satisfied with the job you do as parent.

He feels guilty of ‘hyper-parenting’ (Hoffman, 2010), which is most commonly found in mothers; guilt is a theme that “overrides differences between mothers”, who measure themselves against the dominant “‘good enough’ paradigm” (Gray and Ryan, 1996, 216); some of the men internalise that ideology, challenging the idea that only mothers take on the “invisible mental labour” of caregiving (Lupton, 2012b, 13).

Care was synonym for fathers of performing ‘emotion work<sup>97</sup>’ (Hochschild, 1979). Goodsell (2008) writes that fathers are expected to be “exercising self-discipline, controlling anger, communicating with children and being attuned to the child and the environment”, which requires managing emotions depending on the context and the audience (272-273). To be a father meant for these men patience, staying composed and in control of one’s emotions in moments of crisis, and better express their emotions with their children. Logan says to me, “If I’m ever frustrated, I now tell [Alice]. ‘This makes me frustrated’, ‘this makes me angry’, so that she knows where I’m going in terms of my feelings. It leads us to talk about it”.

To be a father is for Simon an opportunity to “test my patience and learn to verbalize and articulate ‘why’ ... I always have to catch myself ... don’t scream ‘haaa’, no pointing, no pointing ever, *speak*. That’s one of the things I feel I’ve seriously gotten”. He went from “stuffing it in” to managing his own emotions:

I had bursts of rage [with Lola] ‘don’t do thaaat!’. My therapist has also helped, it’s the focus of trying to articulate what I feel. It’s always been a problem of mine, articulating how I feel, being vulnerable or exposed or showing myself and having a

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<sup>97</sup> Which refers to “an intentional management and display of one’s own feelings” (DeVault, 1991, 53),

child, especially a girl ... the boys, you can be tough with them, you can harden up but [Lola] it's like the perfect thing, I can say 'I feel sad because of this' and not be afraid of my feelings with my daughter.

As men develop deeper bonds with their children, build trust and become involved in intimate care work, they are challenged "to understand and manage difficult feelings in intimate relationships" (Raymond, 2008, 32). Dermott (2008) identifies an 'emotional turn' that privileges "an emphasis on the aspects of male parenting that fathers themselves view as most significant: emotions, the expression of affection" (143). For Earl, who also sees a therapist<sup>98</sup>, to be a father is also to be able to connect to his emotions, express and regulate them, and in turn to model emotional regulation onto his son. To him,

The most important role of any parent is emotional teaching, emotional regulation, showing by example that you can have a situation, a problem, a challenge, and be able to deal with it emotionally, model that to your child, whether it's a boy or a girl, maybe especially for boys because there's a stigma about emotions for boys, they tend to not express them or inhibit them. Boys are just as emotional as girls. ... A good role for a good dad is somebody who's well connected with their own emotions, who can express them freely and can also regulate them, not let them overwhelm them either by coming out too strong or by suppressing them.

Care was also understood as rewarding. All the men talked about forming "deep emotional attachment" (Ranson, 2015, 68) that resulted from caring for their children on a daily basis and spending time with them. "It is difficult to spend time with young children and not be engaged in practical caring, and knowing and understanding takes time" (Jamieson, 1998, 166). Fathers do make the connections between caring for their children, and getting to know them, bonding with them, loving them. Logan on his time as a stay-at-home father with Alice tells me, "I get to be with my daughter and have this precious time with her and create a bond with her I'll always have". Simon, who had a hard time adjusting to becoming a single father, recognises that "after a while, the adjustment every day ... and then the bond between me and my daughter grew exponentially, it just flourished into what it is now". He remembers, "I got all that time, and I think about how many people have kids, they got to get a nanny ... they only spend this time amount. I got it all, right up until she was talking,

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<sup>98</sup> One third of the group of fathers were seeing a therapist.

before she was able to go to day care". When Lola went to day care, Simon tells me, smiling, "I think I cried 3 or 4 days when she had to go to day care", which reminds us of the kind of visceral attachment (Lupton, 2012) other fathers in this study have experienced and expressed. "I don't know if I could love anything more than that", he says to me, very emotional. Feelings of love for her daughter emerge every time he speaks about her; she is his "wonderful joy of apple cheeks and everything"; "the bond is woow! That's another thing about having a kid, I don't know if I could love anything more than that". He tells me,

Being a dad is... when she says certain things... like I'll make a nice thing, when it's time to clean up and fold, 'oh my god you're the best dad ever, you care about me'... those are the things that as... hulky and sometimes I try to feel a bit... cause I'm pudding, I melt away and I would not be the same person in my life if it wasn't for my daughter. She has been the blessing, the apple in the sky, my personal heaven. ... it taught me that unconditional love, like I can say 'no, but I don't stop loving you'.

### 5.3 Care as an embodied practice

*In their apartment, Ross' older daughter comes to her dad who is talking to me, climbs up the big leather black chair where he is sited, she crawls like a baby elephant or monkey, and climbs clumsily on his laps. She rests her head on his belly, stretches the rest of her body onto his legs, takes a foetal position and falls asleep, in this position. Ross wraps her in his arms, he's tapping gently her bottom, touching her hair or on her sides, all this time talking to me at the same time.<sup>99</sup>*

The fathers talked about, and experienced care, as an embodied practice. What emerged from their narratives and from the observations I made was the "weight of embodiment"<sup>100</sup> that Doucet (2006, 239) found also. This contradicts the view that "early fatherhood is largely disembodied" (Doucet, 2009, 91, citing the work of Draper, 2000, 2003). Fathers do enjoy and engage in "embodied caring behaviours" (Lupton, 2012, 41).

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<sup>99</sup> From fieldnotes.

<sup>100</sup> Embodiment involves "a scrutiny of how people experience and carry out their daily activities from within their bodies and an examination of how one's body relates to other bodies" (Tapias, 2006, 403).

Paul for instance describes his baby daughter is a “very cuddly kid” who likes “physical contact, the affection” in his words. In Central Park one afternoon as we are sitting on the grass and letting the baby walk around a bit, he recalls the start of his day with her:

Oh my gosh she was so sweet this morning, I was changing her diaper, I think 1<sup>st</sup> thing this morning when I got her out of bed and she takes two hands, puts them on my face and pulls me to her and kisses me and she did it like three times, muah muah muah [he mimics her] she’s definitely a shower of affection, I can say ‘can I have a kiss?’ and if I’m holding her she’ll lean over and she’ll give me a kiss. But this morning it was very sweet because it was unexpected and unprompted. I was about to lay her down to change her diaper<sup>101</sup>.

Men learn to be “insensitive to what our bodies can teach us since we assume that all knowledge has to come from the external world” (Seidler, 1989, 116); they “learn to identify themselves with rationality, but this was to be fundamentally separated from any sense of embodied experience. Even our bodies are no part of our identities as men” (130). In being involved in childcare, men experience ‘re-embodiment’ (Connell, 2005), “a search for different ways of using, feeling and showing male bodies” (233). Lupton (2012) argues that

Part of the positive meanings associated with the infant’s body, therefore, is the opportunity to experience skinship<sup>102</sup> and interembodiment<sup>103</sup>, to ‘return to the body’, to appreciate, acknowledge and revel in the ways in which the tiny body of the infant may be held and touched by oneself, to allow one’s ‘instincts’ to take over from one’s rational thinking. (9)

A clear connection emerges between care, embodiment, and “disclosing intimacy<sup>104</sup>” (Jamieson, 1998, 166). The fathers’ attachments to their children become not only emotional, but also “visceral” (Ranson, 2015, 58). Men learn “non-erotic forms of gentleness and touch as they get used to the bodily care of others” (Hearn, 2001, cit. in

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<sup>101</sup> From fieldnotes.

<sup>102</sup> Skinship refers to “the relational states created by close physical proximity, touch and intimacy” (Lupton, 2012, 40). It is the development of “intimacy through touch” (Tahhan, 2010, 217), or non-physical forms of touch but “which still evoke feelings of closeness, security and warmth” (228).

<sup>103</sup> The concept of interembodiment serves to capture “the relational dimension of embodiment, and the intimate relationships between infants and their caregivers that result” (Ranson, 2015, 177).

<sup>104</sup> Intimacy “is increasingly understood as representing a very particular kind of ‘closeness’ and being ‘special’ to another person founded on self-disclosure. This self-disclosing intimacy or self-expressing intimacy is characterized by knowledge and understanding of inner selves” (Jamieson, 2005, 2411).

Hanlon, 2012, 203). Child care “can allow men to explore emotional intimacy in relative safety, more so than with other intimate care relations” (Hanlon, 2012, 204). Poussaint (1974) writing about American men, and black men in particular, argues that “for a man to display feelings of love and vulnerability toward his children is more acceptable” (101).

Pete, a black father, says that being home with his son was

one of the best times in my life. Kids are your clay. You just see so much of yourself... it's too young to see yourself, but you see the first crawl, the first wobbly stand up with the legs, you hear dadadadada, things so monumental, you feel it, and to be right there, it's a whole other level. I remember him being sick, he's warm to the touch, doctor's visit, it was a *great* feeling because he needs me as much as I need him. I wasn't working so everything was him. ... it was the greatest feeling on earth, because you're so vulnerable, the both of you.

Frank compares what he felt in his body at the birth of his son to a cervical spinal fluid tap that was once done to him. He remembers they injected him with an aesthetic and he felt “the depolarization south from the injection point and it's almost like ... it's like dominos falling and a cold sensation ... it's just an incredible feeling, vouuuuum !”. For him, Sam's birth was the same kind of “shock”. He explains,

The little guy is doing 100 decibels, it shocks your body into a different state ... I literally just felt from the ground up [he snaps his fingers] something just switched on and all my attention, everything was on that boy. It's primal ... can't be unique, it's part of the human condition, part of the human experience, that was one of the most incredible things I've experienced in my life ... I was completely imprinted on that voice ... I was hooked.

Pete in his memoir, describes the main character whose wife is about to give birth at the hospital, as “having an out of body experience” (253). He sees his son's head being pushed out, and “the sight of the baby's limp body sent chills of worry throughout my soul” (254). Both of these birth narratives are experiences of paternal embodiment, and not “body-mediated-moments,” or “proxy embodiment conferred through ... his partner's body”, like Draper (2003) argues (254).

Care emerged as an embodied practice in the fathers' narratives; now, as Ranson (2015) writes, "the real question was how it played out in public" (177). The observations and fieldnotes I made were saturated with references of the fathers' bodily interactions with their children, both in private and public settings. Ethnography mobilises the researcher's body, it is an "embodied activity" (Coffey, 1999, 59). "We concern ourselves with the positioning, visibility and performance of our own embodied self", while other bodies are "most obviously watched, analysed and noted" (60). My (female) body was also "watched", was hugged by the fathers, and engaged in body contact with their children: in sum it was part of a relationship of trust; "what our body looks like, how it is perceived and used can impact upon access, field roles and field relationships" (68). All the fathers I spent time with displayed signs of physical affection with their children. My body also constituted an audience; once invited in Dale and his husband's apartment for a meal, I was asked afterwards if I wanted to come into their son's bedroom and watch as he was being changed by one of his fathers. Reluctant to step in this personal and intimate space, I stayed by the door and watched. I could hear them say, "I love you!"; "do you want to do hugs and kisses?". "[F]amilies need to be displayed"<sup>105</sup> (Finch, 2007, 66) and 'family practices' "need to be understood by others as carrying meaning associated with 'family'" (67). In the case of Dale and his husband, one could argue that because "their effectiveness and capability as parents are constantly being questioned by society", "gay and bisexual men ... [feel] the need to justify their parental quality and efficacy, even in more recent studies" (Carneiro et. Al, 2017, n.p.).

As men navigate "social environments that often assume men's incompetence in caregiving" (Doucet, 2011, 85), fathers seek "to convey that they are suitable caregivers and that they are doing family in socially acceptable ways" (91). However, most of my observations show that display was more about "conveying social meaning to each other" (Finch, 2007, 73),

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<sup>105</sup> 'Display' is "the process by which individuals, and groups of individuals, convey to each other and to relevant others that certain of their actions do constitute 'doing family things' and thereby confirm that these relationships are 'family' relationships" (Finch, 2007, 73).

where fathers and children confirmed *their* relationships as “family relationships” (i.d.), rather than about “conveying meaning to external agencies, or seeking reactions in a public context” (76). “[D]isplays of families require reciprocity” (Dermott, 2016, 145).

*In Ikea, after lunch, [Sam] who is sitting next to me puts his arm on the table and reaches out for his father’s hand. Their hands touch. He goes around the table and goes sit on his father’s laps. He wraps his arms around [Frank]’s neck. [Frank] hugs him back, while he continues talking to me.*

*In a prêt-à-manger, [Sam] tells his father he is cold. He gets closer to him, and lines against his chest. [Frank] strokes his hair gently. He touches Sam’s head and taps it gently, while telling me how proud he is of his son doing well at school.*

*In my garden in Brooklyn, [Sam] sits on his father’s laps and rests his head against his father’s chest, while he is drinking his soda, contemplating his surroundings, day-dreaming, trusting. Still sitting down on his dad’s laps, they play together with the game [Sam] brought with him, touching hands.*

*At the zoo in Brooklyn in hot July, [Logan] bends down and kisses [Alice] on the head. While watching the monkeys, he touches her hair affectionately. Later on, in the sun, he puts sunscreen on her face and arms gently, while she is enjoying watching the seals.*

*[Logan] and I are waiting for [Alice] at her school outside her class. The door opens, and I see her running towards her dad. She does not even see me. He gets down on one knee, arms open, smiling, and gives her a tight hug. Later on, we sit down in a cosy salon on the same floor, he’s asking her about her day. They’re both facing me, she’s sitting on his laps, and his arms are around her waist.*

*At an event organised for the Olympics at one of the piers, [Alice] is sitting on [Logan]’s laps; she starts crying, she’s upset. He hugs her, she puts her head against his chest, and buries her face<sup>106</sup>.*

If we agree that “men experience pressure to perform socially acceptable masculinity in public” (Hanlon, 2012, 61), and that “men learn how to involve themselves in ways that are acceptable, normal, and in concert with public expectations” (Doucet, 2006, 197), the men’s interactions with their children, across class, race, sexuality and faith, tell us something about the prominence, the visibility, and the normalisation of caring masculinities in global,

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<sup>106</sup> From fieldnotes.



cosmopolitan areas. Context matters: “the socially contingent nature of the body, and how it is experienced, will vary according to how, where, and when it is located and the nature of the social situations which prevail” (Nettleton and Watson, 1998, 8). “The social hybridity of such large cities, with their complex interplay of social relations defined by race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality, has ... led to a multitude of specific masculinities” (Moffatt, 2012, 4) that men can draw on. Connell (2011), drawing on recent studies (Ferguson, 2001; Brannen and Nilsen, 2006) argues that in some contexts, “softer masculinities, more equal marriages, and more emotionally engaged fatherhood, have become hegemonic” (45).

### 5.3.1 *Body techniques*

‘Body techniques’ in Mauss’ work (1979) hold three main characteristics; they are “technical”, in that “they are constituted by a specific set of bodily movements and forms”; they are “traditional”, in that “they are learnt or acquired by means of training and education”, and they are “efficient”, “they serve a definite purpose, function, or goal” (Williams and Bendelow, 1998, 50). These techniques are shaped by class, gender, religion, age etc. and are historically and geographically contingent. Mauss (1979) came up with the concept of *habitus* “to conceptualise the collective knowledge involved in ‘body techniques’” (Crossley, 2007, 86), distinguishing it from *habitude*, or habits or customs. The techniques are forms of “collective and individual practical reason” (Mauss, 1979, 101). ‘Body techniques’ also hold “symbolic significance, are normatively regulated and perhaps also ‘rationalized’” (Crossley, 2007, 86). They are “‘social facts’”, they are “characterized by a sociological distribution, social origin and by their diffusion through social networks” (i.d. 87).

The body techniques that the fathers develop, such as holding a baby, changing diapers or braiding hair, “in the learning, become routinized” (Ranson, 2015, 46). They “become part of a repertoire that fathers acquire, and that can be performed without conscious thought” (i.d. 111-12). For Crossley (2007), body techniques

embody knowledge and understanding ... Swimming is a form of practical

understanding in its own right, as is holding a baby, using a screwdriver, writing a letter or a list, applying lipstick etc. To study body techniques is to elucidate this level of practical understanding. (86)

Ranson (2015) in her study of primary caregiving fathers argues that

The embodied techniques fathers employ to care for their babies are learned. Competence is acquired through practice, in the course of ongoing engagement with the babies being cared for. Men who acquire this competence do so as embodied subjects ... who learn the skills – the ‘body techniques’ – necessary for the work. ... caregiving is a kind of skilled work, a kind moreover that requires an apprenticeship, but that, once acquired, remains in the repertoire, and can be performed on an ongoing basis in other contexts. (27)

Body techniques involve “training the gaze” (Crossley, 2007, 90). This training “is not gendered” writes Ranson (2015) argues (51). She argues that both fathers and mothers

must learn to listen for a baby crying, and to distinguish the meaning of a cry. They must learn when a baby is hungry, and how much to feed her; when a baby needs more stimulation, and what kind to provide him. They must learn, in short, to ‘read their babies’ signals, and respond accordingly (51).

Practices of caregiving involve a “form of perceptual ‘training’” (Ranson, 2015, 52). As body techniques, they are “involved in the conferral of meaning in the respect that they include specific technical modalities of perceiving” (Crossley, 2007, 90). “Attending to babies' needs on an ongoing basis ... produce[s] a kind of thinking about children’s needs” (Ranson, 2015, 51), that Ruddick (1982) has identified as ‘maternal thinking’, that fathers can develop as well. The fathers develop the skillset necessary to become proficient at ‘reading’ their children’s cues, before deciding on the right course of action. These cues produce “in caregiving fathers ... a perpetual watchfulness” (Ranson, 2015, 53). An example of that is when Frank remembers that “even during the first three years [that he was with his wife], I didn’t sleep if [Sam] breathed the wrong way. If he cried I was the one to take care of him”. “If babies’ sounds train their parents’ ears, so their facial expressions, gestures and body comportment come to ‘train the gaze’ (Crossley, 2007)” (Ranson, 2015, 53). Magaraggia (2013) in her study of Italian fathers coins the term ‘paternalita’, the “process of getting to know each other”; “[I]t is in this new daily rhythm that fathers can begin to lay the

foundations for paternalità, the slow getting to know each other by interpreting gestures and cries of the newborn and so understanding its needs” (84).

Frank used that idea of ‘training’ the body in reference to learning how to care for his new born son:

The only thing that’s actually helped me out was doing judo for 20 years. It teaches you about the kinesiology and the particular mechanics, by the same token you can help someone, or you can break someone. It’s the same with a child, to support the head ... and the rest is understanding what the child is telling you in their own little way and in a way they’re socializing and training you cause it’s their job to charm their pants off of you so that they can survive. Once you understand that, no, I’m not training him at all, he’s training *me*, when he needs to be fed, what he needs ... I was immediately tuned to that.

Fathers learn to distinguish the cries, and this learned skill “remains in the repertoire” (Ranson, 2015, 27). In my observations I noticed that the fathers were often able to identify the different types of cries of other people’s children, long after this knowledge was of no use for them anymore since their own children were grown. An example of that was at a show for new and expectant parents where the New York Group occupied the ‘dads lounge’, a space with changing tables, tables and chairs, couches, and glider chairs. Logan and I are talking, standing up in the entrance of the lounge, when we start hearing a baby crying behind us, that a father is changing. Logan exclaims, “oh my god that sound! I don’t miss it. It’s the cry of ‘I’m uncomfortable’. I didn’t believe there were different cries but there really are. Pain is a completely different one. Hunger is too<sup>107</sup>”. A similar example, when I met Sam, Frank’s son, for the first time, the three of us went to Ikea in Brooklyn to have lunch there. As Frank and I were talking, Sam starts complaining about twin babies at a table nearby who had been crying loudly. “I hadn’t even noticed”, I said. Frank laughs, and says, “it’s the same for me, I didn’t notice. Before [Sam] I would be bothered by these sounds, like babies crying, but after [Sam] I didn’t mind at all, I got used to it, you also learn to recognize the cries, whether it’s because the baby is hungry, he is tired, and so on<sup>108</sup>”.

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<sup>107</sup> From fieldnotes.

<sup>108</sup> From fieldnotes.

Ross is the father among the participants with the youngest child, Natasha, who was 4 months and a half when I spent a morning with them at their apartment in Brooklyn. There comes a point when Natasha cried for 10 minutes straight, temporary inconsolable in the arms of her father, who walked around the living room in circles, tapping gently on her bottom, talking to her, “oy boy!”, “yes I know”, “you do *not* like waking up today”, while remaining calm, and patient. “Why do you think she’s crying?”, I ask. He responds,

She had a doctor’s appointment this morning, she didn’t get the rest she needed. Usually [Veronica] nurses the baby before she goes to work, and then she naps. Also, there’s the medication for her heart she’s on, we don’t know if it’s connected, we stopped it two days ago. [Her older sister] had her first tooth at 5 months, could be that. May be teething.

Natasha has finally calmed down. “She’s certainly on her way to sleeping”, he tells me, still walking around with her in his arms. “She looks very relaxed”, I observe from one of the armchairs. He continues,

She’s fluttering. There’s a difference between the choice we’re making, because, because I’m here, I’m willing to endure my own pain more, rather than crying it out with her, I sort of wrestle her, I just let her cry it out *on me*, she cries out less.

I make the comment that it is courageous to put up with the crying of a child for lengths of time, observing my own uneasiness being in the same space as Natasha was crying. He explains that

it’s tough. I try and be pretty good about baby whispering where I can tell, or at least I think I can tell that she is where she is on her scale, ... and I know that ok, it’s only gonna go this far, I have 5 minutes left, and then she’s gonna be out.

It is an example of how the work caring is physical, not just in relation with the child’s body, but in the ways the fathers’ bodies are impacted too. If caregiving involves ‘training their gaze’ and other senses to better respond to the child’s needs, these same senses are simultaneously affected.

This echoes Qualls (1998) who writes about her “‘training’ in the lived experience of being a mother” (339):

Being a new mother constantly teaches me new ways of thinking, seeing, hearing, and feeling. My sensing now has a broader range of meaning for me. ... Now my ears distinguish such different cries as those of hunger, distress, pain, wet diaper, frustration, and anger. I feel the differences in my body, and I respond accordingly. ... Meanings and themes regarding my own child are unique and are constantly broadened and enhanced as each new stage of his development is reached. My response to other babies has changed as I have learned from my own child. ... I have learned to listen and sense on a level within my being that I never knew existed before (i.d.).

### *5.3.2 Doing hair*

Doing hair is a routine form of care, and an embodied practice of care, that requires the learning of 'body techniques'. It is one of the many "acts of physical intimacy and affection" that are part of everyday practices of care (Lupton, 2012, 39). When fathers take care of their children's hair, they experience 'skinship' and 'interembodiment' that are developed through the embodied interaction. Men develop "deep emotional attachment[s]" (Ranson, 2015, 68) that are produced by embodied acts of caring. Hamington (2001), on writing about washing his daughter's hair, argues that "care is not an explicit knowledge but implicit, tacit body knowledge grounded and practised in lived interpersonal experiences" (279). This section focuses specifically on black fathers doing their children's hair and what it means for them.

Very little has been written in the literature about fathers doing their children's hair. Doing hair is a practice done by both mothers and fathers in the African-American community: "braided hair in Black America and the Caribbean is gender-neutral; it can be done and worn by either men or women" (Mazrui, 2014, 186). African-American fathers "have also been identified as responsible for combing their daughters' hair, and as taking pleasure and pride in the task" (Lewis, 1999, 512). hooks (2004) writes that "Black men and women have always had a diversity of gender roles ... the idea that men could stay home and raise children while women worked hard had already been proven in black life" (9). This contradicts the cultural images of fathers being depicted as "inept, uninvolved or unimportant" (Parke, 2013, n.p.),

and of black fathers in particular, as being “deadbeat<sup>109</sup>, deficient, lacking, uninvolved, uncaring, and absent” (Connor, 2011, n.p.). A photo posted on Facebook and on Twitter by an African-American father on, at the time, a paternity leave, Doyin Richards, went viral in 2013 on social media. It showed him in his bathroom wearing his 3-months-old daughter and doing his 2.5-year-old daughter’s hair. While he was not the parent that usually did his daughter’s hair, his wife was late for work that morning and showed disbelief that he could do their daughter’s hair. He set the timer on and took the photo to prove her he could “handle it” (Daddy Doyin, 2013). The photo was liked and shared thousands of times. The responses he got on social media were at the extremes, from strong appraisal, being featured in the news and interviewed on national talk shows, being shamed for doing a ‘woman’s job’, to racists comments (“So do you do this for all of your illegitimate kids?”) (i.d.).

Lewis (1999), in her paper about African-American mothers doing hair, writes that hair grooming involves ‘necessary skills’ (511), which I understand as ‘body techniques’. Like the fathers who learn to recognise the different types of cries (see previous section), doing hair requires the need for “sensitive and responsive kinds of maternal behaviour, contingent on the child’s cues” (Lewis, 1999, 506).

Because of the variety of hair textures and choice of styles among African Americans, several additional skills must be learned if mothers are to perform the task of combing their children’s hair adequately. Several types of braiding techniques, familiarity with chemical treatments, and use of hot combs are probably the minimum number of skills required to groom original African hair. (i.d., 510)

Lewis and Swift (2013) argue that

Many Black infants’ hair textures may change during those early years from straight to wavy and easy to manage to a coarse and tightly curled texture that may require different hair care techniques and a range of time and patience to style. (61)

To do African-American hair can take up a lot of time. Lewis (1999) writes,

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<sup>109</sup> The ‘deadbeat’ fathers is “the one who does not pay child support” (Hamer, 2001, 230).

Original African-American hair comes in a wide variety of textures, ranging from very fine and straight to extremely coarse and kinky. Children's hairstyles also vary widely, from two or three simple braids or twists to elaborate curls and cornrows. So too, does the time required to arrange them – from a few minutes to several hours. The frequency with which the hair is combed ranges from daily or biweekly to monthly. Thus, parent and child spend a substantial amount of time on a one-to-one basis. (511)

To spend time with someone “is significant for creating and sustaining intimacy” (Dermott, 2008, 141). Intimacy comes in three forms: “embodied intimacy”, “emotional intimacy” and “intimate knowledge”<sup>110</sup> (Morgan, 2011, 35). Jamieson (2011) argues that “spending time with” is one of the “component practices” that make up intimate relations, along with “giving up, sharing with, ... knowing, practically caring for, feeling attachment to, expressing affection for” (2.2). Lewis (1999) writes,

The functional aspects of hair combing offer an opportunity for attachment, as well as intense emotional intimacy between mother and child. (506)

To do hair is “offers an opportunity for skin contact and physical intimacy” (i.d., 511).

During hair combing, mothers must repeatedly touch, pat, and smooth a child's hair. The child may be required to sit on the mother's lap or be held between her knees, increasing the area of skin contact. Maternal touch during hair combing may include massage of the scalp with ointments and oils. It may be harsh or nurturing, direct with the hand or more distal with an implement (e.g., a comb or brush). (i.d., 505-6)

During those embodied interactions, fathers create a sense of familiarity with their children, they develop “bodily knowledge of that other, through the hand or the eye” (Morgan, 1996, 134). “It is a 'qualitatively different' kind of knowing in intimate relations (Jamieson, 2011, 2.3)” (Davies, 2015, n.p.). “Set apart from sexual areas of the body, the head and hair afford a safe, risk-free embodied form of parent–child sensuality, something that is crucial in father–child exchanges” Gabb (2008) argues (128); she also writes that

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<sup>110</sup> Embodied intimacy “includes but it not limited to sexual intimacy”; it can include “forms of embodied caring under this heading as well as everyday touching”; emotional intimacy involves “sharing and disclosure but might also include what has come to be referred to as 'emotional intelligence' a kind of understanding of the other which is not simply at the verbalised level”; intimate knowledge is “partly what emerges out of embodied or emotional intimacy but is more to do with the interweaving of personal biographies over a period, often a considerable period, of time” (Morgan, 2011, 35).

Intimate bodily encounters are commonly part of everyday family routine, especially when children are young. Parents and children use bodily practices to communicate with one another, exchanging many different feelings such as love, gratitude, compassion and remorse. (i.d. 126)

Simon, a young, black, single father, talked already about his daughter's hair on the first day I met him in the subway in Brooklyn, waiting for the F train in direction of Manhattan (see Introduction). He told me, "yesterday was the last day of Pre-K, I took her to a saloon, she had her hair and nails done", looking at Lola fondly. "But usually, yes I do her hair", he says. The next time I meet him, he says, "I have to do hair, I have to do hair". Lola's hair is mixed, since her dad is black, and her mother is Hispanic; her hair is "wavy", "it's not as kinky as mine, but it is itself a beast", "she has a big old puff, and sometimes she can have it lay nice and wavy"; "I have to do so much" with her hair. He describes their hair routine

Most of the time, if I want to get it really nice, I have to wash it, condition it, and make sure it's nice and wet, and moisturise it and apply another layer of coconut oil so that it holds, and then another set of, I don't know my mum says it's edge tamer, cause little frenzies pop up on the side so I push it back, so it's like a 3-4 step process, and I didn't even get to braid her hair yet ... I have to comb it out, it takes me like *an hour and a half*, to do her hair. (my emphasis)

"Do you braid her hair afterwards?" I ask him. He replies,

yes, only I'm trying to learn how to... I can do the braids, put it in many different parts and then braid it that straight from here [he shows me top of his head] [you strengthen the hair and then you braid it?] yeah. First you have to get all the... make sure it's all kinked out, that way I can catch everything and then I do it. Some people do it without anything. I part her hair, if I can do many little braids, but I would have to start at the top parted already, not directly like continuous, I can't do that, I can't do that! That's too intricate, my fingers don't do that. [so you do small different ones, not a big one] I can do many ones but they'll be like two ponytails braided and then it will be different ponytails braided, that's the only way I can do it.

Simon does research and looks at tutorials to learn the 'body techniques' of braiding hair. While we are talking, I start doing a fishtail with my hair. "I can do your hair right now, it's easy, it's easy to do anything", he says to me. He is watching me, and speaks at the same time,



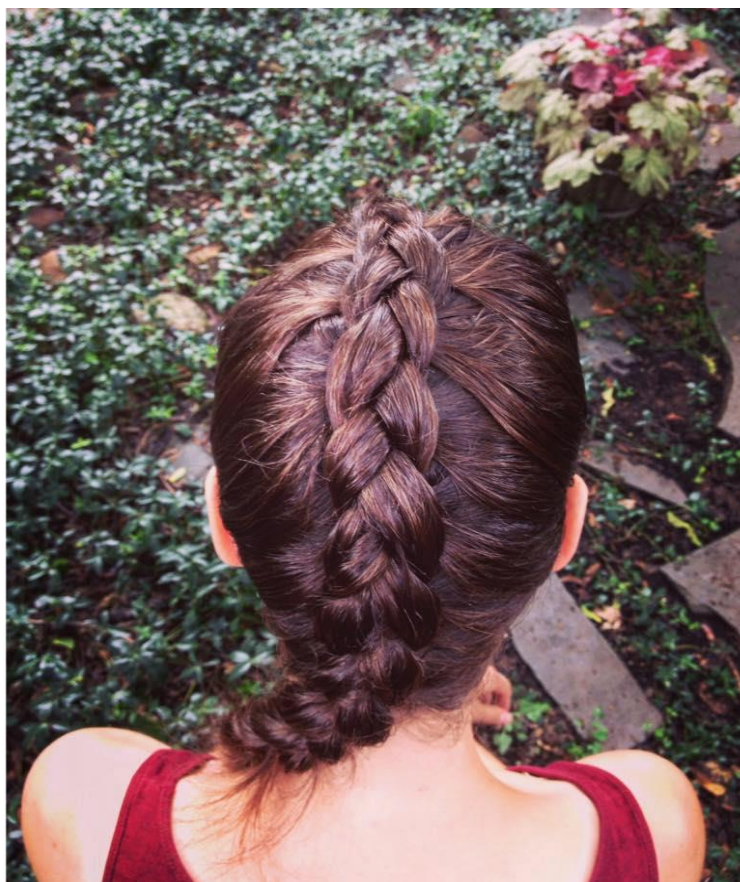
cause my problem is when you get to the end, that's where it gets hard for me, I just put those tiny rubber bands on. [he's asking questions about the technique I am using] I'm all about form and technique. It just looks like little hearts. It does look like a fishtail. I'm so gonna practice that one. At the end of my braids there's always one that's just longer, why is that? Why is that? I'm like, *why?* So how do you finish it?

I ask if his mother, the grandmother, who lives with them, helps him with Lola's hair. He describes her as a "tomboy", who is "almost as good as me, she's slightly better than me. She doesn't really know braids", he says, and laughs. "[Lola]'s like, which one's going to really hurt my head, is it daddy's hands that gonna hurt more or is it mommy's [the grandmother] hands that gonna hurt more", he tells me, laughing. Hair braiding is an opportunity "for intimate or harsh touch" (Lewis, 1999, 510).

Simon says that doing Lola's hair is "a bonding thing". "Soon she'll be able to do her hair by herself", I tell him. "You think so? I don't know, some girls, they can start and go like this, and then 'oh I'm finished'", he replies. "I meant, you won't be doing her hair forever", I tell him, smiling. "Yeah I know... I don't think she's gonna be 16, and I'm gonna be [still braiding her hair]", he says, laughing. He recognises that hair is for girls an important aspect of their "emerging sense of gender" (Lewis, 1999, 508); "for girls, the hair is the most precious thing, for women, it's defining, it's the femininity, it's 'you're a woman!'", he says. Mothers, and we can see that also fathers, "unconsciously communicate the message to their daughters about what the gendered self looks like verbally or non-verbally during hair combing interactions" (Lewis and Swift, 2013, 58).

As we are talking about hair, hairstyles and techniques, I show him a photo of a Dutch braid on my phone that a hairdresser did recently with my hair, to which he reacts very enthusiastically: "that's what I'm talking about, that's what I want, that's the one I want to do for Lola!! That's perfect. Oooh I wish I knew how to do that!". Simon is very excited:

that is so cool, [Lola] would die for it! I would pay for that, that's amazing. You better show me, I swear you better show me. I'm not playing. I would pay for this. I'll be over there tomorrow like 'do my daughter's hair'! [he laughs] I need that. That's a necessity, I'm so serious.



The photo shown to Simon.

Simon had once taken Lola to a ‘kitty spa’<sup>111</sup> for her Pre-K graduation, and he complained that “they did not know what to do with her hair”. “Were they white?”, I ask him, to what he says that they were,

but there’s no [black owned] kitty ones... where she’s gonna be treated like a princess. [The white hairdressers] could say it and be honest up front, ‘I don’t know how’ and I’d be like ‘ok thank you’. I paid 50 dollars, what a waste. I’d pay more if they did it right. I don’t know where to go you know.

I recommend he takes Lola to the hairdresser I went to to style her hair, since she was from Dominican Republic. ‘We Work With Any Kind of Hair’ the saloon advertises on their store banner. I meet Simon the following month at a meeting in Manhattan with the Fathers

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<sup>111</sup> Children spas offer treatments for kids which include manicures, hairstyles and makeup.

Group. I hear him talking to one of the other fathers about taking his daughter to the hairdresser with excitement. He comes to me later on,

Oh my god she *loved* that place, oh my gosh! but her hair doesn't stay! ... you should have seen her [he mimics her put her hair back, opens his mouth] 'daddy take the picture' I mean she was very princessy. Oh my gosh. Nothing was ever the same [he smiles].

Another example is Logan, who, in a post-fieldwork interview<sup>112</sup>, explains how learning how to do Alice's hair, which is mixed since her mother is white and her father is black, was important to him as a father:

I was adamant about learning how to care for her hair because, I'm her parent. Just because I didn't have to care for my own hair in the same way, it doesn't mean I shouldn't learn how to care for hers. I've learned how to do ponytails and pigtaileds and braids ... I take pride in that, I like the idea I've learned how to do these things for her, and with her. So for me that was amazingly important. I had to do that, I had to learn that. It's one of the few times I do pat myself on the back a little bit. I'm very proud of the fact that I didn't shy away from that and I went right in and learned how to do it.

I ask him how he learned to do his daughter's hair. He says,

Hands on. just [my wife Leone]. I didn't YouTube any of this stuff, I said 'alright, just teach me how to do braids' and I would watch pigtaileds, and ponytails, oh ok, that's pretty straightforward I can do that. And I just jumped right in. and [Alice] is always super patient with me. She's encouraging, 'it's a good job daddy, good job today!' [he laughs] 'daddy did my hair today, look at it, doesn't it look good?'. She's fantastic when it comes to that. I jumped right in.

Logan recalls being on a subway platform with Alice going to a soccer practice; she had done the ponytail for herself, however, he wanted to fix up the ponytail a little bit, to which she agreed. He found his performance of fatherhood being watched by a black woman. He explains,

And there's a black woman who is watching this, much to my chagrin, and says, 'oh I want to see this, I want to see how you do her hair', but it was in a way that made it seem like she didn't... yeah because I'm a guy, I'm a man, 'is he really gonna be able to do this?' I didn't really even respond, I just went about the job and did her hair,

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<sup>112</sup> By skype.

and that was it. I finished. It's also still a novelty to be a dad who is comfortable doing daughter's hair. For me, I'm kind of over being a novelty, all I'm about is trying to be the best dad that I can be and be a good role model for [Alice]. Because I always think about the fact that I lean into discomfort. This is not my area, I am not knowledgeable about this. I was a little bit nervous about it. But I leaned in and I'm just going forward and now it is an area of comfort. ... And I want [Alice] to have that mentality. To not be fearful of trying something and going out there and figure out some of these things so she can be able to pass along that knowledge to someone else. If more of us would have that mentality, Donald Trump would not be president [he laughs], it's the 'I just want to lean back and do the things that I know and I don't want to branch out'.

Logan invests here in a particular kind of display, through which intersectionalities of race, class and gender are operationalised. Black families are constructed as "pathological" (Jordan-Zachery, 2009, 111), and black fathers are read through the lens of the run-away, irresponsible, uncaring, black father discourse (Hamer, 2001). These discourses are strongly classed as well; they criminalise low-income, black men, who do not provide financially. Also, "within African American communities a parent is perceived as neglectful if their child appears in public with hair that is not styled" (Lewis and Swift, 2013, 56). Logan, in being there, in showing care, affection and skills, conveys the message, "this is my family and it works" (Finch, 2007, 70).

Although Alice's hair is curly ("but not the type of curly that most black people have"), her hair is very much part of her identity as a brown person, and it is a "shared experience" that she has with her father. Because of his own experiences as a black man, because of the ways "people were treating it and asked and were touching it and say ridiculous things about it", Logan was concerned even before Alice was born about how he anticipated people to be treating her hair. He shared stories with his wife, and with his daughter also; "her hair, that novelty, the hair, it's still very sensitive, I think [Alice] understands that and has that appreciation for what's that'll all about, cause I shared stories about my past with her". He explains to me,

it definitely connects to my experience as her father and some of the things I was concerned about. Having grown up black, going to a predominantly white school, when I was 12, I had to deal with people finding my hair a novelty, I was always very

sensitive about it. I started to take more pride in it when I went to high school, around 15-16 I started to style it differently and be proud of my black hair. I wanted to make sure that [Alice] had a sense of pride in her hair. Once I started to cut it, I actually kind of had a sense of *relief*, not only it was easier to deal with but I was less likely to have people comment on it.

One of the things I'm very sensitive about is when some of her white female friends are like 'oh I love her hair' and either want to touch it or make a comment about it and it just always makes me feel uncomfortable. I'm pretty sure I wrote a piece on my blog about that, helping people understand how they shouldn't just touch my daughter's hair or make a comment immediately about her hair and trying to educate people about that. Come on, most white people, if not an extremely high percentage, don't understand or have a real knowledge whatsoever about black culture and what hair might mean to us. I took it upon myself to try to educate [Leone] about that so she's very sensitive about it; she specifically looks for hair products that are designed for mixed children, there are actually products out there specifically for mixed children and that's important to her, she's been a great partner in terms of this, very willing to listen, never defensive at all, now is pretty knowledgeable enough to share that information with other parents, that couldn't be any more amazing.

"Why is it important for [Alice] to be proud of her hair?", I ask. Logan replies,

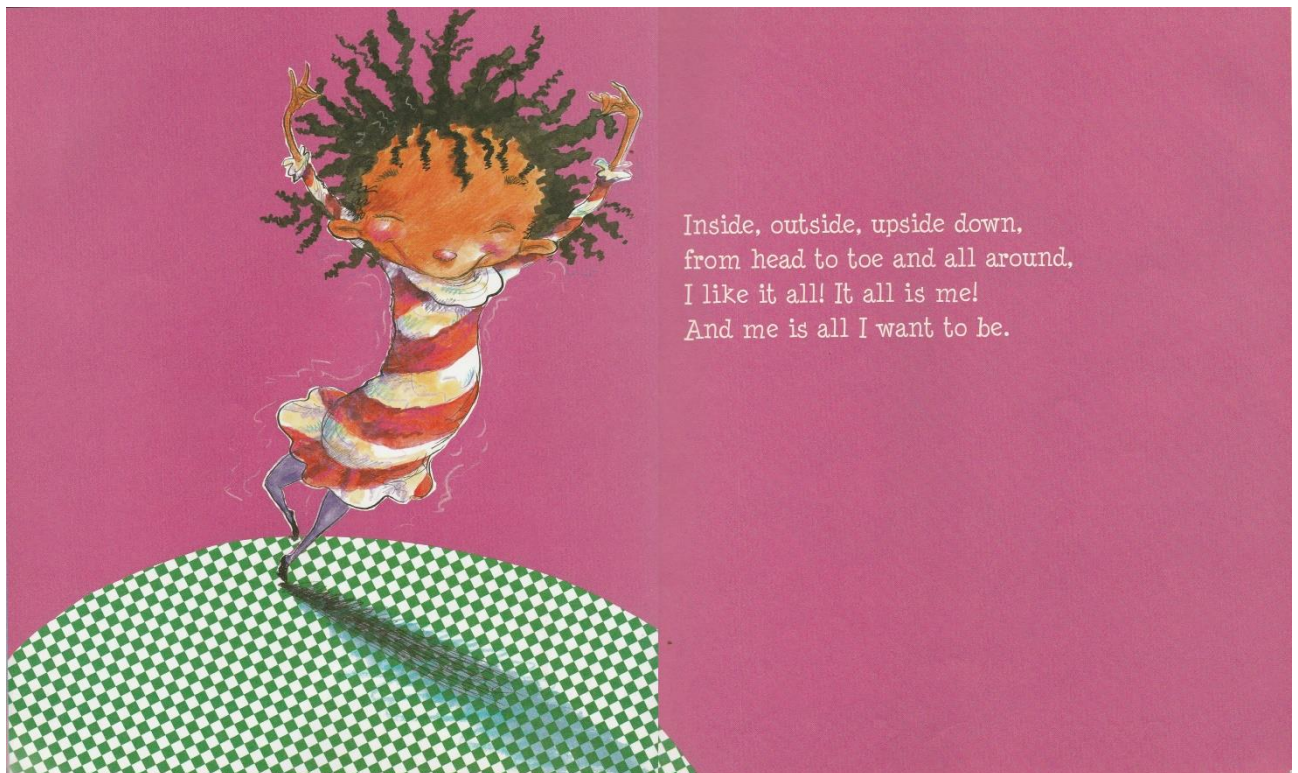
because for so long, so many, specifically black women, have done different things to their hair, to make their hair look more *white* and for us, we would love for her to not have her, like she has to look one way or the other, just be comfortable with who she is and what she looks like and to be proud of that. It's about confidence, it's about having a sense of pride, and looking at it as a positive and not a negative, not a burden, there are enough burdens that people of colour have to bear, enough burdens that women have to bear and other marginalised people have to bear, I didn't want hair to be one of those.

He understands that his daughter grows up in a cultural context where African-Americans, especially women, are taught to feel bad about their natural hair; there is in the U.S. "a conspicuous devaluation of African physical features and the establishment of beauty standards based on idealized depictions of White women's physical features" (Greene, White and Whitten, 2000, 166). Black women in Logan's view

were told they were not attractive enough, that their hair was messy and it wasn't beautiful. I think nowadays it's ok to have natural hair. I started watching *Nappily*

*ever after*<sup>113</sup> on Netflix. It's so important for [Alice]'s identity development especially now that she goes to a predominantly white school where pretty much everybody else doesn't have hair like hers.

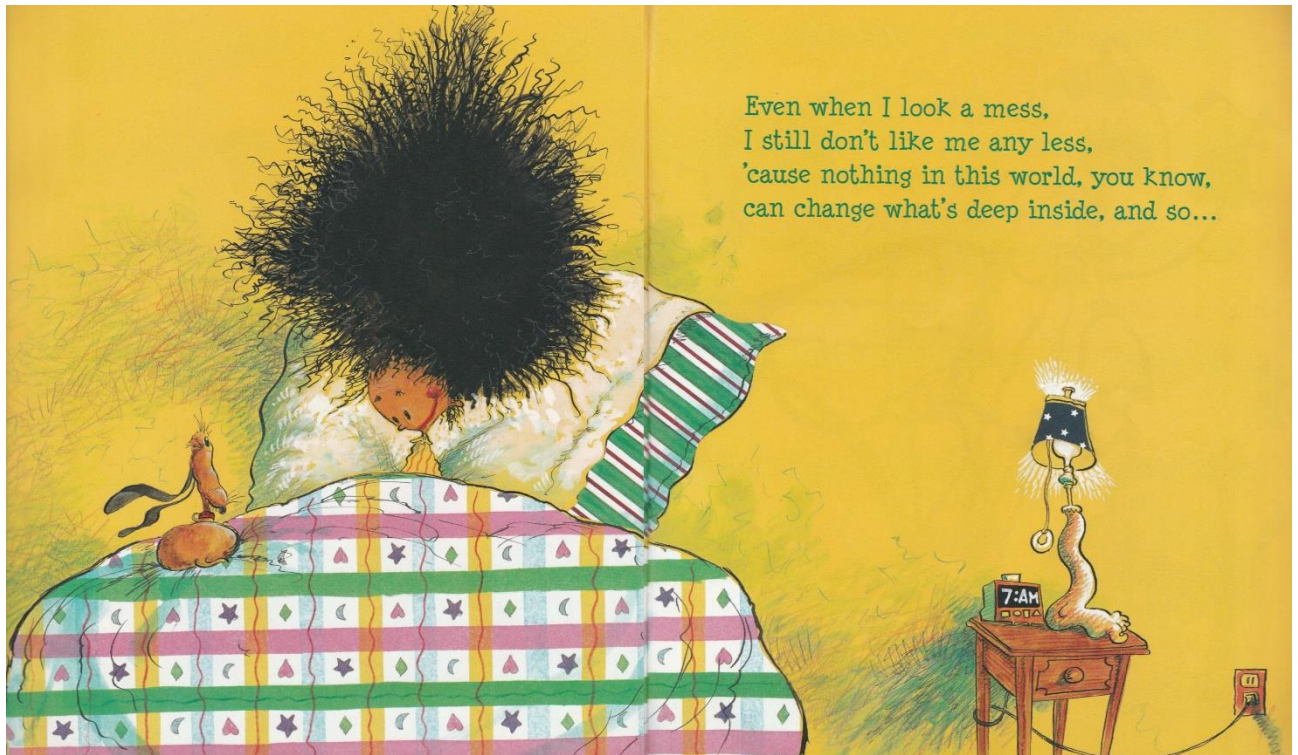
Logan and his wife engage in cultural socialization<sup>114</sup> practices, such as picking out books; "we've always had books that revolve around taking pride in your hair, songs about loving your hair, in helping her understand that her hair is a wonderful part of her identity", he says. Logan's favourite one, *I like myself!* (Beaumont, 2004), contains "short reminders about being confident in who you are, and liking that part of your identity, and not being ashamed at all of your hair"; also, representation matters: "the girl looks like [Alice], that's one



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<sup>113</sup> 2018 movie on Netflix.

<sup>114</sup> It refers to "parental practices that teach children about cultural heritage, ancestry and history; that maintain and promote customs and traditions; and that instill cultural, racial, and ethnic pride" (Hughes and Chen, 2003, 474). It "promotes children's positive racial identity development and self-esteem by preparing children to interpret and cope with prejudice, discrimination and negative group images emanating from the outside world" (i.d.).



Extracts of *I like myself!* (Beaumont, 2004).

of the reasons why we like that book”, he says. “Inherent in messages communicated to children about racial features is an emotional message of acceptance or rejection” (Lewis and Swift, 2013, 62). ‘I like myself’ is one of a long series of books about African-American children and their hair. hooks’ (1999) children’s book, *Happy to be Nappy*, celebrates ‘nappy<sup>115</sup>’ hair, and writes “Girlpie hair smells clean and sweet/ is soft like cotton, flower petal billowy soft,/ full of frizz and fuzz” (n.p.). This book “achieves its racial and gender positive message by unilaterally challenging and replacing negative images and attitudes about black people's hair” (Lester, 1999, 45); it denies “racist stereotypes associated with black people's hair: that it is dirty and stinky because of the hygiene grooming techniques exactly the opposite of hair grooming for whites” (Lester, 2007, 206).

<sup>115</sup> Smitherman (1994) refers to nappy hair as kinky hair, “extremely curly hair, the natural state of African-American hair, curled so tightly it appears ‘wooly’” (37). ‘Nappy’ is historically a derogatory term. In African-American communities it came to be associated with ‘bad hair’, in opposition to ‘good hair, which is “straight and silky” (Rosado, 2008, 493).



Extracts of *Happy to be Nappy* (hooks, 1999).

The “harsh touch” (Lewis, 1999, 510) and pain experienced by Alice when her mixed hair gets tangled mirrors in Logan’s words the “real pain and suffering” what people who were white and black in the U.S. and who loved each other went through for a long time as their relationships were taboo and against the law until 1967 (Obama, 2007, 11). Logan explains,

There are times that it’s hard to comb or it gets tangled, and I say, ‘you know, think about the fact that those tangles kind of represent how hard it was for people like mommy and I to be married. If that’s what you have to endure to remember the real pain and suffering people had to go through in order to just express their love and be married, you know. You can handle that’. I try to remind her about that.... she understands it really is a representation of both of her parents, one of the ways that she can always remembers where she comes from and who she is.

For Logan, doing hair is not just about the technical acts themselves, or the moments of intimacy shared with Alice; it also means talking about hair, fostering pride and confidence and promoting “positive racial identity development and self-esteem” (Hughes and Chen, 2003, 474). To foster ‘racial consciousness’ is “a strategy of resistance” adopted by (mostly



middle-class) black parents who "aim to instil a sense of history and solidarity for the 'black' struggle to provide their children with a way to emotionally distance themselves from racist discourses" (Garratt, 2017, n.p). Alice's hair becomes a symbol of pride, of beauty, but also a symbol of love and struggle; the pain endured by people from the past who were like her parents continues to live through her, to keep their memories alive, to remember that black people have had to fight for their rights. The body is not entirely private or autonomous; it is a "natural symbol<sup>116</sup>" (Douglas, 1970). Hair is a "symbol of the self and of group identity" (Synnott, 1993, 410) that carries both personal and public meaning.

In a video<sup>117</sup> uploaded on YouTube, a black stay-at-home father films himself washing his son's hair. He writes in the description of the video that this is an opportunity to "hang out with them and have their ear". The father talks his son: "Say, 'I am strong'. Say, 'God loves me'. Say, 'Black is beautiful'", mantras that the son repeats after him. "Very good. Say, 'I am a leader'". "Who are you?", he asks. The boy replies, "I don't know". "So you gotta find who you are man". "Why?", the boy asks. "Because that's everything. Who you are will tell you what you will do and what you don't do. You may not be understanding me right now but I'm not gonna stop telling you this", the father replies.

Young boys who are African American are subjected to constant information about who they can be. An hour in front of the TV might lead these boys to ask themselves "Why am I underrepresented in commercials? why do many of the shows not include someone who looks like me? Why are so many of the villains and sports heroes in movies African American males? Teaching these boys to be critical consumers of the information they receive, showing them alternative models in both media and real life, and being overt about this injustice can help inoculate them against rigid 'buy-in' of who they are and who they are capable of being. In the same way, young girls with darker skin might wonder "Why am I underrepresented in positive roles in many shows and movies? Why am I seldom on the cover of magazines? Why am I frequently not depicted as strong and intelligent? (Zimmerman and Aberle, 2002, 2-3)

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<sup>116</sup> "The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body . . . sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other" (Douglas, 1970, 69).

<sup>117</sup> Beleaf in Fatherhood (2017).

## 5.4 Conclusions

This chapter starts with fathers' conceptualisations of care; the research shows that fathers construct a form of "de-gendered 'parenting'" (Ranson, 2015, 19). Care is believed to necessitate a set of attributes that both men and women have. Men who are primary caregivers draw on the same discourses that are more commonly associated with mothers. The men are involved with the mundane, routine forms of care; their children take up space in the fathers' minds and become priorities over everything else; men take on 'mental labour' (Walzer, 1998) and 'emotion work' (Hochschild, 1979); they plan meals in advance and adapt to their picky eaters and worry about their picky eaters, all of this showing how the men absorb elements of intensive parenting culture.

The next section demonstrates that the body is not just a set of physical needs, it is also a site of bodily practices and of emotional attachment. Men talk about feelings of love and the pleasures of intimate baby work, they develop 'body techniques' that become part of their caring repertoire, they describe feeling a 'visceral attachment' (Ranson, 2015, 77) to their children. Fathers display care and caring relationships, for them and their children, and for other audiences too. Because we are talking about different men, there are types of display attached to their performances as fathers. When Logan is watched by a black woman while he is doing his daughter's hair, there are at stake issues of representation of fatherhood and of masculinity, but his performance is also racialised, and classed, and challenges the stigma attached to black fatherhood.

The body is also a site that certain children, black children in this chapter, have to negotiate, that white children do not have to. The latter do not need to worry about people finding their hair exotic and having it touched by people who did not ask to. Black children need to think about how to carry themselves in public, about how their bodies can become, even for a short moment, other people's properties. The body becomes a site for exclusion. It also becomes a work of affirmation. Hair is a 'multivocal' symbol (Turner, 1967, 50). Practices of care come to encompass for certain fathers talking about the meaning of hair with their children. The examples of Simon and Logan show there is a distinctiveness of certain things when taking in consideration the broader context of African-American fathers'

experiences and the wider politics of identity.

## 6. Families and networks of care

### 6.1 Introduction

The last chapters may have given us an image of the fathers as being a bit secluded; we discussed the importance of support provided by the men's partners, wives and husbands, however, not all the men were in stable, married relationships with a high-earning partner. Some of these fathers were single and working full-time, others had stopped working completely when they became primary caregivers. This chapter seeks to answer the following questions: who counts as 'family'? Who is involved in helping those fathers delivering care? Who do the men mobilise, and why? This research shows that men rely on support networks of care; there are familial, but also other sorts of relationships are involved in the caregiving process. I demonstrate in this chapter that a lot is drawn upon female labour, provided by grandmothers, nannies, babysitters. Some of the 'Experts', described in Chapter 3, as well as the 'Apprentices', rely in practice on networks composed primarily of women for help and support, which concurs with existing research (see Doucet, 2006). Presented in this chapter are 'family trees', which are visual representations of the men's 'families', showing the kinds of relationships they understand to be 'family'. This research shows that a lot of the men "believe in the value of networks and community" (Hansen, 2005, 156). Gender intersects with class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, faith, as well as location, shaping parenting ideologies, expectations, and opportunities.

### 6.2 Diverse families

At the time of research, 8 out of 15 fathers lived in married, nuclear household families; 7 were married to a woman, 1 to a man.

2 fathers had full, physical custody of their children, 1 was divorced and 1 was separated from the mother and single. The latter, Simon, was living in a three-generation household headed by a woman.

Out of the remnant 5 men, 2 fathers were divorced or in the process of getting a divorce. They were sharing custody more or less equally with their ex-wives, and the children spent time in two separate homes, one headed by the mother or the grandmother, and one headed by the father. 2 men, Bradley and Mathias, were divorced also but were not residing with their children as they were grown-up and had left the house, with the exception of Mathias' adolescent daughter who was living with her mother in Florida. Bradley was living by himself and Mathias was sharing an accommodation with a long-time friend. 1 father was separated from his son's mother and could only see him under supervised visitations because of his recent encounters with the law; he was living by himself.

3 out of 15 fathers had had children outside of marriage. Pete had had 2 children with two different women, and his current girlfriend was pregnant of his third child. Dale was homosexual, married to a man and they had a son. Manuel was transgender, married to a woman, and they had a son. Mathias had adopted a son from a previous heterosexual relationship, who was from a different descent than him. 6 out of 15 fathers had had children with partners who were from a different descent than them.

The fathers had created different sorts of families for themselves: the boundaries of who counts as 'family' are drawn and redrawn as relationships and 'homes' change. Goldberg (2012) talks about an "explosion of new family forms" (3), citing broad changes that happened in family life in the United States since the 1970s, such as rising employment rates for women, decline in marriage rates, increase in divorce rates, increases in cohabitation, progress in assisted reproduction technologies; surveys show an increasing acceptance of "non-traditional approaches to family formation" (5). The 'Standard North American Family ideal'<sup>118</sup> (Smith, 1993) is now "in the minority" (Golombok, 2015, 1). As Weston (1991) puts it, there is no "single coherent form of family" (27); she argues that "in

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<sup>118</sup> "The ideology of the Standard North American Family assumes a heterosexual, two-parent model. Although children are not a necessary component of a Standard North American Family, when they are present, family households constitute the primary site of child rearing. Also implicit in this ideological code is the idea that children continue the legacy of the family materially, culturally, religiously, and, except in cases of adoption, genetically" (Hansen, 2005, 4).

the United States, race, class, gender, ethnicity, regional origin, and context all inform differences in household organization, as well as differences in notions of family and what it means to call someone kin” (28).

Yet, “idealized notions of the family as nuclear, heterosexual, and biologically related continue to dominate contemporary popular media and public discourses” (Goldberg, 2012, 5). They continue to be “gold standard against which all other family types are assessed” (Golombok, 2015, 4). Gay families are often understood as ‘alternative families’, alternatives to a normative construct. “Black family structures are seen as being deviant because they challenge the patriarchal assumptions underpinning the traditional family ideal” (Collins, 1990, 77). However, “nuclear families do not constitute the timeless core of what it means to have kin in this society, relative to which all other forms of family must appear as derivative variations or marginal alternatives” (Weston, 1991, 7). The ‘American family’ is as much a myth as the ‘gay family’ or ‘the black family’. “All kinship is in some sense fictional” (i.d. 105). Families are made and unmade through symbol of blood, genes, love and choice.

For many in the United States, “biology is a defining feature of kinship” (Weston, 1991, 34). Simon for instance, who had broken up with his ex and who did not want to be a father, knew his ex’s new born was *his* when he was told the baby had the same rare blood type as he did. Like a paternity test, this sort of news “may provoke the complete reconfiguration of a person’s identity and, by extension, his or her personal relations” (Fonseca, 2009, 261). “There is no choice about it; such effects are built in” (Strathern, 1999, 75). Simon at first was “very angry, in denial, scared” when he learned about the pregnancy, until it was confirmed that the baby is blood type negative O. He was not there for the baby’s birth, his mother was. The day Lola was born, he did not want to hold the baby.

Then my mother and I went home, and we had a big argument. I broke the car somehow, I was screaming, bashing in the dashboard, I felt all that rage and fear and anger. [“That was a lot to accept and to process”, I say]. Yeah it was, it was very hard.

[Being a father] was a rude awakening, not rude, I want to say it changed my maturity level inside on life, it just changed everything.

However, as Weston (1991) notes, cultural anthropologists have tended to “overlook certain bonds regarded as kin by the “natives” themselves” (2). Writing about lesbian and gay kinship, she argues that “families should not be confounded with genealogically defined relationships” (i.d.). Other symbols such as love and choice were important for some of the fathers in making sense of who was related to them.

Mathias, a black, Christian, heterosexual father, remembers being 21 when he met the mother of his children. She was 22 at the time, and had just had a child herself. She was Dominican and had had a baby with a Puerto Rican man, who was out of the picture. “For two weeks, I was talking to God, praying. I was wondering if I was ready to be a dad”, Mathias says to me. He talked to his mother, who asked him if he was ready to be a father, and they had a long dialogue about what it means to be a father, especially to be a stepfather. Mathias remembers thinking, “I don’t know if I’d be the stepfather, I think I’d like to be the guy that raises him and I think I’d be good at it”. He recalls the first time he met the baby,

The first time I met [Leo], my older son. He was 4 months old. I loved this kid, I held him... her dad was murdered when she was 11 or 12, he wasn’t around either. I remember thinking, yeah, that would be normal. ... august the 22<sup>nd</sup> I kissed her. That was the beginning of being a dad. ... the fact that she had a son was a bonus. ... the day after we got married I adopted [Leo]. He has my name. *We have the same blood type*, go figure. ... he knows his other half-brothers but I’m dad. [my emphasis]

Adoption appears “to occupy the borderland between biology and choice. ... adopted children are chosen, in a sense” (Weston, 1991, 38). Also, black communities in the United States have never held to “a strictly biogenetic interpretation of kinship” (i.d. 37). Informal adoption and foster care have long been practiced in black families since the time of slavery, with roots in Western African cultural practices; Hill (1972) calls this tradition of taking in children and elderly members from other families ‘doubling up’. A greater percentage of African American families adopt “nonrelated children than any other ... group” (Jaynes, 2005, 16). Adoption is spoken of favourably in the Bible: in the Old Testament, a Hebrew

woman named Jochebed gives her infant child when the Pharaoh orders all Hebrew male new-borns to be killed. She puts the baby in a protected basket and places it in the river, child who is found by one of Pharaoh's daughters while she is bathing. She eventually adopts him, a foreigner, in the royal family, and she names him Moses. The latter becomes a servant of God.

Dale, a gay father, was inspired by a gay friend he knew who had two children via surrogacy with someone else; "seeing other gay men doing it, it feels like it's possible, you know", he says. He and his husband had their son through a surrogate, "a friend of a friend", who lives in Pennsylvania<sup>119</sup>. They used an anonymous egg donor. "It's only accessible for people who have money", Dale says to me<sup>120</sup>.

*In their apartment, before dinner, I look at the children's books that are on a table in the living room. One is called 'Daddies are awesome'; another one features a black woman on a bus, who I understand is Rosa Parks<sup>121</sup>. The cover of another one features an alligator and a duck; [Dale] says to me, "it's a baby alligator raised by a duck mum. It's hard to find book with something else than a mum and dad<sup>122</sup>.*

For a long time, the words 'gay' and 'family' were "mutually exclusive categories" (Weston, 1991, 22). Homosexuals have been constructed as narcissistic, selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, "single and unattached" (i.d. 157). Gay stereotypes associate homosexuality with being white, rich, muscular. But wealthy, white, gay men are "neither representative of nor identical with the totality of gay people" (i.d. 129). Many people today still hold ambivalent feelings towards homosexuals becoming parents (Pew Research Center, 2013). Gay prospective fathers face barriers as a result of being both gay and male (Downing et. al 2009). Gay families continue to face structural and institutional barriers in order to become parents and

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<sup>119</sup> Where surrogacy is legal. 3 states, Michigan, New York and Louisiana, do not allow "paid surrogacy arrangements, or prohibit both intended parents from being on the birth certificate" (Forde, 2019, n.p.).

<sup>120</sup> "Surrogacy is typically pursued by only a narrow subset of gay men: those who have considerable financial resources (the average cost of surrogacy in the United States is over \$100,000)" (Goldberg, 2012, 10).

<sup>121</sup> Rosa Parks is an African-American woman and an activist who refused to give up her seat to a white man in 1955 in Alabama. She was arrested and fined. Her arrest sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a 13-month pass protest, a critical chapter in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

<sup>122</sup> From fieldnotes.



to be recognised as families. Gay fathers continue to face discrimination with adoption agencies and workers (Goldberg, 2012). Weston (1991) argues that

What gay kinship ideologies challenge is not the concept of procreation that informs kinship in the United States, but the belief that procreation *alone* constitutes kinship, and that “nonbiological” ties must be patterned after a biological model (like adoption) or forfeit any claim to kinship status. (34)

By actively disentangling both heterosexuality and biology from parenthood, gay adoptive fathers destabilize several key assumptions about family, such as the notion that all families are created through heterosexual reproduction and the notion that all families are biologically related. The very fact that men are parenting with male, not female, co-parents is a fundamental challenge to traditional notions of “motherhood” and “fatherhood”. (Goldberg, 2012, 11)

Both Dale and his husband lived in Manhattan most of their lives. They lived in a suburban town in Westchester county when I met them. New York City is considered to be one of the most progressive metropolitan areas of the United States. New York is a democratic state, and the zip codes 10023, 10024 and 10025 on the Upper West Side in Manhattan are the most liberal in the country (New York Times, 2000, 108). NYC, an emblematic gay city, is known for the Stonewall Rebellion<sup>123</sup>, a historical and political event that marked LGBT<sup>124</sup> history. The city has the largest gay population<sup>125</sup> and one of the largest LGBT population in the country. LGBT populations have access to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center in Greenwich village, historically a gay neighbourhood, alongside with Chelsea and Hell’s Kitchen, in Manhattan. When I meet John<sup>126</sup>, a gay father, it was not long after the Orlando shooting<sup>127</sup>; I ask him if he feels safe in New York City as a gay man, he says

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<sup>123</sup> Police raided the Stonewall Inn bar in Greenwich village in Manhattan in 1969. Gay bars were regularly raided, but this time the patrons and others resisted and fought back. It remains “a landmark event in the fight for lesbian and gay liberation” (Miller, 1998, 10). “Much of gay and lesbian life is talked about in terms of “before” and “after Stonewall” (Kort, 2008, 9).

<sup>124</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender.

<sup>125</sup> The city has the largest gay and lesbian population in the country in terms of sheer size (Leonhard, 2015).

<sup>126</sup> John was a gay father I interviewed, but who had not or was not a primary caregiver. He had a partner and they had had twins through surrogacy.

<sup>127</sup> The Orlando shooting happened on June 12, 2016, where a security guard opened fire in a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, 49 people were killed and 53 were wounded (Alvarez and Perez-Pena, 2016).

In every aspect I feel safer here. And even in the bigger picture just because there's more gay people and I feel like I'm surrounded by... like the four of us walking together, we get smiles or nods or winks, people look, they think 'how nice, a gay family', where sometimes you take us out of this environment and put us somewhere where it's less common, I think people have different thoughts or they're confused by it.

In a conversation with Dale, I ask him whether he originally had a preference for a son or a daughter, he replies, "it's big just to have a child you know". He, however, "may have avoided having a biological child" by letting his husband be the biological father. He explains to me,

If you look at your child's face and you see you own features, it feels like an extra level of connectedness that in a way I didn't want. I just wanted to love this child ... I'm already emotionally connected enough, I didn't want that extra 'Oh my god it's me!'

Dale understands his relationship with his child through the metaphors of choice and love. The absence of a biological connection does not make him less of a father. If anything, Dale says, "the child is more bonding with *me* [than with his husband]" as Dale is spending more time with him as an at-home father. Dale's conception of family echo with Weston (1991) who writes

[T]he gay and lesbians I spoke to ... considered a nonbiological mother, father, or co-parent no less a parent in the absence of legal or physiological connection to a child ... Biological relatedness appeared to be a subsidiary option ranged alongside adoption, co-parenting, and so on, *within* the dominant framework of choice that constituted families we create. (189)

Dale finds himself challenged by heteronormative<sup>128</sup> conceptions of kinship, saying to me, "I view myself as not traditional. I didn't think it would matter to me, the problem is everyone focuses on asking who he looks like. He has curly hair. Nobody knows which characteristics will be passed on".

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<sup>128</sup> Heteronormativity can be defined as "the mundane, everyday ways that heterosexuality is privileged and taken for granted as normal and natural" (Martin, 2009, 190). It also has been described as "an ideology that promotes gender conventionality, heterosexuality, and family traditionalism as the correct way for people to be" (Oswald, Blume, and Marks, 2005, 143).

[Gay fathers] are not insulated from or immune to heteronormative gender norms and ideals. They may alternately or simultaneously draw from or derive meaning from normative conceptualizations of family, fatherhood, and parenthood ... gay men resist and accommodate to dominant cultural and societal norms (such as the societal presumption that family members should look alike). (Goldberg, 2012, 12)

On a separate occasion with his husband Matthew, I ask him if being biologically related to his son is important, he says, "I think about it when I look at him. [Benjamin] is emotionally closer to [Dale] than he is to me, because he's home with him a lot. Sometimes I think about it. I don't think about it often". When I ask him how he feels about the relationship Dale has with their son, Matthew says,

It hurts, in my head, I'm his dad, his father. Kids get different things from each parent. He calls us 'dad' and 'papa'. It was a negotiation. I wanted to be 'daddy', I grew up with a daddy, I didn't grow up with a 'papa'. ['What is the difference?' I ask] Just the identification of the word. You grow up with a daddy, you think one day you're gonna become a daddy. But because I spoke Spanish, papa is 'daddy'. 'Daddy' and 'dad' are the same. 'Father', it's more normal. When we say to [Benjamin] 'how many daddies do you have?', he says 'two', he has 2 daddies, he understands it intellectually. But it's fine, papa's fine, I'll keep it. I don't need much to make me happy.

Dale and Matthew are Jewish and white, and both their sexuality and their ethnicity played a role in their choice of the egg donor. Dale explains to me half-jokingly, "we didn't want to be a gay couple with a child from another race, we didn't want to add another problem<sup>129</sup>". He worries already that their son is going to be discriminated at school for having gay dads, which is real (Clarke et al., 2010); having a child their own race would spare him additional forms of oppression and discrimination. Strategies to create resemblance between family members is a form of 'display work' (Finch, 2007); physical resemblance plays a role in "the recognition and legitimization of (marginalized) family relationships" (Nordqvist, 2010, 1141). Whiteness becomes a privilege, a means to conform to "the requirement that a "real" or "normal" family be physically similar" (Goldberg, 2012, 189).

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<sup>129</sup> From fieldnotes.

In the Jewish kinship cosmology, the primary criterion for being Jewish is birth<sup>130</sup>. Jewishness is passed matrilineally through the mother. The children take their father's name. Because gay men and lesbians have been viewed as "members of a nonprocreative species" (Weston, 1991, 23), they appear "to menace the legacy of "strong" kinship bonds sometimes attributed to other categories of people", among them Jewish people (37). Gay identity is a "threat to ethnic ... identity" (i.d.). Dale says to me,

My father was bothered by the fact that I'm not biologically related to my son. He has relatives who died in the Holocaust, [I would hear] 'you have to reproduce'. I also took my husband's name to make things worse [he laughs]. ... I didn't fit in his worldview his oldest son would be gay. He got used to it. [When I told him I was gay, in college], he said *I was continuing Hitler's work*. He was a bit drunk when I told him. He still drinks too much. [my emphasis]

Dale finds it "difficult to be a gay parent", especially now that they moved in an upper-class suburban small town, an area that he describes as "very conventional". He explains, "most men here are in finance or business, there are so many cultural differences, and parents have nannies". Dale and Matthew moved recently because "it's supposed to be the best schools in the area". "It's a bit alienating to be the only one of your kind", he says. He met one couple of lesbian parents, and over time was slowly getting to know other gay men. Being an older parent as well, "that's another outsider thing". He feels lonely because "I don't get on with people easily". He has strained relationships with both his mother and his father, who are not together anymore. He talks to his brother "but we don't have much in common". Dale says to me, "I don't have family really". "What about your friends?", I ask; he replies,

it's not great. In the old days people called people, I just have no one to call .... The closest person I have is a woman who lives in my building, the grandmother of a boy that's in [Benjamin's] class, she drives us to school, one day a week now. I just like her and we see each other because of the children.

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<sup>130</sup> "Most rabbis argue that Jewishness is passed through pregnancy and birth -- not through genetics, meaning that Jewishness is established through the womb" (Goldberg, 2010, 86).

Dale is an 'Apprentice', as described in Chapter 1; when I ask him who he goes to when he needs help or guidance with Benjamin, he talks about it with Matthew, but also goes to this grandmother. He says about her, "she's a super intendant in the school, she's accomplished in education, she has amazing patience, she's very good with her child, she watched the child 2 or 3 days a week".

Manuel, a queer, transgender, white dad<sup>131</sup>, who lives in Boston<sup>132</sup>, received a lot of support from his<sup>133</sup> parents, who live on Staten Island in NYC; "I had a lot of support from home". He knew he did not want to bear children around the age of 8. He remembers thinking about adoption and foster care early on. Growing up as female, he first came out as lesbian, and transitioned in his 30s. When I ask him whether he experienced challenges as an at-home dad and or a transgender dad, he responds, "it has been a challenge as much as an opportunity for me. I have really strong, close friendships with women, all of my close friends are women. [Collin] has a lot of aunties". In another conversation, he brings up again his "amazing friendships, with queer people, mostly queer women".

We actually call ourselves a family, we get together for family dinners, our families get together. The other day at a wedding for one of us, I just had the most morbid but beautiful thought, I just saw us doing this many many years from now at each other's funerals [he laughs], that is a really morbid thought, but this is who we are you know, we're gonna celebrate, and mourn, and celebrate again, doing that for babies, weddings.

Like gay and lesbian parents, trans-parents create their support networks that function as 'families of choice'<sup>134</sup> (Weston, 1991). Transgender individuals (and lesbians) are more likely to rely on assistance of close friends and chosen families in comparison to gay men and bisexuals (Boyd, 2019, 78).

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<sup>131</sup> Manuel prefers the term 'dad' rather than 'father'.

<sup>132</sup> Massachusetts has the second-largest LGBT population in the country (Smith, 2018); LGBT residents make up for roughly 5% of the Boston population, making the city the 5<sup>th</sup> largest LGBT community in the country (Voorhis, 2018). Boston has the largest LGBT health and research facility in the United States. "To have access to healthcare, it's huge and wonderful. I have a privileged life in that way", Manuel tells me.

<sup>133</sup> Manuel's preferred gender pronouns are he/him/his.

<sup>134</sup> "Gay or chosen families might incorporate friends, lovers, or children, in any combination" (Weston, 1991, 27).

When I ask Manuel whether he is concerned about the image he projects as a trans dad and a queer family, he responds

not outside of my immediate family ... we're the odd ones in the family, everybody went a certain path and I didn't. in this way we're very traditional, we got married and we're having kids, but the way we're doing it, there's a little difference.

He and his wife had a son using a sperm donor from California<sup>135</sup>. She carried the baby. They tried 3 times with one donor through IUI<sup>136</sup> in a doctor's office, went with a second donor, tried 3 times, which did not work. Each attempt, the buying of the sperm and the medical visit cost them 1000 dollars a month. At that point their insurance kicked in and they could try I.V.F.<sup>137</sup> which was covered, "which is a huge deal", Manuel tells me. In Massachusetts where they live, if you are over 35 years old and you have been attempting it for 6 months, then it is covered; under 35, you have to try for 12 months. He adds that if they were trying at home as a heterosexual couple, "we could walk in and say we've been trying for 6 months, but we needed to actually document it by buying sperm, go in the doctor's office. Any home attempt ... would not be counted". This is an example of how "trans people and their families are creating and sustaining families within the context of systemic discrimination" (Downing, 2013, 114). On selecting the sperm donor, Manuel shares with me,

As [my wife] said I was in charge of bringing the sperm, that was my job. I did research, I went through profiles, I narrowed it down, we were trying to find someone that had some of my features. You can tell how well it worked [he laughs]. Although he does have my eyelashes. When he gets complimented on eyelashes I'm like 'oh yeah I take credit for that, I mean I did pay for them!' [he laughs]. The guy, we knew he had long eyelashes, and as he got older his hair got darker. ... And the later one [the donor's photo at 5 years old], hum.... our future's looked a lot more like him. He's like, pale, blue-eyed, kind of auburn hair, none of these things describe me [he

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<sup>135</sup> One of the largest national sperm banks in the country.

<sup>136</sup> Intrauterine Insemination is "a fertility treatment that involves directly inserting sperm into a woman's womb" (nhs, 2017).

<sup>137</sup> In Vitro Fertilization. The average cost of IVF is 12,000 dollars the cycle (Gurevitch, 2019, n.p.). "During IVF, an egg is removed from the woman's ovaries and fertilised with sperm in a laboratory. The fertilised egg, called an embryo, is then returned to the woman's womb to grow and develop. It can be carried out using your eggs and your partner's sperm, or eggs and sperm from donors" (nhs, 2018).

laughs]. [Your wife is blond right?] yeah, blue-eyed, brownish blond. I was calling him my recessive gene baby [he laughs].

Manuel had already transitioned when he met his future wife. He says to me, “I can’t deny we have heterosexual privileged by virtue of day to day in a grocery store or whatever”. It is easier for Female To Male individuals to ‘pass’ as men than Male To Female individuals ‘pass’ as women (Lev, 2004). Manuel and his wife are afforded normative heterosexual privileges in ‘passing’ for a straight couple; other queer families do not have that and experience more stigma and discrimination (Downing, 2013).

Dale and Manuel, while belonging to marginalised and oppressed populations, also hold on to racial, class, and geographical privileges, which make it easier for them to decide to become parents and enable them access to the means of achieving it. This demonstrates how, “to capture the experience of queer families, sexual and gender identities cannot be isolated from other socially positioned identities” and “social locations are interlocking and mutually constructed” (Fish and Russell, 2018, 3).

### 6.3 ‘Family trees’

7 out of the 15 fathers of this study drew a ‘family tree’, a mapping of biological and non-biological relationships that had been important in shaping them both as individuals and as fathers. From the drawings and the conversations with each of these men emerged old and current connections of people that they loved and support networks they relied on. The ‘trees’ are closer to Ingold’s (2000) ‘relational model’<sup>138</sup>, which “allows us to conceive of a world in movement, wherein every part or region enfolds, in its growth, its relations with all the others” (140), than to the genealogical model of kinship. The latter “presents a history of persons in the very peculiar form of a history of *relatedness*, which unfolds without regard to people’s *relationships*” (136). The ‘trees’ here connect the men to “their life in the world”, to “their [current] relationships – that is to their experience of involvement, in perception

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<sup>138</sup> Which relates to the concept of ‘progeneration’, defined as the “continual unfolding of an entire field of relationships within which different beings emerge with their particular forms, capacities and dispositions” (Ingold, 2000, 142).

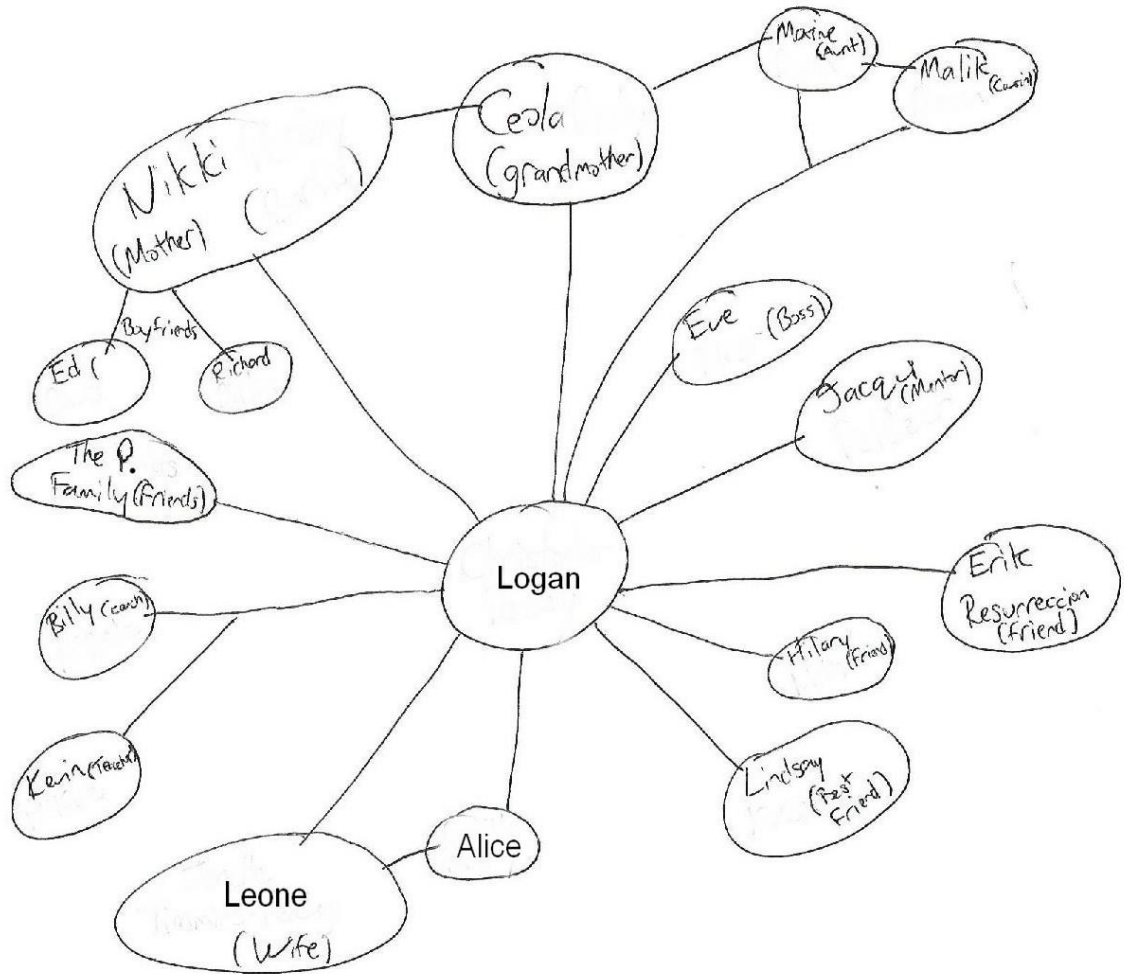
and action with their human ... environments” (136). Some of the fathers’ ‘trees’ resembled more “a dense and tangled cluster of interlaced threads or filaments, any point in which can be connected to any other” (140).

For his ‘tree’, Logan drew<sup>139</sup> a circle with his first and last names in it in the middle of the page, and then drew multiple circles with names in them around him all connected to him with lines. The circles around him are of different sizes; he explains to me that they are proportionate to the influence they have had on him. In the circles are written the names of the people with their first names and last names, even his daughter. He puts in parenthesis in each circle underneath the names the type of relationship that links him to each of them (‘coach’, ‘friend’, ‘mentor’, ‘wife’, and so on).

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<sup>139</sup> All were handed a A4 white piece of paper, some used the whole page, other folded it in half and used half the page.



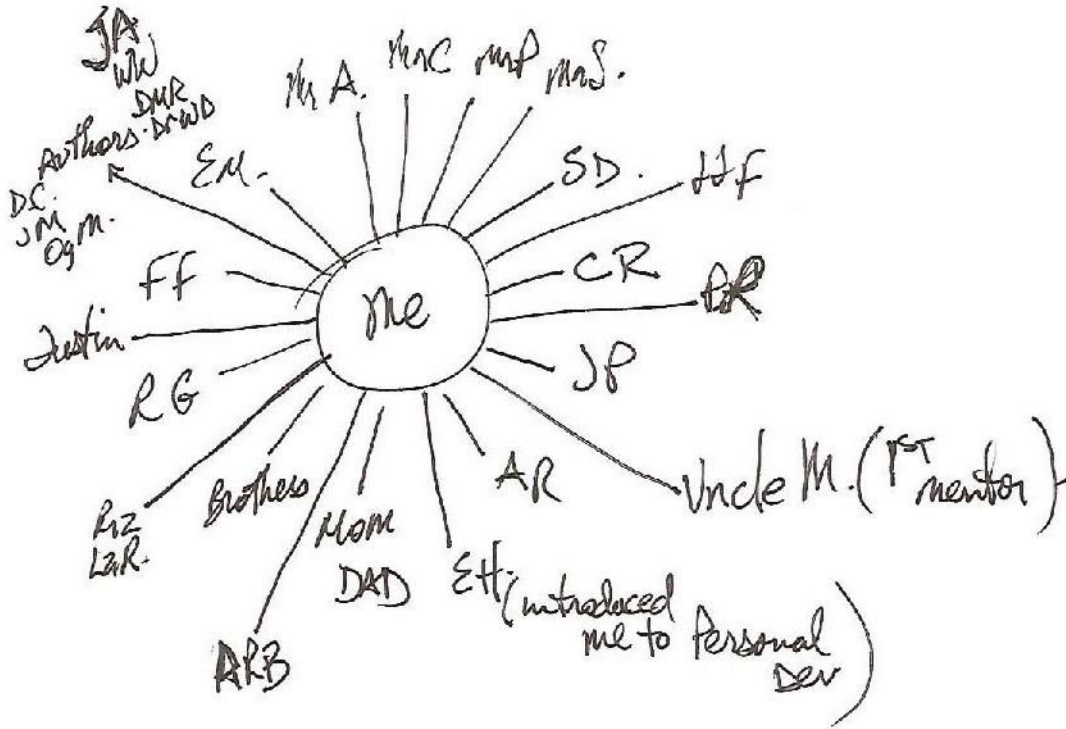


Logan's 'family tree'<sup>140</sup>.

On one quarter of the page, Mathias drew a circle with 'me' in it, and then very much like a sun, drew multiple lines, a small line, followed by a long line, etc., all connected to the central circle. At the end of each line, he wrote down either initials ('FF', 'EM', 'JP', etc.), kinship terminology for his blood relatives ('Mom', 'DAD'), one friend with his first name. For two

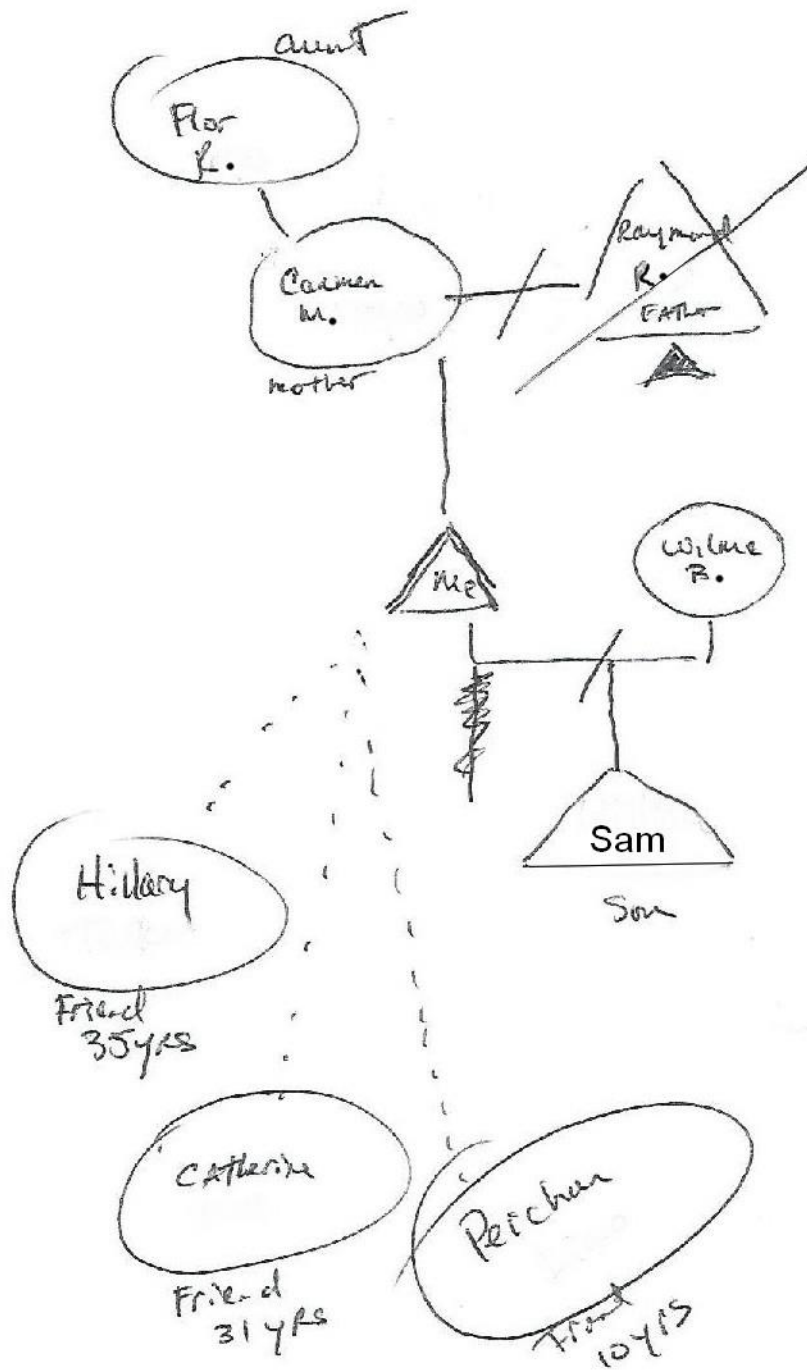
<sup>140</sup> To protect the identities of the fathers and of the people that figure in these 'trees', last names have been erased. When the fathers name themselves, their children or their partners, names have been replaced with surnames that are used in this thesis.

individuals he specifies in parentheses '1<sup>st</sup> mentor', and 'introduced me to personal development'. Next to a line with a couple of initials written one below another, he writes 'Authors', for the authors of books that have influenced him.

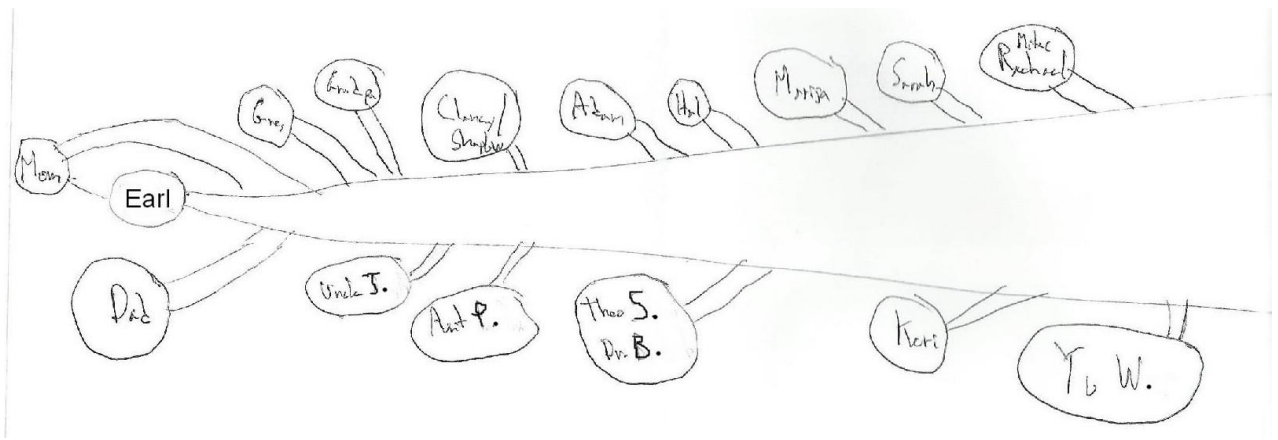


Mathias' 'family tree'.

Frank wrote male names in triangles, and female names in circles; his first and last names are in a triangle, his parents' names are drawn above him, his aunt's name is connected to his mother with a line, his father's name is crossed over since he passed. He also crosses the connection between his parents and on the connection with his ex-wife. He draws his son's name in a triangle. He draws pointed lines that connect to him, (pointed, because not genetically related to him); three female friends he has had for a long time. He writes the number of years he has been friends with each of them. All of the names, like Logan, have first and last names. He also writes the types of relationships these names refer to, outside the triangles and the circles ('mother', 'father', 'son', 'friend', etc.).



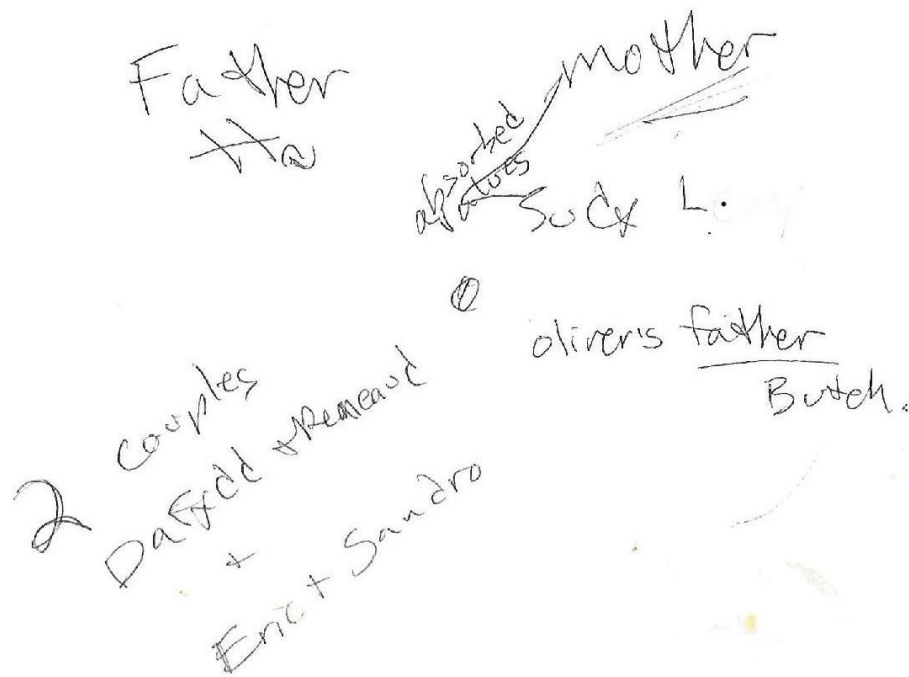
Frank's 'family tree'.



### Earl's 'family tree'.

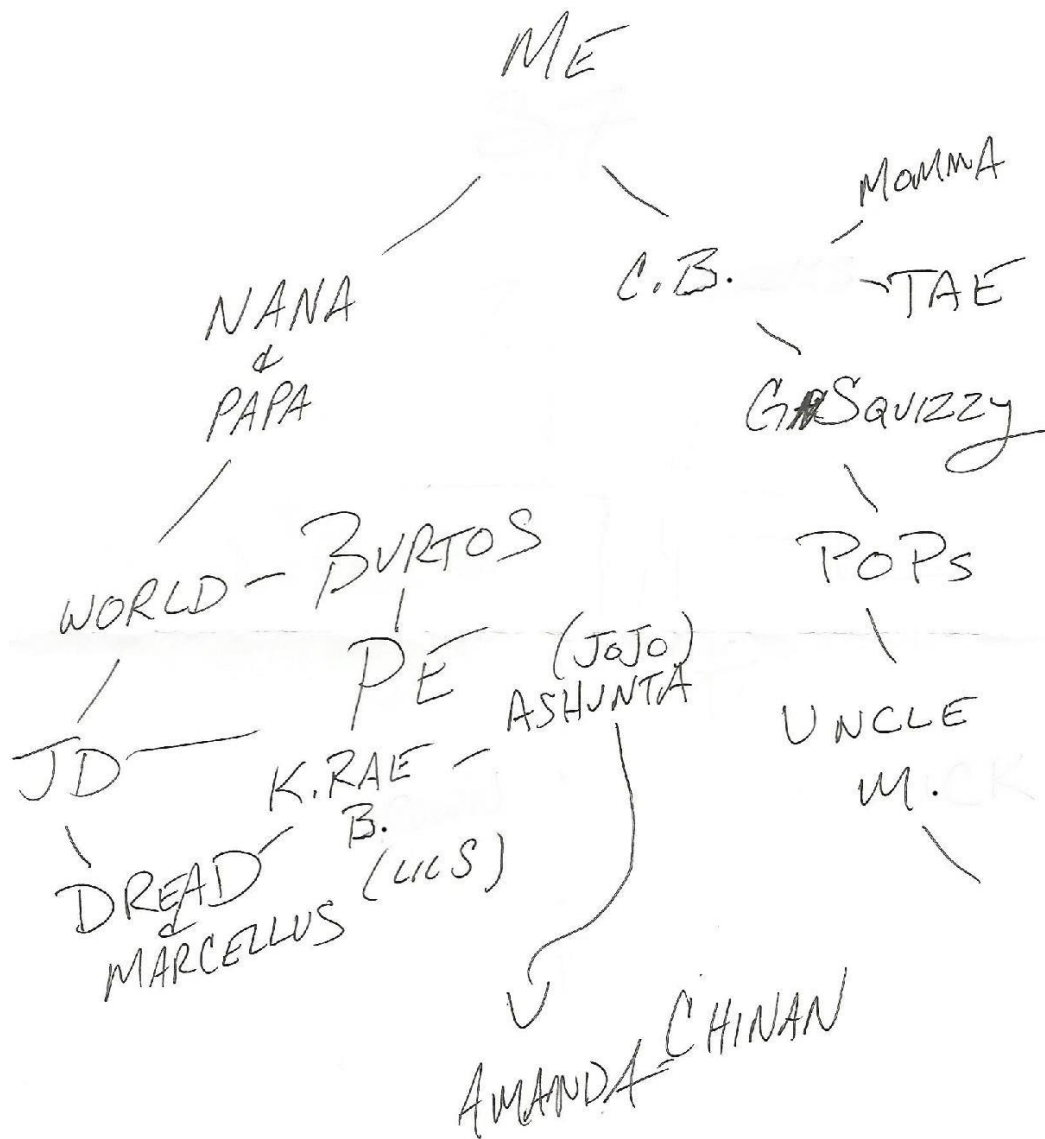
Earl's tree looks like a large horizontal tree; his first name is in a circle at the top of the tree on the far left of the page, and the people's names connected to him are encircled, and connected to the tree via branches. Like Logan, the sizes of the names are proportionate to the influence the people had on him. Some have first and last names, some have only first names, and blood relatives are denominated as 'dad', 'mom', 'grandpa'; only his aunt and uncle are called by their first names.

Dale wrote on a piece of paper folded in two the names 'father' and 'mother' on top; below 'mother', he wrote the name of a friend of hers, that he connects with a line. He writes down the name of a former friend's father, on the bottom right of the page. He writes down the names of two gay couples who have been influential on the bottom left of the page. Some have full names, others only have first names.



Dale's 'family tree'.

Pete writes 'ME' and his initials in the top-middle of the page, then writes down surnames he gave people as they became important throughout his life ('nana and papa', 'pops', 'PE', etc.). The first people that come to his mind are connected to him by lines, and the others that come afterwards and written below are all connected to the former via lines as well; not that they know each other or are connected to each other, but they are all ultimately connected to him.



Pete's 'family tree'.

The men, and Simon (see his 'tree' below), had between 8 and 27 people composing their 'trees'. They included biological connections, mothers, fathers, siblings, uncles, grandparents, and so forth, but also non-biological relations, such as coaches, teachers, professors, bosses, friends, their mothers' boyfriends, a father's best friend, a girlfriend's father, authors, a therapist, mentors, and so on. Half of the men do not include their child(ren), the other half does. The men generally do not mention the half-siblings they have on their fathers' sides who they do not know. Out of 5 men who are divorced/separated, two mention their exes, and out of 2 who are married, one mentions his wife. Often, the connections assimilated as 'family' were with people they grew up with, or people who took care of them or were there for them in time of need, or people who cared for their children. Pete was taken care of by an older woman in his building, 'nana', who called him 'grandson'. One of Frank's friends, she "sort of adopted [Sam] as her son, she says 'he's my weekend kid'"; "I consider her family", he says to me. Logan mentions a family in his building he grew up with. Mathias talks about a woman he grew up with, "she's like my sister". Also figured are men who were father figures, men they wanted to have as fathers, fathers they looked up to, who they wanted to emulate with their own children.

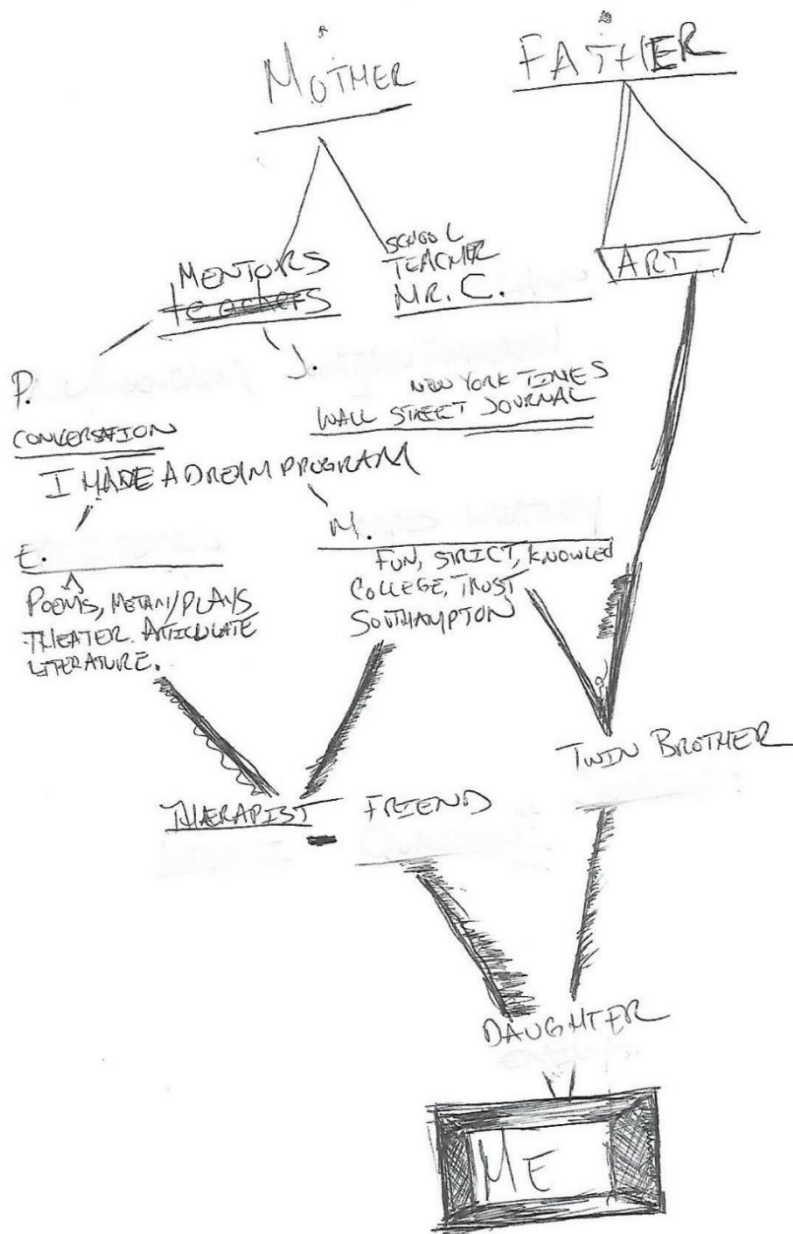
Simon was a young, black, single father. In our conversation about his 'family tree', he talks about his daughter, Lola, "she's the one who shaped me", and his mother, with whom Lola has been growing up in the same house. Lola calls her 'mum' or 'mamma'; Simon says to me, "Lola's grandmother, *she's the mother* in her life" (my emphasis). Lola calls her biological mother by her first name. Simon discourages it, but he does not want to force her to call her mother 'mom' either. He and the mother have had a strained relationship for years. Another person that figures in Simon's tree is his twin brother, Rick; "he's been there every step of the way, he's always been there, he's my right-hand guy". Lola "loves him. She gets to be loved, cared, that's what I want for her, to have a loving environment". People who do not feature in the 'tree' include Lola's mother, and Simon's 8 half siblings from his father's side that are much older than him and who he barely talks to: "we are by blood but everybody's very different", he says.

Simon has had “many father figures”, in his words; he remembers school teachers, one in particular with whom it “was the first experience other than my father where I felt like, a father figure and a mentor where I took advice, I was open, I was receptive”. He met other men that became important through mentorship programs and an after-school program his mother put him through as a teen, one “was a really good guy”, another one “was wonderful”; “they changed everything for me”. He talks about his therapist, who he was introduced to by his mother, calling him “a father figure and a mentor”. He has known him for two years, “he’s another person who’s been there”. He talks about a male friend that he looks up to and who has been supporting him throughout their friendship of a decade. He talks of a “bromance”; this friend “has been there through good and bad ... *he’s like family now, I know his sisters now, I come over, it’s like he’s another brother, like he’s on a par with my [biological] brother*”. “He’s helped shape me”, he adds. The solidarity and the shared suffering that Simon says he went through with his friend is here a sign of ‘mutuality of being’, which covers “the range of ways kinship<sup>141</sup> is constituted” (Sahlins, 2011, 230). “A shared history testified to enduring solidarity, which can provide the basis for creating familial relationships of a chosen, or nonbiological sort” (Weston, 1991, 36).

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<sup>141</sup> Sahlins (2011) defines kinship as “a manifold of intersubjective participations, founded on mutualities of being” (10).





Simon's 'family tree'.

#### 6.4 'It takes a village'

The phrase 'it takes a village' was a phrase I grew accustomed to hearing and seeing during fieldwork, from conversations with parents to bus stop advertisements on the streets and on television shows. It was originally popularized by a 1994 award-winning novel *It takes a village* by Jane Cowen-Fletcher set in Benin within which the character Yemi is responsible

for watching her little brother Kokou. As it turns out, not only her but the whole ‘village’ has its eyes on him. Later, it is Hilary Clinton’s book (1996) *It takes a village and other lessons children teach us* that “helped spread that wisdom throughout the United States” (Mieder, 2014, 202). Clinton traces the phrase to Africa, but research shows the phrase might not come from the African continent at all, although it does have some similitudes with the Swahili proverb ‘one hand cannot bring up a child’. Mieder (2014) writes that it is more likely an American expression that can be traced to a 1981 interview with African American novelist and Professor Toni Morrison who pronounced that same phrase (202). For Hilary, although parents have the “primary responsibility” (11) for their children, other relationships play a significant part in their children’s well-being. She writes

Children exist in the world as well as in the family. From the moment they are born, they depend on a host of other “grown-ups”—grandparents, neighbors, teachers, ministers, employers, political leaders, and untold others who touch their lives directly and indirectly. [. . .] It takes a village to raise a child. (i.d.)

It was described to me by one of the fathers as a “corny, hockey phrase”. Yet, a lot of the fathers kept going back to it. At the Prospect Park zoo in Brooklyn one very hot summer day I was with Alice and Logan, looking at the tamarins, reads the sign out loud to Alice a sign which describes how they help each other out to raise their young. “It really takes a village”, he says thoughtfully. Later, I get to ask him how much of that notion he personally believes in, and he says that one of the first gifts his wife gave him was an autographed copy of Clinton’s book. It is actually this book that led him to really embrace the concept. He says, “I don’t know if I would say everyone is involved in the raising as much as being there when she might eventually need you”. He talks about a “core group of people” who are going to be there for his daughter for different things. Logan wants this group to be reflective of the people they are close to, which “is probably more diverse than the groups that surround most of the kids she knows”. I was very surprised and touched to hear that I, as a friend, was now included in that group. He says that Alice is exposed to “a great deal of diversity and perspectives”, with people from diverse backgrounds. He and Leone for instance are close to their female neighbours, a same-sex married couple; one is white and the other one is

black. In fact, some of the people in Logan's 'tree', such as Alice's godmothers, who are Logan's friends, are part of their 'village'. Logan and his wife engage in "creating and maintaining community networks" around their child (Doucet, 2006, 297).

*[Alice] had her Christmas pageant with her all-girl school in Manhattan, where she dressed up as an angel and sung songs with her peers. [Logan and Leone]'s neighbours were there. Logan's mum came too, her partner, Leone's mother who came from another state and her own sister [and myself]. In the freezing cold of December, we took some photos afterwards – Alice and her parents, the three of them and myself and so on—to remember that special event that brought us all together. We then walked 2 blocks to a diner, where it's tradition to go. Alice is having pancakes and bacon with syrup on the side. "We don't even have that at home" Leone comments on the syrup that Alice keeps adding to her pancakes. "It's only once a year"<sup>142</sup>.*

'It takes a village' meant different things for different fathers. Kyle says, "I agree to it to the extent that our children are influenced by everyone around them, like it or not, the village is raising a child". However, he adds, the 'village' does not have direct influence on how he parents. Kyle is an 'Expert' as discussed in Chapter 3, he draws on a discourse of self-reliance, and he is not someone who is going to seek advice or ask for support from other parents. The 'village' is also the neighbourhood on the lower East side of Manhattan where he chose to live to raise his children with his wife. He loves his neighbourhood, he praises the good school his children go to around his block, the beautiful parks around, the baseball fields, the Hudson River nearby, a very different urban environment than where he grew up in Denver, Colorado. "New York has become a very liveable place for people". He agrees with the phrase 'it takes a village' "from the extent that we need to have social systems in place to support parents and allow parents to raise a family and think about what parents need to do so".

Dale, similarly to Kyle, has a similar vision, where the 'village' is the neighbourhood, saying "everyone wants a nice environment for their child, they want a place where things work and things are pretty and people do their job and everyone's pleasant". He adds, "and I

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<sup>142</sup> From my field notes.

guess you learn from the people around you also, how to raise children'. However, the same way that his village does not comprise people who have been participating in his son's care, with the exception of his mother, Dale articulates an idea of 'the family' built on the notion of privacy and self-sufficiency, as he says,

I don't think in America people actually do much intervening in other people's children. I know in Japan and other places, strangers will partake in raising children, they will teach children they don't know, but in America it's not like that. They don't actually physically get involved.

Manuel agrees that it takes a village to raise a child:

I don't want him to just get values that I share, that he is gonna get messages about what it is to be in this world and the impact he has in the world from all over. I want to make sure that to counter the mainstream messaging he's gonna be getting, I want him to have a village of people who will support him to being the best version of himself. ... tangibly and intangibly, it is a village. ... he's surrounded by a lot of people who love him, themselves very conscious about how they move in the world.

Pete, Mathias, Bradley and Simon were part of the Fathers' Group. The group's motto was 'Fathering is like a team sport, you don't do it alone'. Before each meeting, one of the fathers reads out loud the group's principles, reminding the fathers of their commitment to raise "happy, well-adjusted and successful children", which resonate with Clinton's (1996) words, "As a nation we must ... begin to value the important work of raising strong, healthy and happy children" (328). Mathias, a divorced, single father, recognises that, as a father, "I no longer have to do it by myself". He says to me, "I owe my relationship with my children a lot of the experience of being part of the [Fathers' Group]". "We'll still make mistakes and we'll still go through stuff", he shares with me, and to the men at one of the monthly meetings, "when we leave this place, we don't leave as perfect dads". He often says himself, 'it takes a village to raise a child' and at one of the group meetings he talks about "the collective wisdom of fathering" as one of the things he looks forward to. The group is part of his 'village'.

Mathias tells me about his 'village':

[“Who was Mr. A, who’s in your ‘tree?’” I ask] he was a mentor in my neighbourhood. He was the first person to have a house on my block [in Queens], everything else was a farm. He was a Jewish man. I was 4 years old, he was in his 60s. He lived to a 100. I would listen to him, as a teenager as well. I would shovel his sidewalk. He would take care of the neighbourhood. We took care of him, he took care of us. He was a good person to get perspective. He would share stories.

How the village raised me in New York City in particular is to see people as people. Not as Italians, Irish, Jews. I see them as people first. It helped me to see an idiot or a genuine person, quickly. ‘He’s not an Italian prick, he’s a prick!’ [he laughs]. If I only had a black experience, I might see everybody as other. Every time I leave New York and I go in a more homogenised environment, with a lot of Hispanics, a lot of whites, a few blacks, *I don’t even feel good.*

‘It takes a village’ takes a particular meaning in the context of New York City. Over time, the city grew in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with people coming from other states, former slaves fleeing from the South as well as European immigrants coming by boat in large numbers. This diversity of cultures and languages drew people of their ‘own kind’ together, creating highly segregated neighbourhoods. The single largest ethnicity was represented by Jews in the 1930s, who moved to neighbourhoods where they made up at least 40 percent of the population (Dash Moore, 1994, 140). The reaction and often trauma of arriving somewhere foreign with few connections led to a form of ‘tribal’ thinking, in their case finding a group of people who understands their language and eats the same foods. This idea of finding one’s community is reinforced by the nature of cities, which are spaces of extreme alienation and isolation; their size, architecture, population density, social heterogeneity, loud noises push people away from each other. New York City is now the most populous and most densely populated city in the country. “There are few experiences of a large urban population more visceral than Penn Station in New York City at rush hour” (Oliver, 2001, 38). To counteract this sense of otherness, people create their urban ‘villages’ or “communities of closed ties and supportive relations” (Flanagan, 1990, 98).

*I notice there’s one American flag on every wagon as I leave the subway car. I walk up the stairs and arrive at Penn Station in Manhattan. It’s cold. One homeless person is lying down on the pavement, with a blanket covering her completely. A sign next*

*to her says 'PREGNANT WOMAN NEEDS HELP'. People are walking by, they want to go home, they have things to do. You have to dance to avoid crowds of people walking in the opposite direction. I wait to cross the street, the light is not green for us and people are already on the road, waiting impatiently. They don't have time to wait. There are more and more of them on both sides of the road as the traffic slows down. The last car to pass is engulfed by a sea of humans with not a single face I can recognise<sup>143</sup>.*

### 6.5 Another set of hands

As discussed in Chapter 3, the fathers were, at the time of research, or had been in the past, primary caregivers. They had established primary child-care arrangements, however, as Henson (2005) notes, “these systems are seldom fully sufficient, so the networks of care provide essential backup” (18). Henson argues that there is an “acute need for a network of care among all classes of families” (9), challenging the long-standing idea that white, middle- and upper-class families are self-sufficient entities (Coontz, 2004) and that only poor and/or families of colour rely on domestic networks. Hansen (2005) argues that “families with more resources are better equipped to participate in a network” (1), and that networks are “deemed a normative asset for the middle-class and are associated relative privilege” (11). Research shows that middle- and upper-class families tend to rely on friends and paid help, while working-class families rely on friends and wider kin (Lukacs, 2011). Class shapes how the networks are organised, who is in it, and what is expected from people. It intersects with other social locations such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, shaping the contours of men’s support networks.

It is understood in the literature that “family networks are most often anchored and constructed by women” (Lukacs, 2011, 469). Poor women of colour “have cultivated supportive networks of family members as strategies for daily survival” (Marsiglio and Roy, 2012, 126). Men, on the other hand, can “have less extensive friendships and care networks to draw from than women” (Hanlon, 2012, 76). Also, as discussed in Chapter 3, some of the fathers

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<sup>143</sup> From fieldnotes.

feel like outsiders, they do not feel welcomed in mothers' groups; as men, they may "encounter gender-specific barriers to cracking networks of parents who coordinate play dates for their children" (Marsiglio and Roy, 2012, 143). Many men hold on to an ideal of self-sufficiency, as discussed with the group of 'Experts'; men are encouraged to be "competitive, self-reliant, and assertive in critical family decision making" (i.d., 140). However, they "quickly find that the needs of their children far outstrip what they and the mothers of their children can offer on their own" (i.d. 130). Men are embedded in a set of "interdependent relationships" that enable them think of themselves as "independent" (Hansen, 2005, 1). This section shows that men in fact make a "significant contribution" to the networks (i.d. 183) that in turn make fatherhood possible.

"Both men and women rely disproportionately on women as network members" (Hansen, 2005, 7). The fathers in this study relied on other women for emotional, practical, and sometimes financial support. Care is historically and ideologically a gendered practice, where women, mothers, sisters, daughters still provide more care for their relatives than men (Ha and Seltzer, 2009). Paid care work even more so, it is "one of the most gendered areas of work in the economy" (Moss, Boddy and Cameron, 2006, 13). Doucet (2006) in her study writes about how sole-custody fathers specifically

draw heavily on *another woman* to assist them: a caregiver, a sister, their mother, a neighbour, or an oldest daughter. [...] Many single fathers start off with sparse social networks, having relied heavily on their female partners ... Yet these fathers gradually learn to rely on others to assist them with parenting. (82)

The fathers in this study relied on –predominantly female– secondary caregivers, "those involved in daily interactions with the children" as well as those "who live outside the geographic orbit of daily life, but who contribute invaluable advice and emotional support" (Hansen, 2005, 15).

#### 6.5.1 Grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts

Frank will say of his maternal aunt with whom he has been raising his son that "she's the mother as far as I'm concerned, we're a surrogate nuclear family". "For her, [Sam] is her

son”, he says, she “has been de facto his mother”. Sam’s mother is present, but she and Frank have a very strained relationship; she left the both of them when Sam was small, to come back years later to ask for full custody. As discussed in Chapter 3, Frank is both an ‘Expert’ and an ‘Apprentice’, who has been relying on his aunt, and female friends. The former is from the Philippines; she is a doctor, divorced, with no children. They live close to one another, and he plans on sharing a house one day with her and Sam. “She works long hours but whenever she has time and on the weekends that she's not working she's with him”. If anything should happen to himself, his money, his son's money, documents would go to his aunt who would become Liam's legal guardian. As discussed previously, he includes his friends into his ‘tree’, and one of them babysits Sam and ‘adopted’ him. Frank tells me,

I am very fortunate that I have the support of my family, I have a good support system to give my son everything he needs .... I'm accustomed to do everything on my own but it's a huge moral booster to have other people around who support you ... I developed my own microcosm of supportive people, it's comforting.

“Family members are people who are “there for you””, as Weston (1991) puts it (113). Men form networks of relationships that provide “emotional support and understanding as well as friendship” (Marsiglio and Roy, 2012, 142) and “guidance or support in their efforts to be involved fathers” (149).

Mathias’ mother, who he describes as a “built-in caregiver”, has helped raise his four children. Mathias and his wife lived in his parents’ house in Queens for 10 years; “money was tight”, he explains. He lived again at his parents’ after his divorce, where he had his daughter with him from when she was 1 until 6, and also for two years when his adolescent son stopped living at his mother’s and came back to live with him. Every time, his mother, Yolanda, took care of the children and helped raise them. She also took care of Mathias’ wife’s first baby, who Mathias adopted, as discussed earlier.



Yolanda is a deeply Catholic black woman in her 70s, who was born in the French Antilles. She left the country because of the political climate of the 1950s<sup>144</sup> to join her sister who was already in New York City as a nanny. Yolanda was the primary caregiver of her two sons and she spent most of her life caring for the children of others. When I meet her at her house, two small black boys are sleeping in her and her husband's bedroom. The mother of one of the boys' is in financial difficulty and Yolanda receives little money in exchange; the other one is 2 years old, he is one of her grandchildren who spends the week with her. Historically, Caribbean women "have viewed child rearing and motherhood as *collective* enterprises where "other mothers" from extended families and kinship networks assume some of the responsibility of mothering, known as child-shifting" (Mullings, 2017, 161) (my emphasis). She identifies as a motherly figure for the babies she cares for; she would say things to me like "*quand j'ai eu cet enfant*"<sup>145</sup> or "they gave me the baby". When I ask her what she did for Mathias and his family she says

They [the parents] went to work, it's me who read for them [the children] at night, they came home and the children were sleeping. I took them to school, picked them up, like I did with mine. I never worked. ... They had *me* to do everything, I cooked, I took care of the children. They travelled, they did whatever they wanted ... I gave everything. [You educated them as well, I say]. Yeah.<sup>146</sup>

I ask her if her taking care of the children was ever discussed with the parents, she replies that it was

without saying anything, it was something natural, in Haiti it's the same thing, mothers take care of children, of grandchildren, and it continued to be something natural. So I didn't say anything, I just accepted. They came here, they said 'nanna, I don't have any money', [Mathias and his wife] came to live with us<sup>147</sup>.

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<sup>144</sup> "*On avait peur du président*", we were scared of the president", she says, about Duvalier, Haiti's former president. "*C'était l'enfer des hommes*", adds her husband, "people's hell". From 1958 to 1986 the country was ruled by a dictatorial regime; the president and his militia "imposed a rule of terror on the Haitian population" and were responsible for as many as "50,000 assassinations and executions"; "for the first time in Haiti's history, women ... children and even infants were targeted by the regime" (Belleau, 2008, n.p.).

<sup>145</sup> "*When I had this child*". Yolanda and I would speak a mix of French and English together.

<sup>146</sup> My translation. Original quotes in French.

<sup>147</sup> I.d.

Her labour as a primary caregiver is obligatory, internalized as a 'status duty', which refers to "duties assigned to all those in a given status, for example, wife, mother, daughter" (Nakano Glenn, 2010, 6-7). That women "do the bulk of caring in the family ... tends to be taken for granted as part of the natural order of things rather than being recognized as a socially created arrangement" (i.d. 184). Yolanda revels in the nurturing role: "It was truly something wonderful, because I loved doing it", she tells me. However, what made her feel enraged (*'enrager'* in French) was that the parents did not help with the housework. "I liked taking care of the children, it wasn't a problem for me, but help me out a little bit<sup>148</sup>". Grandmother caregivers report receiving little support from their family and friends (see Ruiz, 2004). The only time Yolanda said something was to the mother was when she realized how much money the parents were giving to the church they went to for building maintenance, "when I wasn't asking for anything. I thought, *what?* ... that upset me<sup>149</sup>". Her son Mathias is "*un bon papa*" ("a good dad"); he did the homework with them, they learned a lot from him, "he was always there". But he was also "always on the phone" after work, which annoyed her, she thinks it was often more about his wife than his children. "Children should be the firsts in your life, for me<sup>150</sup>". Children were hungry, she fed them, "*mais je voulais lui casser la bouche*" ("but I wanted to break his face"). She feels resentment and ambivalence; "they travelled, they did whatever they wanted", while she was overwhelmed with house responsibilities and her care is taken for granted. "Grandparents may feel taken advantage of and disappointed by their lost freedom" (Garfield, 2009, 101).

Mathias, Simon, and Pete, the three working-class, black fathers of this study, had to go back to living with their parents in order to survive as young fathers. Marsiglio and Roy (2012) write that

[some of the men] who are most precariously positioned to are for and support their children are young unwed fathers. ... they disproportionately are men of color and

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<sup>148</sup> i.d.

<sup>149</sup> My translation. Original quotes in French.

<sup>150</sup> i.d.

live in poverty. Often they are unemployed or underemployed and have limited education. (130)

These young fathers often “depend on female-headed households and family networks” (Marsiglio and Roy, 2012, 132). Black families have relied on strong kinship bonds as a way of coping in a racist and discriminatory society (Artis, 2008, 275). African-American grandmothers in particular have been “central to the economic support of Black families and play a crucial role in childcare” (Boy-Franklin, 2003, 79). Already in west Africa, “before and after the era of slave hunters, grandparents played an important role both in socializing and protecting children” (Malley-Morrison and Hines, 2004).

This was the case for Simon, who asked his mother to move back to the family house where he was living with Lola. He was living with his twin brother before that, but he got married and moved out. “My mother had to move back in when [Lola] was born because I couldn’t have done it by myself. She was very helpful, my brother was very helpful, he was there for the early stages”, Simon says to me. Simon temporarily stopped working to take care of his baby. “Dad and [Rick] took care of it, they said do what you gotta do with your baby ... they would pay for everything, they helped out”, Simon explains. Simon’s mother, a teacher, accepted to move in under the condition that Simon would seek government assistance. He did, he qualified<sup>151</sup> and received governmental support for day care: food stamps (roughly 300-350 dollars a month), Medicaid<sup>152</sup> (co-pays were covered) and rent support so that his mother, who earns about 90,000 dollars a year, would not have to pay the full amount. Simon worried about the rent when I met him, the house where they live is not rent-controlled anymore, the coops started increasing the prices, the rent went from 800 to 1300 dollars in a few years.

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<sup>151</sup> Simon belongs to a minority of fathers who get custody of their children in the first place. Because he obtained custody, he was able to apply for government assistance. “Custodial parents who meet income guidelines are eligible for housing subsidies, short-term cash welfare, a generous Earned Income Tax Credit, and other benefit that lower their living costs or subsidize their incomes” (Edin and Nelson, 2013, 254).

<sup>152</sup> Medicaid is social healthcare program for people who cannot afford a private health insurance.

Simon's mother played an important role in facilitating Simon's relationship with his ex over the years. Marsiglio and Roy (2012) write that "the kin system can offer the father resources to help him forge his fatherly identity and, in some situations, secure involvement with his children" (128); "[the men's] mothers' ... presence, advice, and support shape their ideas about family and parenthood" (131).

In kin networks, paternal grandmothers perform a range of kin-work roles for the well-being of their grandchildren. From the earliest interactions, mothers help their sons to establish relationships with their children. Paternal grandmothers are instrumental in defining paternity for younger fathers and in resolving conflicts between fathers and the mothers of their children. (i.d. 133)

Simon's mother did not help with the day-to-day, routine forms of care: Simon says, "she would come and tell me 'you have to do this, just do this, do that, you'll be fine'". "She wasn't doing the work", I say, to which he replies, "no, she let me feel that, every bit of it, changing the diapers, everything". Yet, Simon's mother can be identified as a "bridge-care" provider, providing nurture "during the gaps of time between school and work" (Marsiglio and Roy, 2012, 142) or "during weekends, between work shifts, or on random days of urgent need" (133); paternal grandmothers are "an important resource for both young fathers and mothers" (i.d.). Lola's grandmother works in the same school as her, she takes her to school and brings her home; Simon says, "I need her help with my daughter".

When I met Pete, his youngest son was living with the maternal grandmother. Similarly to Mathias and Simon, Pete once found himself in a very precarious situation, "losing everything", having to live again in his mother's house, not during the time he was a primary caregiver, but later on:

In between the divorce and now, it was another rocky road, I had no job, no money, I lost my coop [in the Bronx], I ended up in a relationship that was just not good at all ... I ended up living with my mother, which was horrible, *horrible*, staying on the couch for 3, 4 years. I was still going to courts, still paying child support. ... Tough time, tough time. ["Was Bryan with you?" I ask]. Yes, I would take him every weekend, we would go to my mother's house and lay right on that couch together ... we had joint custody on paper, but he was living with his mother. ... During the week I would go from my job to see him, chill out with him, sometimes I'd bring him

back to Queens with me, maybe do homework. [The mother and her mother] lived in Harlem.

As Doucet (2006) writes, “It is as though hegemonic masculinity with its emphasis on autonomy and self-reliance collapses in those moments of crisis to reveal the hidden influences of connection, relationship and interdependence” (217). Pete’s mention of child support is important here. Both him and Mathias got divorced and fell behind child support payments. They accumulated thousands of dollars in debt and were still paying them off when I met them. Both almost went to jail. Pete was already giving money to the mother prior she took him to court, but found himself having to pay much more than he could afford: “It shouldn’t be so much of your money that you can’t like... make it so that it’s manageable”, he says to me. “Low-income fathers are more likely than those with higher incomes to be arrested for non-payment of child support” (Hamer, 2001, 126). Gender, race and class intersect in ways that make black, working-class fathers’ lives more precarious. Mills (2010) writes how

Criminalizing the nonpayment of child support increases existing high rates of incarceration among African American men and further marginalizes their participation in the labor market ... incarceration<sup>153</sup> is not an effective solution to low-income and poverty; instead, it tends to create and further extend these disadvantages among oppressed populations ... strict enforcement of child-support policies is a major factor oppressing young African American men, as it forces them into a downward spiral of debt, incarceration, and unemployment (342-43).

This shows that the men’s “identities are linked to existing systems of power and are manifested in relationships of dominance and subordination at both macro and micro levels” (Romero, 2017, 53).

Logan and Leone relied upon Logan’s mother’s help when Alice was born. She offered her help when Leone was pregnant, which they were grateful for. She took care of Alice from three --from when Leone’s maternity leave came to an end-- to eight months old, when she

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<sup>153</sup> “Having a felony record removes possibilities for obtaining a student loan, housing, credit, and even employment. In some states, the removal of voting rights further disenfranchises many African American men, reinforcing their position at the margins of civic society” (Mills, 2010, 343).

said she could not do it anymore. To this day both Logan and Leone do not know why; they were hurt and frustrated. Leone tells me,

And someone did give me a bit of advice, it did turn out to be true that family is not as helpful as you think they're gonna be. Of course, nothing is a blanket rule, but it was like oh my gosh this is what they're talking about!

"Family supports often come with strings attached, such as expectations about normative behavior, moral obligations, or long-term reciprocation" (Harrington Meyer and Kandic, 2017, n.p.). It happens that network members opt out of caring responsibilities, which "fundamentally interrupt[s] network operations and undermine expectations about the likelihood of reciprocity" (Hansen, 2005, 151).

#### 6.5.2 Babysitters and nannies

Other fathers had their families living in other states or other countries, or their parents were deceased, or the men did not have good relationships with their families and/or did not trust them with their children alone. Often, they could rely on class privileges to pay for people to watch their children. Paul and his wife will get a baby sitter when they want a night out. The babysitter they have is "17-18 years old", a "high school kid", "her mum is in the building all the time, if there was any problem, you know".

We'll get a babysitter if we go out. Like in an evening. It's a financial thing, if you go out for a casual inexpensive meal, it's still 200 dollars a night. We can't always afford to do that or not all the time. We choose what's important to us to do.

Paul's children are also watched by a nanny he befriended, Clarisse. She is the nanny of female, friend of his, Katia, a mother, whose children are friends with Pete's. "[Clarisse] is great, she's been so helpful in taking [Samuel], watching him for playdates. I think she's more than a babysitter! *She's almost part of [Katia]'s family, I feel that she's part of mine too*<sup>154</sup>" he tells me very enthusiastically. I meet Clarisse one day at the park where I spent a morning with Paul and his family. She is a Guatemalan middle-aged woman of colour, wide in shape, small in height, with a classy and colourful outfit. She explains that she arrived in the country

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<sup>154</sup> From fieldnotes. My emphasis.

at 35 years old. She has two children who live with her in the City and three children with her husband in her home country. She is a kindergarten teacher, but her level of English does not allow her to teach in the U.S. “I have a lot of experience with children. I love my job” she tells me. She works from 8.30am until 6pm, 5 days a week for 700 dollars. The family lives on the Upper East Side, the most expensive neighbourhood in Manhattan, and also has a cleaner so Clarisse does not clean, but she does help out in the kitchen sometimes and makes some food. This demonstrates how the emotional attachments that child-care workers and the family can develop for each other “blur the perceived dualistic distinction between “private”, emotional, home-based caring relationships and “public”, formal, workplace professional relationships” (Tuominen, 2000, 120).

*I'm walking from my neighbourhood in Kensington, Brooklyn, to Flatbush, to go food shopping, which is maybe a 15 min walk. Cortelyou Road Avenue is full of families of diverse backgrounds, with the Public Brooklyn Library, the Public School 139 close to it and the small playground opposite the street, where a majority of women are watching the children, with some men. It's a beautiful summer day. I notice 3 nannies with South American origins who are talking to each other right at the corner, in the shades of the trees. They all have a stroller and the three babies they are watching are white<sup>155</sup>.*

Dale and his husband Matthew rely on women to take care of Benjamin a couple of times a week. Dale is an at-home father, and says to me, “I still want to do something else in a day, I want to feel excited about spending time with him and not having the feeling of being stuck with him all day”. I once go to their apartment to meet with Matthew, and when I open the door, a white, middle-aged woman is there, smiling. I introduce myself and ask her if she is the babysitter. Matthew hears me and says before she has time to answer, smiling, “she’s like the grandmother”. He says, while looking at her,

we met somebody who was working with your daughter and who knew you from when he was growing up and he knew that you cared for kids, so he recommended you. He was our waiter, we had just moved to [a city in Westchester County]. He said, ‘I really have somebody great’.

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<sup>155</sup> From my field notes.

He explains that Sylvia comes help Tuesdays and Thursdays. Joane comes for 5 hours, twice a week, and Sylvia twice a week for 3 hours. “Do you not mind that strangers take care of [Benjamin], or do you prioritize having one parent watching over him?”, I ask Matthew. Sylvia had left the living-room and was in Benjamin’s room with him as he had woken up from his nap. Matthew responds,

I think it’s more important for parents to spend time with the child, and we really don’t have strangers taking care of [Benjamin], it’s just been [Sylvia] and [Joane], [Joane]’s been with [Benjamin] since he was born. It’s was through [Dale’s] friend, who referred us to the surrogate, she’s the godmother, it was her roommate who ended up helping us with [Benjamin], that’s [Joane]. She was there right when he was an infant. We met [Sylvia], she’s just wonderful, [Benjamin] loves her. That’s it, there’s nobody else.

The godmother, Joane, comes help every Wednesday; “she’s a very good friend of the mum who was pregnant with Marty”, Dale tells me, while we are having lunch one day. “The babysitter was with [Benjamin] this morning, I went to the gym”, he adds. The babysitter comes half the day Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays, “at least 4 times a week”. But she is going to law school soon, he says. He explains that Sylvia “is a mother of 6 who we got to babysit sometimes; she’s not a babysitter”.

While Dale is content that he can have some free time during his week, he says his “ideal would be to have someone part-time, but the problem is you can’t really ask someone to come and help for 3 hours, they want more”; he also expresses feelings of resentment that Matthew insists on having women come help them. Dale explains that they originally had a nanny, Joane, but he told Matthew he did not want a full-time nanny. He proposed she could share her time between them and a friend of his with a child in school. And it turned out she was going to spend less time with them and more with the friend’s child. “[Matthew] was mad at me ... he is not so great at sharing”, he says to me. He cites differences of “culture” between him and his husband, explaining that Matthew conforms to “the stereotype of Jewish people in America, when you have money you get people to do things for you”. Matthew’s family got rich “really quickly” and “they were very happy, they had a lot of money to spend and they kinda showed it off, the nouveaux riches kinda thing”. He, on the



other hand, “was raised where you like kinda try to do things yourself and you try to save money”. Dale says to me,

My idea would be to do as much as I could and get a little bit of help and [Matthew] likes kinda the more help, the better. We try to find some compromise there. But it’s hard because I’m staying home so I would like him to be appreciative that I’m being the main parent. In his life it’s like ‘well if you have a lot of money you just pay for things’, it’s not quite the same value that I feel I should deserve. He’s happy that [Benjamin] is not being raised by nannies but he likes nannies a lot. The more help the better. ... he doesn’t place a value in like saying ‘this is my time with [Benjamin] and I don’t need any help’ ... but he spends a lot of time cooking, [Benjamin]’s food and some food for us, at the beginning he only cooked [Benjamin]’s food [he laughs], and he does bath with him. Then I step in and I do the clothing and the diapers and stuff. He decided that diapers isn’t something he likes. ... he’s like ‘yeah I don’t want to do any diapers’, he’ll do it if necessary but he’d rather pay someone 100 dollars a day to be there.

Matthew is a “traditional male” in Dale’s words, who was raised by a traditional father; while he cooks and does baths, he leaves the dirty work to others, his husband or the women he employs.

Manuel, an at-home father working on his business, joined a babysitting cooperative<sup>156</sup>. He explains,

[Collin] would go twice a week. Once a week another parent and I would watch [Collin] and 3 other children for 3 hours, and another day I’d drop him off to be watched by two parents for 3 hours, to get 2 hours uninterrupted to work on my podcast. But I was spending 6 hours a week watching kids or commuting.

So he stopped doing that. Students have babysat for Collin, “not more than a few hours a month. 6-8 hours a month”. Manuel originally “didn’t know people with babies”. He tried joining a community of parents, but they were very strict about the geography of the people they allowed in. In Boston for 15 years, Manuel created a progressive cross-issue community

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<sup>156</sup> Parents exchange babysitting services. “This approach—of using community chits to build a network of helpful acquaintances—is an example of the growing civic engagement movement around the country” (Hansen, 2005, 172).

and network with 3000 members, a baby clothing swap group of 800 members with 40 families who show up every month and created a Facebook group 5 months prior his son's birth in order to be able ask questions. He also goes to a coffee shop with other dads once a week, whose children are between 3 and 7. He shares with me,

I have what is probably a human fear of being left out, I think the reason why I organise so many community spaces it's because I'm organizing it, I'll be invited and I can welcome others. That's a proactive response to that fear. It's a transpace approach to that fear. A year ago I didn't really know anyone who parents. I now walk into a mums' group and a mom will turn around and say 'that's [Manuel!] ... I've limited some of that. It is still a possibility.

They live in a part of Boston "where dads in play grounds are not that unusual even though it's less likely". However, he mentions a friend of his, a trans guy, who lives in north Boston, "the cops were called because he was at a playground, he was there with his daughter. He was very upset about it". He also says, "I'm lucky that where I live, it's progressive ... I don't have a guard up about being trans. I tend to come out in larger group settings ... it's a lot easier to come out that way", like he did at the convention for at-home fathers in Rayleigh that year that he and I attended. He explains,

It wouldn't have felt safe for me to continue to build relationships in that community without coming out, because the longer that I don't say anything, the longer I let people assume their assumptions, some people assume I'm a gay man ... and then I say 'wife', they're so confused. ... If I did that and then it came out, it would feel as if I had kept a secret and it was this big deal, it was like a big reveal. Whereas if I say something to a few people and it doesn't happen to filter through to everybody and someone finds out later, my response is 'well, these people knew, I guess it wasn't such a big deal, sorry, I guess no one told you', totally downplaying it. That's a defence mechanism. It's hard for me to make true authentic relationships and connection if I'm worrying about what I'm saying.

Transgender individuals face greater discrimination than gay and lesbian populations (Downing, 2013). They are "at a greater risk for hate crimes, particularly ones that are seri-

ously assaultive” (i.d. 108). They face sexual and gender oppression, as well as transphobia<sup>157</sup>, which “ranges from discrimination and harassment to emotional, verbal, physical, and/or sexual abuse, to *murder* or forced suicide” (Raj, 2014, 87). Violence against transgenders disproportionately affects transgender women of colour and it is not improving: 2017 was the deadliest year for the transgender community (hrc, 2018).

## 6.6 Conclusions

This chapter looks at the plurality of meanings attached to ‘family’, attesting of the growing diversity of family forms in the United States. It shows that different relationships, both familial and non-familial, were co-constructive and co-constitutive of how these men conceived ‘family’. I agree with Weston (1991) when she writes that “‘family’ ‘can mean different things when complicated by ... class, race, ethnicity and gender’” (107). This research indicates that in a heteronormative context, Dale and Manuel in particular have to negotiate their experiences and identities as gay male parents and queer trans-parents respectively; they find themselves having to “navigate the multiple ways in which their families are different from the dominant notion of “family”” (Goldberg, 2012, 10).

This research demonstrates that a lot of the fathers, despite the impact of traditional masculine norms that emphasize autonomy and self-reliance identified in Chapter 3, do in fact rely on networks of people who provide help, guidance and support with the care of their children. These men “coordinate [a] mosaic of care strategies by identifying members of an integrated kinlike network” (Marsiglio and Roy, 2012, 142). They “create networks by turning friends into family” (143).

This research shows that fathers rely predominantly on women; grandmothers, aunt, babysitters, nannies. Babysitters and nannies often become ‘family’, or ‘like family’. African-American grandmothers in particular play an important role for working-class, young fathers of colour, who at times live precarious lives and cannot cope, often

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<sup>157</sup> "Fear of, or contempt for, trans people. Behavior based on those feelings. A system of oppression in which trans people are marginalized and subject to violence" (Holleb, 2019, 282).

financially, in the raising of their children on their own. Other men, including uncles, brothers and grandfathers, participate in the networks of care also.

Some of the fathers that we identified as 'Experts' spoke very little or not at all about any kind of support network. They were white, middle-class, heterosexual; some were married. As the example of Kyle shows in this chapter, they saw caregiving mainly as a private responsibility. In Chapter 3, we discussed how the 'Experts' described themselves as "can-do, go-it-alone, self-sufficient parent[s]" (Hansen, 2005, 1), which may be a function of their middle-class masculine identities.

## 7. Fatherhood and rac(e)ism

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at how fathers describe the consequences of both self- and ascribed-identifications pertaining to race onto how they understand themselves and the kinds of fathers they are. I argue that these consequences are different for different groups: the consequences are largely negative for black fathers, while the white fathers hold on to their privileges of being white, privileges that are passed on to their children. Conversations and observations took place in 2016, Barack Obama was still president. It was a year when a string of high profile, police-related deaths of unarmed black people occurred, which was no different from the year before, and the year after. In 2016, “34 percent of the unarmed people killed ... were black males, although they are 6 percent of the population” (Kelly et al, 2016, n.p.). In this context, it came as no surprise that race took up a lot more space in conversations with the African-American men than it did with the other men. The only question I originally asked all the men were where they were from, and as this chapter attests, the conversations with the black fathers took us very far. The space that their stories occupy here is a reflection of how much racism played a role in their lives, and in their children’s lives, and how much it did not for the others. This study contributes to a long line of research on black parents who have to cope with certain realities when raising black children or children of mixed descent in the United States (see Lee, 1997; Smith and Fleming, 2006). This chapter also looks at the ways in which race impacts the white fathers’ lives, and how their intersecting social positions result in different “articulations of whiteness” (Frankenberg, 1993, 20).

In this study, 10 out of 15 men were white. The majority did not describe themselves as white; they, however, highlighted their ancestors’ ethnicities. 5 of those 10 men identified as Jewish. 4 out of 15 fathers identified as black or as African-American<sup>158</sup>. One father, Frank,

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<sup>158</sup> Because participants used both terms to identify themselves, both terms are used throughout this thesis.

identified as Asian.

## 7.2 A conversation about race

One of the monthly meetings with the Fathers' Group during fieldwork was about parenting and the issue of race. This meeting occurred after a consecutive string of high-profile police shootings of black men happened throughout the country. Pete recalls out loud a private conversation with Mathias, who he is friends with, about the recent events, conversation which "brought up the dynamics of us and how there's so many ... types of men that we are as parents, as men, as races". The meeting's agenda was to "raise awareness". Mathias and Pete, two black men, were running the meeting. Racism is

the 800-pound gorilla in our community, in our society; how is that gonna affect our kids? What are we doing proactively to engage our kids in conversations? ... Have you initiated or been called upon to have a conversation with your kids around race relations, or responding to what has occurred, not just recently, because let's be real, this shit's been happening for a very long time. Has there been a moment when you looked at the news and decided to talk about it or is the propensity to say 'ouh that sucks I really feel bad and move on?

asks Matthias to the men and I. He quotes Albert Einstein<sup>159</sup> and Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>160</sup> and adds; "children become influenced by this racial bias. We all have a responsibility, a part that we play". A white, Jewish father in his 60s, says he feels "ashamed" because conversations with his children tend to be quite "superficial", "I didn't want to rock the boat ... we never seem to get anywhere". "I am guilty because I just never felt there was a reason to speak up", he continues. He feels "proud to be Jewish, American, a white male. It's hard for me to look at [Pete] and not see a black man, but I don't see anything other than a perfect man either, perfect as in equal". A father whose stepson is a "young black man" says his Dominican girlfriend, the boy's mother, is "concerned" and "makes sure she has direct conversations with him, letting him know how to handle himself in public so that he

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<sup>159</sup> "I believe that whoever tries to think things through honestly will soon recognize how unworthy and even fatal is the traditional bias against Negroes. What, however, can the man of good will do to combat this deeply rooted prejudice? He must have the courage to set an example by word and deed, and must watch lest his children become influenced by this racial bias." (Einstein, 1946).

<sup>160</sup> "A time comes when silence is betrayal" (King, 1967).

stays safe from the police". A father with Latino origins with white skin will discuss police violence with his children if it is on the news or if something happens, "but then we don't ... 'What do you think?' 'yeah, it's wrong!', that's the extend of where we go".

He continues,

And that maybe is a cultural thing, yes we're white, and we don't get what *you guys* get in society, how... because [he looks at his arms and flaps them] we don't get that. To us it's a little different. Maybe we don't understand it or we refuse to understand it. None of my kids are prejudiced. We've never had that issue, we've never had it. It's not *there*, in our face.

To the question asked by Mathias "would any of you guys who are lighter than I want to have the black experience?", mimicking the experiment<sup>161</sup> conducted by anti-racism activist Jane Elliott in 1999, men first shake their heads or stay silent. One Jewish father speaks up. He grew up in Russia and recalls the prosecution he experienced. "Jewish people in Russia are like blacks in the U.S." he says, with a serious tone. Another Jewish father in his 60s who grew up in Brooklyn remembers being raised "with the responsibility to act in a certain way, my dad would say 'don't bring shame on the family'". A white father with Irish and Portorican origins jumps in and explains how he "grew up black" within a predominantly black community. "But", he adds, "there's no possible way I actually have. I was never treated the same". To Mathias' question, the answer is no. While there is the recognition that blacks and Jewish people have been and to some extent continue to be "pariah people", a "people who had to make and remake themselves as outsiders on the margins of American society and culture" (Lerner and West, 1995, 2), the men do know how black people are treated in U.S. society. In a society that rewards whiteness, Jewish people have come to be integrated in that ever-expanding category (Labaro, 2014, 129-30), while blackness continues to be stigmatised. Also, in New York City, Jews have had a visibility, and gained access to positions

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<sup>161</sup> She addresses an audience composed mainly of white people and asks, "I want every white person in this room who would be happy to be treated as this society, in general, treats our citizens - our black citizens - if you, as a white person, would be happy to receive the same treatment that our black citizens do in this society, please stand. You didn't understand the directions. If you white folks want to be treated the way blacks are, in this society, stand. Nobody's standing here. That says very plainly that you know what's happening. You know you don't want it for you. I want to know why you're so willing to accept it or to allow it to happen for others." (Verhaag and Elliott, 1999).

of power and influence, so much that the city has been nicknamed “Jewish town” (Aviv and Shneer, 2005, 137).

Pete asks, “race wars never ended, issues of race were never tended, how does that associate to us as parents, how do we show our kids?”. He tells us how his 8-year-old black son asked him about Emmett Till. Emmet Till was a 14-year-old African-American who was killed in Mississippi in 1955 after being accused of whistling at a white woman in a grocery store. The two men accused of kidnapping and murdering Till were acquitted by an all-male, all-white jury. Till’s mother insisted on having an open-casket funeral, and the photo of her son’s disfigured body was published and became iconic. Till’s murder sparked outrage internationally and helped fuel the Civil Rights Movement (Anderson, 2015). Pete’s son wanted to see a picture of the open casket. He says to us,

I fought with myself, but as a black man trying to raise a young black boy to become a black man, I want him to understand there are things that can happen. In the blink of an eye your whole life can change. Things can be fucked up.

Pete at the end did show his son the photos of Emmet Till’s open casket. The boy’s maternal grandmother called the next day, telling him that he should not have shown him the photo. The boy had nightmares that same night. “I understand”, Pete said to her, and to us, “but he’s my son”.

### 7.3 ‘Racecraft’

Race in the United States is a word that permeates social life. I understand race<sup>162</sup> as a category of identity, in the way my participants equated race with their identity, but also as racism, in concordance with the ‘race-racism manoeuvre’ as theorised by Fields and Fields (2012). Race becomes the first lens people use that captures their world in oversaturated colours. Race is a powerful ideology that was created, and continues to be created today.

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<sup>162</sup> Race “stands for the conception of the doctrine that nature produced humankind in distinct groups, each defined by inborn traits that its members share and that differentiate them from the members of other distinct groups of the same kind but of unequal rank”; “Race is the principal unit and core concept of *racism*” (Fields and Fields, 2012, 16-17).



In *Racecraft*, Fields and Fields (2012) argue that race as ideology “takes on the appearance of uncontroversial everyday reality” (112). Coates (2015) writes that “Americans believe in the reality of race as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world” (7). People “believe they are white” (7) while American society fails people of colour, and especially black people, “a tribe ... invented [but] no less real” (56). Similarly to witchcraft, ‘racecraft<sup>163</sup>’, or the making of race, presupposes an invisible ontology. Invisibility, and ubiquity, are what maintain invisible ontologies alive. “At the same time that practices presuppose a system of belief, they confirm it as well”, Fields and Fields write (205). Race is at first sight eminently visible, one could argue, because based on a person’s skin colour. However, “‘race’” does not depend on physical difference, can do without visible markers, and owes nothing at all to nature” (261). It is race that makes the colour, and not vice versa. Race is a product of thought. And yet, “ideas of racecraft do not exist purely in the mind ... they are social facts ... both an idea and a reality” (25).

invisible ontologies require – and therefore acquire – anchors in sensible experience, including quasi-biological anchors ... visible physical difference is an unparalleled prop for invisible things ... Race, it would seem, is eminently visible ... The invisible aspect of race becomes apparent ... as soon as we reflect that the focus of racecraft is not the outward, visible color of a person’s skin (hair type, bone structure, etc.) but the presumed inward, invisible content of that person’s character. It is always black *and*, yellow *but*, white *therefore* ... rarely a matter of appearance standing by itself. (206-7).

Race has the appearance of a “guiltless word” (95) while it is in fact a “neutral-sounding word with racism<sup>164</sup> hidden inside” (102). Race is a substitute word for racism. Fields and Fields call it the “race-instead-of-racism ideological manoeuvre” (97). Hailing a taxi that does not stop for African-Americans is understood as a result of their race, instead of racism. This is an “evasion that attributes race to the disfranchised rather than racism to the disfranchiser”, evasion “born of the race-racism switch” (104). Race is taken to “explain”

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<sup>163</sup> Racecraft is “one among a complex system of beliefs, also with combined moral and cognitive content, that presuppose invisible, spiritual qualities underlying, and continually acted upon, the material realm of beings and events” (Fields and Fields, 2012, 202-203). “Racecraft is “imagined, acted upon, and re-imagined, the action and imagining inextricably intertwined” (i.d. 19).

<sup>164</sup> Racism “refers to the theory and the practice of applying a social, civic, or legal double standard based on ancestry, and to the ideology surrounding such a double standard ... *Racism* is first and foremost a social practice ... it is an action and a rationale for action, or both at once” (Field and Fields, 2012, 17)

historical phenomena (119), especially the fact that African-Americans have been treated differently. While race is “a fiction, an illusion, a superstition “ (101), racism is a reality that brings pain, fear, and death. “The real action creates evidence for the imagined thing” (22).

A widely held assumption is that “there is really only one race, the Negro race” (Fields and Fields, 2012, 115). It is only to African ancestry that the one-drop-of-blood<sup>165</sup> rule or other known-ancestry rule apply (102). In racecraft, “blood stands in for racial identity” (Dussere, 2003, 99). “Black blood’, following the ‘one-drop rule’, is by definition a “polluting substance” that stains the generations to come with blackness and all its meanings associated to it (i.d.). The skin colour is a convenient, visual prop “for invisible things” such as racecraft (Fields and Fields, 2012, 207). People are “visualised” (269) as African-Americans and become as a result, a race. “You have been cast onto a race”, black writer Coates (2015) writes to his son (107). In a so-called ‘post-racial’ society, Barack Obama was a ‘black President’, not ‘the “President of the United States’. This “reprised an age-old feature of racecraft: the turning of one person of African descent into a synecdoche for all” (Fields and Fields, 2012, 279). Black, brown, people of Caribbean descent or African descent or people from Africa are all lumped into one single category. “There can be no such thing as a fractional pariah: one either is or is not ... racism is a qualitative, not a quantitative, evil. Its harm does not depend on how many people fall under its ban but on the fact that any at all do” they argue (i.d. 109). As West (1993) puts it, “blackness has no meaning outside a system of race-conscious people and practices ... All people with black skin and African phenotype are subject to potential white supremacist abuse” (25).

In a video<sup>166</sup> uploaded in 2017 on YouTube, two African American parents explain to their viewers why and how they talked about race with their 3- and 4-year-old sons. The conversation started initially between the siblings only, who were debating who amongst

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<sup>165</sup> “This rule designated as “black” any person with any amount of African ancestry ... it functioned to exempt white landowners, particularly slaveholders, from the legal obligation of giving inheritance or other benefits of paternity to their multiracial offspring” (Daniel et.al, 2014, 12).

<sup>166</sup> Beleaf in Fatherhood (2017b).

them was black and who was brown. They then brought in their mother, who was present. The parents decided to have a conversation with their children, filmed it, and posted it online. “Do you see a difference in colour?”, the father asks them, showing them pictures of their friends from different descents. One of the children picks up the colours of their friends’ shirts. “What about their skin colour?”, the father asks multiple times. He says to them,

Now listen, everybody has shades of brown. Some are light brown, some are dark brown, papa’s really dark brown, see my skin, it’s really dark brown. What that means is that we have melatonin. Can you say melatonin? That’s what makes our skin dark. We are brown, our colour is brown, our race is black. We are black people. Black people, that is our race.

“That’s our race? Why?”, one of the boys asks. “That’s because when you see other black people, like [one of their friends’ fathers], he’s a black person too. We are black people, but our skin is brown”. “But”, he adds, “it doesn’t mean that we’re a different type, that we’re different people”. “So what do we learn today?” he asks. “So, we are black people, right?”, his eldest says, unsure. The mother nods her head. His father continues, “No matter what the colour the skin is, you can be friends with everybody. Everybody’s equal”. “Everybody’s equal”, his son repeats after his father.

The black father is a stay-at-home father who uploads videos on his YouTube channel to document his experiences as an at-home parent with his children. In the same video about that specific conversation, he then talks to the camera alone with his wife where they reflect on how things went. The father says, “it was sad, helping him understand how society sees us, cause then I was putting systematic thoughts in his head, telling him how society is going to... basically put him into a box. And that was frustrating”. The mother recalls one of her sons noticing the colours of their friends’ shirts, and not the skin colours. “His focus wasn’t even necessarily on the skin ... it’s like they don’t really care about the colour of everyone’s skin but it is something that they notice, but they don’t know how to talk about it”. They recognise their children were young to have the ‘race talk’ with, and the difficulty it was to find the words; the father says,

as parents we have to prepare the minds of our children for how they're going to deal with society. You never know what other kids' parents are saying to their kids, and what they're going to introduce to our kids. Somebody will say it if you don't. If you don't tell your kids how babies are made, somebody will tell them. And that goes for every other situation.

To learn at 3 and 4 years old that they are 'brown', however also from the 'black race', enact for these children "in a way that hand-me-down stereotypes never could, the truth that physical description follows race, not the other way around. Repeated rituals, race [is] re-born everyday" (Fields and Fields, 2012, 147). Every time we talk about race, "we continue to create and re-create it in our social life, continue to verify it" (147). Children "absorb the classification system" (31) necessary to the maintenance of racecraft beliefs. These beliefs are acquired in childhood, acquisition that "gradually overcome[s] the child's not-yet-socialized capacity to "see" from within its horizon ... Once acquired, that seeing becomes open-endedly applicable to specific contingencies of life, as they come up" (216-7). Evidence of these beliefs is then searched for and found in people's daily lives. A person who grows up in the United States learns "to filter what he sees", seeing his view being "distorted by the haze of expectations ([that is] racecraft)" (30).

race beliefs ... are acquired in the course of rearing and ... that the evidence that races exist is obvious. "Racial" incidents are frequent, criminals and medical patients are counted by race, statistical studies reveal race differences in everything from death to prostate cancer to rates of decline in the incidence of teenage pregnancy. Since race is ubiquitous, that list is open to indefinite extension. ... blood pressure ... athletic prowess, propensity to welfare dependence ... In our race-conscious world, virtually anything that can be counted will eventually be sorted, classified, and published by someone according to "racial" differences". (213)

#### 7.4 Whiteness 'localized'

Frankenberg (1993) writes that there are three dimensions to whiteness<sup>167</sup>:

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint," a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, "whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually

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<sup>167</sup> Whiteness "refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced, and ... are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination" (Frankenberg, 1993, 6).

unmarked and unnamed. (1)

Whiteness “function[s] as [a] transparent nor[m]” (Smith, 2012, 179), it is “unmarked, unraced, [it is] the human simpliciter” (Yancy, 2017, 3), and it is seen as “intrinsically valuable”, “pure” and god-like” (xv). Whiteness depends on “the marking of others on which its transparency depends” (Frankenberg, 1997, 6). It is the norm against which other groups are judged against. Fields and Fields (2012) argue that people of European descent or of non-African appearance only “classify as races ... for purposes of direct or indirect contrast with people of African descent” (115). Often, privilege is invisible to those who have it (McIntosh, 1988), however, it is highly visible by marginalised groups: whiteness “makes its presence felt in black life, most often as a terrorizing imposition, a power that wounds, hurts and tortures” (hooks, 1991, 341). “*If race disadvantages some, it necessarily advantages others*” (Hartigan, 2010, 91). Moreover, racism is not “an option for white people”, as it “shapes white people’s lives and identities” (Frankenberg, 1993, 6).

Whiteness is also “a process” (Carroll, 2011, 9) and “has a history” (Frankenberg, 1993, 204). It may “be displaced by its intersections with other social positions” (Levine-Rasky, 2013, n.p.). Race privilege intersects with other axes of difference and inequality, namely class, faith, ethnicity, gender sexuality, all “shaping ... articulations of whiteness” (Frankenberg, 1993, 20). There is not singular experience of living as a white man, and whiteness is “continually being transformed” (i.d., 2). 4 out of the 10 white fathers in the study identified as white, indirectly<sup>168</sup>. When asked where they were from, 5 out 10 used ‘thin descriptions’ to talk about their origins, mentioning the places where they grew up. The Jewish fathers’ descriptions were ‘thicker’, they talked about their ancestors in Europe, family dying in the Holocaust, or coming through Ellis Island with a few dollars, speaking a non-dominant

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<sup>168</sup> Bradley once talked about the Fathers’ Group at its infancy, and how it was “a bunch of white guys”, which he was part of. Kyle talks about the convention for at-home fathers he and I attended, “there were only whites in the room, there were very few non-whites, 2 Indians, 2 black men, gay dads”. Both Dale and Manuel talk about their respective sons as white people. I also understand that some Jewish men and women do not see themselves as white, given how Jewish people have been categorized as “cultural outsiders” or “racial outsiders” (Frankenberg, 1993, 224) and the continuing salience of anti-Semitism in certain places. Paul once talked about Jewish people at the same level of “Hispanics” and “black people”.

language, etc. Frankenberg (1993) found the same differences in her female white participants between non-Jewish and Jewish; she explains that Italianness or Irishness have currently “little political or social salience” for the first group, while “Jewishness has more political salience in the present-day United States than any other white ethnicity” (215).

In her study about white women in the 1980s, Frankenberg (1993) identifies three “modes of thinking through race” (16): ‘racial essentialism<sup>169</sup>, ‘color-evasiveness’/‘power evasiveness<sup>170</sup>, and ‘race cognizance<sup>171</sup>. The colour-blind discourse remains the current dominant language of race in the United States (15). These modes of thinking were present in the conversations I had with 5 of the 10 white fathers. Bradley, a white, Jewish father, was colour-blind, telling me once, “my kids are not prejudiced, they don't see colour, gender, sexuality”, and also selectively talking about certain kinds of “safe differences” (i.d. 149), but “evading questions of power” (152). Whiteness was associated with institutional and structural privilege for Manuel, a white, transgender, queer father, and Dale, a white, Jewish, gay father. Their marginalised, intersecting identities impact the ways they made sense of their whiteness. Dale would say about his son and choosing the kind of school for him, “I would like him to be more exposed to wider realities than just a village of white children”. Manuel says he is “very aware” that he is raising a “white person who’s presumably male and presumably straight”; him and his wife want to raise him “to be proud of who he is but also to be aware of the privileges he has in the world”, and make sure he “meets people of varying backgrounds”.

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<sup>169</sup> It puts an emphasis “on race difference understood in hierarchical terms of essential, biological inequality” (Frankenberg, 1993, 14).

<sup>170</sup> It “asserts that we are all the same under the skin; that, culturally, we are converging; that, materially, we have the same chances in U.S. society; and that— the sting in the tail—any failure to achieve is therefore the fault of people of color themselves” (Frankenberg, 1993, 14); “claiming to be the same as everyone else makes other cultural groups invisible or eclipses them” (198). “Despite the best intentions of its adherents, [it] preserves the power structure inherent in essentialist racism” (i.d. 147).

<sup>171</sup> It “articulates the new characterizations of race difference (including awareness of structural and institutional inequity and valorization of subordinated cultures) that emerged out of civil rights and later movements for the cultural and economic empowerment of people of color from the late 1950s to the present day” (Frankenberg, 1993, 140). It signals “autonomy of culture, values, aesthetic standards, and so on. And, of course, inequality ... refers not to ascribed characteristics, but to the social structure” (14-15).

The black fathers in this study were race cognizant, a discourse “that returns the focus on race” (Bigler, 1999, 19), where difference is “defined by the oppressed groups themselves rather than imposed on them” (18). These men were critical of the colour-blind discourse; Logan says,

I don't like the colour-blind thing. I want people to see me... I want people to acknowledge that I'm black and understand that it's kind of the first identifier that I have 'cause I've been that longer that I've been a dad, longer than anything else ... I feel there are complexities that come with my blackness that folks just... 'well I'm not comfortable with that', 'I've no interest in gaining a level of comfort', or don't really want to hear about that experience.

Mathias is also very critical of the colour blindness discourse: “I don't care about what people say, 'oh I don't see colour'. Ok. Sure you don't”. He, as a black man, cannot but be aware of how others see him, or rather not him, but his skin colour. The black body is “read” as “inferior, uncultured and disruptive” (Yancy, 2008, 231). Historically, “Black skin, thick lips, flat nose, and kinky hair revealed low intelligence, weakness of will, and slothfulness of mind and body” (Woods, 2000, 4) and black “lips were considered too large and their tongues too thick for them to learn to speak English correctly” (n.a. 1993, 1316). Black vernacular, as opposed to Standard English or “white English” (Smitherman-Donaldson, 1988, 157), was thought to reflect “the slaves' backwardness and inherent inferiority” (Watkins, 2010, 427). African-Americans are still perceived as less intelligent than whites (Leonard and Hazelwood, 2014, 118) and those who speak vernacular black are perceived as less competent (Belgrave and Allison, 2010, 259). Mathias is very aware of these stereotypes. The first question people ask him is ‘where are you from?’, “because they can't figure out how this guy who looks like me knows what he knows”, he says. “I get the question [where are you from?] *after* I opened my mouth, not before. Or after they read what I wrote. Because there's this distinction around intelligence”. He continues,

I was 12, 13 years old when I made the distinction it might be the first thing that you see when you see me [my skin colour] but it will be the last thing that you remember if you speak to me. I made it very clear ... I dressed a little differently and I spoke more eloquently ... I knew I was raised to be intelligent and to speak intelligently.

I got better at being who I am, at representing who I am, it opens the door to how people see people like me, because I've been very deliberate about the responsibility of what I represent, what I represent as black man, what I represent as a father, what I represent as a Christian. It's interchangeable which comes first as a priority.

Kyle is a white father. His wife is Indian, and they have two sons of mixed ancestry. They chose New York City to live in because they did not want their children to be the only minorities. "Most of the U.S. lives separate, communities live separate from each other and it's not true in New York", he says to me, "we live in our wonderful little bubble". Participating at a panel<sup>172</sup>, the host organised a free association game where the men were asked to say the first word that came to mind. When he said "multi-racial family", Kyle recalls,

It took me a moment to even comprehend what he was talking about. Her family is from India, that's to a large extent one of the, I don't remember the term they use... the privileged minority. Being Indian there's less discrimination than if my children were half black, I would have thought about it much more than I have but it's so normal for my kids to be not white that I don't think... we aren't giving it enough consideration and we haven't talked about it as much as other families that are biracial.

He has been "thinking about" his oldest son's skin colour more because he has a "darker skin tone". But it is not something they talk about as a family. "I don't think he thinks a lot about race and being different, I may be wrong about that. I'll talk to him about it to see where he is right now. Most of his friends are white ... he doesn't come home and talks about being bullied". Kyle describes here is a discriminatory preference called colourism<sup>173</sup>. In a society where whiteness counts, lighter skin is more acceptable and more valued than darker skin. There is the recognition that his boys' skin colours generally "provid[e] them with a certain amount of status compared to those further toward the dark end of the color spectrum" (Roth, 2008, 226).

Frank, with a Porto Rican father and a Filipino-Chinese mother, identifies as Asian. Most of

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<sup>172</sup> Panel 'The changing role of dad in the modern family' at Mums +SocialGood event in 2017, a filmed conference on mothers and families organised at the United Nations (Moms +Social Good, 2017).

<sup>173</sup> It is "the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of color over their dark-skinned counterparts" (Hunter, 2005, 237).



his family and friends are Asian, and he put his son in a school with a high Asian population. For him, Asian cultures value education before anything else, something he learned from his parents. He adds, "I always joke [saying] I'm only Latino for financial aid purposes". He recalls experiencing "racism from my own kind" from South American and Spanish Caribbean contractors and workers taking him for a fellow worker when he was a postgraduate student. 'What are you doing?', 'where's your uniform?', 'what are you? cause I can't tell', 'you don't look right', they would say to him in Spanish. There is the assumption that as a Latino, "I couldn't possibly work and do that kind of thing". When Frank told one of them he was studying, the later replied, 'oh, no wonder'. "He figures I have Asian blood which is why I'm doing what I'm doing", Frank says to me.

Frank and his son talk about race, "I tell him you're more Filipino than I am, because you're 75% Asian", with his mother being Filipino. His son identifies as "American". However, he does not talk about racism, because, he explains, his son lives in a primarily Asian neighbourhood in Queens, in a school with a majority of Asian children, "everyone knows each other, there's this entire network of people who do exactly the same thing you do". His son is

in his microcosm, he doesn't see it. Everyone's the same, I don't have to have that talk. He looks different enough from me, I don't have to tell him, you know, whatever, be careful of this and of that. I don't think there's a real need. But it's really sad, some of my colleagues have had those conversations with their sons, it's ridiculous, when their boys approach 11, 12, 13. It's hard to believe that only 60 years ago segregation was right in your face and it's still there.

Frank clarifies that his colleagues are "people of colour. African American, Latinos of mixed ancestry... It's still a thing in black households to have that talk with their kids". Like Kyle, Frank recognises that having a darker-skinned child would mean that his role as parent would be different. Their light-skinned children, if "New Yorkers think of a four-race framework of white, black, Hispanic, and Asian" (Foner, 2008, 59), would be categorized as Asians, "the model minority stereotype" (60). Asians "rank just below non-Hispanic whites in the city's ethnoracial hierarchy -- and they generally meet with greater acceptance from

middle-class white New Yorkers than other racial minorities” (i.d. 60). Foner (2000) writes also that ““nonwhite” immigrants who are *not* defined as black have had the most success in being recognized for their nationality, rather than their color, and in benefiting from the “whitening” effects of class” (149-50).

### 7.5 while black

If you are Black, you cannot afford to believe that you are seen as a “neoliberal subject” free from the force of white racism and its ugly legacy. You must not assume that your life matters in the same way white lives matter. You must not assume that you are granted unconditional spatial mobility. [...] you must not even assume that you are taken to be human. (Yancy, 2017, xxii).

Black people do not own their bodies. Reduced to their physicality, their bodies are deemed problematic (Yancy, 2008). As Fields and Fields (2012) put it, “it is always black *and*” (207), that is ‘black and criminal’, ‘black and hypersexual’, ‘black and rapist’, ‘black and thief’, and so on. Yancy (2017) recognises an “attempt to ontologically truncate the Black body into the very essence of criminality, danger, and suspicion. Hence, Black bodies must be *stopped*, frisked, imprisoned, suffocated, shot dead in the streets and left to rot in the hot sun, or lynched” (4). The black body is made both hypervisible, that is “excessive”, and invisible, that is “under erasure” (Petherbridge, 2017, 105), processes which undermine “the integrity of the Black body” (Yancy, 2017, xxx); it is “criminal”, “scary”, “demonic” (6); it is “socially marked for death” (i.d. 11).

Black writer Coates (2015) wrote a book entitled *Between the world and me* for his 15-year-old black son, with whom he lives in New York City. It is a letter from a father to a son, but also from a black man to another black man. “How one should live [free] within a black body within a country lost in the Dream?”, he asks (12). The Dream, or “a world where children do not fear for their bodies” (20). The (American) “Dream of being white, of being a Man” (60) is “perfect houses with nice lawns. It is Memorial Day cookouts, block associations, and driveways ... treehouses and the cub scouts. The Dream smells like peppermint but tastes like strawberry shortcake” (11). It “rests on our backs, the bedding made from our bodies”

(i.d.). The fear black people feel for their bodies is “connected to the Dream” (29). Black people struggle for the possession and integrity of their bodies; they have been denied “the right to secure and govern [their] own bodies” (8).

Simon is a young black man who says he has experienced discrimination.

From police yes. I doesn't happen as much but when I was younger I used to get pulled over, searched frantically, it was just incessant. 'Is this your car ?' they open the trunk, they gotta go through your stuff, 'you look like the guy that was' ... I was 17-18, and it went on until about 25-26 and then all of a sudden it stopped<sup>174</sup>.

“Why do you think it stopped?”, I ask. He responds,

Maybe I look older, I don't look like a criminal, not as much as I did when I was younger, I had phases when I was a punk rocker, they thought I was Jamaican, I had all kinds of identity. I guess that looks frightening, maybe? But because of the way I was presenting like ... or [was] taught to present myself, I never got loud, never talked back ... because of the way I speak, the way I present information, I always had some kind of backup.

“I am reduced to a racialized essence ... my dark body is the concrete and particular instantiation of racist abstraction: Blackness is dangerous” (Yancy, 2008, 23-4). Like with Mathias, as discussed in previous section, language serves as a buffer against discrimination and racism. Linguist Allen (1969) wrote that “a command of standard English is 'front door' English ... [it] is vital to any American (particularly any 'minority-group' American) who aims to associate with speakers of the standard dialect on anything like an equal footing” (124).

A common theme in the black men’s narratives is that they were taught to control their bodies through self-discipline, first by their parents. “We were always taught about holding yourself up to a certain stature”, Simon says. For him, black and white children are taught different things:

We spend more emphasis on race, how to be and how to carry ourselves ... how to stay in your lane, how to know what to do ... how to present yourself when you step

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<sup>174</sup> Which coincides with a judge who, at the same period, in 2013, ruled the practice of stop-and-frisk unconstitutional in New York City, see footnote 199.

out into the world ... don't let people try to belittle you ... don't be condescending ... be respectful ... remember you represent the family.

For him it was a question of pride, “like a sense of duty to be who you are”. Punitive treatment is received for what is perceived as not ‘staying in your lane’, ‘staying in your place’ -- that is, “at the bottom of society” (Honey, 1999, 15), ‘behaving’ or talking ‘properly’, a power issue that goes back to the time of slavery<sup>175</sup>. “[T]oday the badge and pistol symbolize the whip as for ensuring niggers stay in their place. America watches as police officers lock up Black men to form the New Jim Crow” (Warren, 2015, 31). Black children were, and still are, “carefully taught” (Ritterhouse, 2006, 55) on how to behave. Mathias remembers his childhood years where his parents but also his neighbours were telling him to behave. “Black kids are told, ‘mind yourself when you go out there’”. White children don’t hear that”, he tells me. Coates (2015) writes “All my life I’d heard people tell their black boys and black girls to ‘be twice as good,’ which is to say ‘accept half as much’ ... No one told those little white children, with their tricycles, to be twice as good” (90).

I ask Simon about whether the police officers stopping him were justified in his view. He says

There was always an excuse, there was always an excuse. 'Oh we're pulling you because you got a tail light out' and they want to search the car ... most of the time nothing generally specific on what I did like a moving violation or seatbelt on anything like that.

Simon cannot remember how many times he was stopped by the police and searched over the years. “I don't have enough fingers, dozens of times” he says, shaking his head. His experience of 'driving while black'<sup>176</sup> is not uncommon especially among men identified as black or Latino.

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<sup>175</sup> “Slaves were told, “Stay in your place, don't go wandering about at night, or the patrollers will get you.” They were also told to stay in their place, or they might be stolen ... because they were a valuable property” (Roper, 2009, n.p.).

<sup>176</sup> The term was coined in the 1990s to refer to a type of racial profiling where Black people, and especially males, are pulled over, searched, questioned and arrested at higher rates than white people in America (Louis and Reed, 2015, 89).

Logan once tells me about his previous job as a diversity director in a school, and how he would ask people to write down the top five ways they identify themselves. For him, he is black first “because that’s the first thing people see”. He has been black for the longest also, he explains; father and husband come after. “I go a week without someone doing something that is racial or racist, that’s a huge win for me, that’s how often things happen and people don’t understand that” he tells me. “Do you have any examples you’d like to share?” I ask him. “We’ll be here all day, and tomorrow”, he replies sarcastically. He says that things can be overtly racist, like people calling him with the “n word<sup>177</sup>”, or very subtle like people crossing over to the other side of the street when they see him, shifting their purses, or cabs that are not stopping. He goes ‘shopping while black<sup>178</sup>’. He has had many times someone walking behind him and checking him at the security. “I can even be with Leone and these things still happen, it doesn’t matter” he says.

#### 7.6 ‘A matter of life and death’<sup>179</sup>

“In the twenty-first century, Black Americans have had to proclaim, through expressed mass protest, resistance and pain and suffering, that Black Lives Matter” (Yancy, 2017, 1). In 2016, a video was uploaded online featuring 23 celebrities, in which each of them had recorded a video of themselves (23 Ways You Could Be Killed If You Are Black in America, 2016). They are reading, one after the other, an action from King’s (2016) piece entitled ‘23 Everyday Actions Punishable by Death if You’re Black in America’. “Falling to signal a lane change,” “riding in your girlfriend’s car with a child in the back,” “selling cigarettes outside of a corner store,” “riding a commuter train,” “walking home with a friend”, are some examples. Follows a photo of a black person who was killed by police while doing that particular action, and her/his name. As of June 2018, this video has been watched more than a billion times. Some have argued that the killings of black people and the frequency of those murders is an

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<sup>177</sup> The n-word or nigger, has become “an utterly unacceptable term of racial abuse and a taboo” (Ralph and Ralph, 2019, 319).

<sup>178</sup> When blacks are stereotyped as shoplifters in stores.

<sup>179</sup> After the title of West’s (1992) article.

example of ‘modern day lynchings’ (Embrick, 2015, 387). These activities resemble the so-called ‘trivial offenses’ that led black people to be jailed or lynched<sup>180</sup>, in Jim Crow<sup>181</sup> America, such as “attempting to register to vote”, “unpopularity”, “self-defence”, “peeping in a window” (Williams, 2010, n.p.), “public drunkenness” (n.a. 2005, 237), “demanding respect” or “disorderly conduct” (Smångs, 2017, 68). In the years 2010-12, young black males were 21 times more likely to be shot dead by police than young white men (Gabrielson, Sagara and Jones, 2014, n.p.). The “Black body remains excessive, a surplus to be disciplined, to be held in check, to be shot” (Yancy, 2017, xvi).

Black people, across the class spectrum, have “lower social and political trusts compared to other racial groups” (Nunnally, 2012, 227). Police officers can rarely be trusted, no matter what their skin colour is. Coates (2015) writes to his son that “the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body” (9). “Each time a police officer engages us, death, injury, maiming is possible” (i.d. 131). “On any given late evening”, writes Yancy (2008) “I know that white police officers might kill me as I reach for identifying information” (25). In response to two back-to-back shootings of unarmed black men<sup>182</sup> in July 2016, former president Barack Obama urged in a speech that biases should be “rooted out” and that these incidents are “symptomatic of a broader set of racial disparities that exist in our criminal justice system” (White, 2016, n.p.). In a speech in 2013 he said

You know, when Trayvon Martin<sup>183</sup> was first shot I said that this could have been my son. ... Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago. And when you think about

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<sup>180</sup> Mob execution, frequently of African Americans, especially from 1880s to 1930s. “Lynching victims met their deaths in a variety of gruesome ways, including hanging, burning, and beatings. Torture was frequently a part of the ritual of lynching. Victims were sometimes dismembered while still alive, and many males were castrated” (Wallach, 2005, 512).

<sup>181</sup> Jim Crow laws, “a system of racial separation, established mainly in the South, that began in the late 1890s” (Hohenstein, 2005, 468); it “created a system of political suppression that denied African Americans political status, rights, and opportunities” (i.d. 471)

<sup>182</sup> Alton Sterling and Philando Castile.

<sup>183</sup> Trayvon Martin was a 17-year-old teenager who was shot in 2012 by white Hispanic neighbourhood watch volunteer Zimmerman in Florida. Martin was unarmed. Zimmerman was acquitted of second-degree murder and manslaughter. The movement Black Lives Matter (see note 186) began in response to Martin’s

why, in the African American community at least, there's a lot of pain around what happened here, I think it's important to recognize that the African American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn't go away (Capehart, 2015, n.p.).

Logan's family scared for him and his safety as a black man. He tells me his mother was "upset" at the idea that he may go to North Carolina where the national convention for stay-at-home fathers was organized that year. "And I should be nervous. A black man was killed there recently<sup>184</sup>". "I am especially wary of people who act like cops when they're not cops", he adds. As I am meeting Leone, his wife, for a coffee one morning, I ask her, "do you worry about [your daughter's] security as a brown person?". She responds,

I don't. If she were a boy, I would feel differently. My friends with boys of colour, in the context of racial profiling and police killing, they're having a hard time figuring out how do I protect this child? I don't feel for her safety. I fear for [Logan's] really [she is tear-filled]. Recently I texted him 'can you please let me know during the day if you're ok' because I don't know. Every now and then I don't know ... our country has really an awful violent history when it comes to race relations. We've come a long way but there's a long way to go.

We can imagine how Leone's response would have been different had she been a black mother, talking about her daughter of mixed descent. Black women "have a very specific history with the state and law enforcement", and their "interaction with the state, through law enforcement, is marked by violence" (Jacobs, 2017, 41). They are murdered, assaulted, raped, "arrested unlawfully", and are "tried, convicted and incarcerated for defending themselves against nonpolice violence" (i.d.). Black mothers worry for their safety, but for their girls' safety as well: "Black girls as young as seven, great grandmothers as old as 95 have been killed by the police" (Crenshaw, 2016). While people know the names of black boys and black men such as Trayvon Martin or Tamir Rice, nobody remembers black women's names victims of police violence<sup>185</sup>. Crenshaw (2016), in her TED talk, argues

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death. Martin has become a symbol of "the overwhelming violence and oppression faced by blacks in the United States" (Wills, 2013, 227).

<sup>184</sup> Kouren-Rodney Bernard Thomas, an unarmed 20-year-old black man who was shot dead by a white man, a neighborhood watchman, in August 2016, in Raleigh, N.C..

<sup>185</sup> Some of these names are, Michelle Cusseaux, Aura Rosser, Tanisha Anderson, Mya Hall and Natasha McKenna (Crenshaw, 2016).

“there are no frames for us to see them”.

Black women are largely invisible in the separate narrative constructions of race, gender, and class. Situated at the intersection of these ideological blind spots, black women are seen to occupy a critical place in racial discourse, where the subject is black and male; in gendered discourse, where the subject is white and female; and in class discourse, where “race” and gender have no place. (Gale, 2019, n.p.)

Mathias says to me, “I was a Black man from 74 until the 80s. In the late 80s there was a shift, I became an African American. The discourse changed”. He adds, “It's our culture, not a condition”. The conversation continues on the recent killings of black people throughout the country. 2016, like the years before, witnessed a series of high-profile cases of unarmed black people killed by police officers. These deaths are not new, but technology and social media make it possible for civilians to film live these killings, post them on social media and use footage as proof of bias (Barnard, 2018, 105). It however does not stop black people from being killed. Black writer Stephen (2014) writes, “when you find yourself talking to a policeman — and this is inevitable, as a black man in America — it's never about being right, or who's right. It's about staying alive”. He adds,

I, along with every other black person in America, live with fear every day. (...) I plan to have children someday. They will be black, and there is nothing I can do to protect them from that. I'll give my kids the Talk when they're young, but old enough to understand viscerally what it means to be different, what it means that their small bodies are indelibly marked. (n.p.)

### 7.7 'The talk'

The talk about how to behave with the police becomes part of the parenting script when you are a black parent. Marlon Wayans, an African-American actor and comedian, released a stand-up show on Netflix entitled 'Woke-ish' (Wayans, 2018), in which he describes what 'the talk' is for him, as a black father:

They tell us, as black folks that we need to have “the talk” with our children. You hear about this? “The talk.” It's when you sit your children down and you explain to them how to respond respectfully when law enforcement pulls them over. And see, I'm down for that. And I think that's the responsible thing to do as a parent. You sit your



children down, you tell them to be respectful to our law enforcement. So, see, I tried to have “the talk” with my kids... And you know... halfway through the talk I sound like an old, scared slave that didn’t know he had his freedom. I was talking to my kids, I was like, “Baby, if the cops pull you over, you hush your mouth, and now don’t you sass me, boy! Don’t you sass me now, boy! The cops pull you over, I want you to hold your head down in humility. And you just rock back and forth, he goes, ‘You know why I pulled you over?’ I want you to smile! Show all 36 of your teeth. He goes, ‘You know why I pulled you over?’ Go, ‘No, suh, but I sure do trust ya!’ And he goes, ‘You wise-mouthing me?’ Go, ‘No, suh, I’d never do such a thing, Mr. Bossman.’ Yeah, so you use all kinda surnames. See, the white ego love that. ‘No, suh, Mr. Bossman, master-man, suh, I’d never do such a thing.’ Then he goes, ‘You want me to read you your rights?’ You best to stay humble. You say, ‘Yes, suh, please do. Well, you know I can’t read.’” I get upset. You know why I get upset? Because I get jealous. I get jealous because I got white friends and I’ve been pulled over with my white friends and what I’ve found is that white people are not afraid of the police. Black people are.

Once walking with Mathias in the dark from the subway stop to my house in Brooklyn, he tells me about the talk he had with his four children of mixed ancestry.

I told my kids if something is happening, make noise, raise your hands, and say I AM SCARED FOR MY LIFE [he suddenly stops, his powerful voice fills the void of the empty street and he raises his arms in the air]. Nowadays there are cameras everywhere, people are filming, you don't know who is watching you. It also gives you an advantage to kick with your legs while the person is looking up. Never trust what your attacker says, “keep quiet or I'll kill you” or “do this and I won't hurt you”. I often have this conversation with my kids, what would you do in that situation instead of 'what if'.

“But”, I say to him, perplexed, “Terence Crutcher<sup>186</sup> who was shot recently, he had his hands up in the air, and yet, he still got killed”. Mathias does not reply anything. 'Hands up don't shoot' became a protest slogan and a gesture after the killing of unarmed 18-year-old African American Michael Brown by a white police officer in Missouri in 2014. The slogan went viral and became associated with the Black Lives Matter<sup>187</sup> movement. It has been

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<sup>186</sup> He was shot in Tulsa, Oklahoma in September 2016. The police report initially said he was shot because he did not

follow the order to put his hands up. The footage of the video taken from a helicopter showed that he did.

<sup>187</sup> Black Lives Matter or BLM is an international activist movement created by three African-American women, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi and Patrisse Cullors. Garza describes it as a “an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression” (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). It is a movement “working for the validity of Black life. We are

used on social media like twitter (#HandsUpDontShoot) and written on banners at marches and demonstrations in the country and around the world against police brutality and police killings. However, evidence disclosed months later shows that he did not surrender his hands up in the air. "Yet this does not diminish the importance of what was unearthed in Ferguson by Brown's death. Nor does it discredit the larger Black Lives Matter movement" argues African American writer Capehart (2015).

In a 2017 video<sup>188</sup>, black parents talk to their children about how to deal with the police. One black father says, "we actually have a line that we do at our house, we practice this thing"; he turns and asks his daughter: "What is it?". "I'm Ariel Sky Williams," she says, with her hands up in the air. "I'm 8 years old. I'm unarmed and I have nothing that will hurt you" (Truong, 2017, n.p.). Later in the video the girl starts crying as her dad tells how he got handcuffed and tasered for something that he did not do. The parents in this video insist on not talking back to the police, doing as they are told and raising their hands in the air to show they are empty, to prove that they are not a threat, even when they have done nothing wrong.

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working to (re)build the Black liberation movement" (i.d.). The origin of the movement dates back to the death of Trayvor Martin. The movement gained great popularity through social media (Kidd, 2017).

<sup>188</sup> (How to deal with the police, 2017).



*The Talk* by artist Michael D'Antuono (D'Antuono, 2015).

This painting is “meant to represent a conversation that almost all African American families must have about safety, and how the police force is inherently prejudiced against black kids” according to the artist (Villarreal, 2016, n.p.). The message on the television screen says, “No indictment in police shooting of unarmed young man”. On each side, portraits of Martin Luther King Jr. and Barack Obama hang on the walls. “I doubt that Dr. King would have ever dreamed that in 2015, African American parents would still find it necessary to warn their young sons about the dangers of being black in America,” said D’Antuono in the press release (Cross, 2015). This echoes Coates (2015) who writes to his son

You have been cast into a race in which the wind is always at your face and the hounds are always at your heels. And to varying degrees this is true of all life. The difference is that you do not have the privilege of living in ignorance of this essential fact (107).

The ghost of Emmett Till comes back in another meeting with the Fathers Group where Pete talks again about why he showed the open casket to his son. “It’s risk versus reward. I don’t want him to not know what has happened and I don’t want to make him fearful of who he

is as a man, as a black man, as a person". Later on, in a conversation I have with him in his apartment, Emmett Till resurfaces again. "[My son] came to me, he brought slavery to me ... It's essential, I can tell my son this is where you're from, this is where you're from", he says to me, "I keep trying to tell my kids, slavery was not this 800 years ago, 100 years ago there were slaves". He continues,

I don't want him blind to the fact that, yo, Trevor Martin got killed, the cops are killing. These people are being killed and he's coming to me asking me, 'what happened?' ... he wants to understand these things. I don't want to sugarcoat it ... I want him to understand even at 9 that yo, shit is going on out there, it hasn't even stopped! ... I spin those conversations to say, yes those things happen but Barack Obama is our president, you know what I mean? So he sees there's another side to it. You can do anything you want to do, you just gotta choose what it is ... I need him to understand what it's like not only to be a person or a man but a black man in America ... we are an endangered species. They're killing us, treating us like we're the elephant in the room that they just shoot down, the elephant is lying on the ground and everybody walks around it. It's not only that these people are killing us, they're getting off as not guilty. Which is the same thing they were doing to Emmett Till, the people who murdered him got off, they *got off* ! I need him to understand it's not just being black, it's to be black and understand who you are, because if you don't walk with your shoulders high and your head high, then you're gonna be one of those people that they go 'hey boy, come over here and do this', you're not gonna be that person, you're gonna be better than that, you're gonna be whoever the fuck you want to be.

Emmett Till's story functions to sustain a "collective memory critical to Black survival", to paraphrase Yancy (2008, 8). It is one of those "specific memories that fail to fade, memories that associate the experience of whiteness with instances of lynching, castration, and terror" (i.d. 10). Marsiglio and Pleck (2005) argue that

Men of color have unique opportunities to mentor their children into a social world tainted with prejudice, a world ... where being young, African American, and male is often associated with negative stereotypes and suspicion. Educating sons on what it means to be a black or Latino man in a white society where hegemonic forms of masculinity reign is an experience that speaks to how fathers' experiences can be affected directly by their race/ethnic identity. (260)

Ron<sup>189</sup> is a black father in his early 40s. Like the black fathers in this study, Ron memorized the names of the black people in high profile cases who were killed by police officers in 2016, but also from the years before. Angela Davis writes in 2013, “We know the names of young black and brown people who have been killed by the police or by vigilantes” (in Snodgrass, 2017, 169). To remember their names is giving back those anonymous, invisible bodies, an identity, an integrity, a humanity. Yancy (2008) writes

I am visible in my invisibility. What is seen as a stereotypical “object” devoid of nuance. Tautologically, “a Nigger is just a Nigger”, one who is swallowed up in anonymity. White racists practices construct an iterable conception of the Black body: all Blacks are the same. (25)

Like the name of Emmett Till, names are part of a collective memory that works to recover and forge an African American history that is otherwise “disremembered and unaccounted for” (Morrison, 1987, 275). Already in slavery and in official records, black people had no names (Gates, 2009, 7). They were renamed by their masters, “symbolically cutting ... off ... their African identity and heritage” and “sense of personhood” (Walker, 1977, 74). Coates (2015) writes to his son, “Struggle for the memory of your ancestors” (151). He named him Samori for Samori Touré, who was a Guinean king who resisted the French colonial rule in the 19<sup>th</sup> century “for the right to own his black body” (68).

I cannot but see a sharp contrast in a conversation I have with a white father I met at the largest, annual convention for stay-at-home fathers, which occurred in North Carolina that year. He was explaining to me why some of the fathers did not come this year because they did not support the recent “bathroom law<sup>190</sup>” that was passed. “We [stay-at-home fathers] are against discriminations against all kinds of people, gender, sexuality<sup>191</sup>”. “What about the recent shooting of an African-American man in Raleigh?”, I ask him (see note 183). “I

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<sup>189</sup> Ron is not part of the original study group. He is a family service specialist and an offender workforce specialist, working for an organisation that works with currently or previously incarcerated individuals. Ron works primarily with fathers, who are for the majority part of minority groups.

<sup>190</sup> North Carolina “adopted House Bill 2 in March 2011, a statute forbidding people to use public restrooms that do not correspond to their birth certificates” (Shilling, 2017, 34-48).

<sup>191</sup> From fieldnotes.

wouldn't know, there're so many, I don't keep track", the father says to me, with a smile. "The forgetting is habit, is yet another necessary component of the Dream" (Coates, 2015, 143).

Ron explains that no longer than a couple of days before our interview, a young man in the Bronx (the neighbourhood is also called 'gunsmoke' he tells me) was on drugs, he put a knife to his neck, said he was going to kill himself and started to cut. The police tasered him. He pulled out the lead, and they shot him. "Ok, I'm trying to kill myself, and you stop me from killing myself by shooting me! He didn't die, but they shot him! He wasn't threatening. Why would I shoot you? These methods are just crazy". He continues,

That doesn't even help, raising your hands! You get shot with your hands up, behind your back, in your pockets, no arms, I'm waiting for the guy with no hands to get shot! He didn't have no hands, he wasn't raising nothing, he still got shot! I'm still waiting for that one [in a sarcastic tone]. Amadou Diallo<sup>192</sup>, he had his keys and wallet in his hands, 51 times they shot him. Michael Brown, he had his hands up, 'don't shoot'. They shot him. Tamir Rice<sup>193</sup>, 2 seconds they arrive and shot him, 2 seconds, not a question, not a question, within 2 seconds they arrived on the scene and shot the 12-year-old boy with a fake gun.

Fields and Fields (2012) argue that

[T]he categories imposed by racism are too restrictive to fit persons of ambiguous ancestry ... they are too restrictive to fit anyone. There were too tight for Amadou Diallo, the African immigrant mistakenly killed by New York City police officers, and he died of the constriction. Diallo probably defined himself as a member of his nation or tribe or lineage, rather than as "black". But, under the American system, it was the officers' definition of him, not his definition of himself, that held the balance between life and death. (109)

### 7.8 Parenting while black

Ron has three young children of his own. Ron is selective about he tells them about race.

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<sup>192</sup> Guinean immigrant who was shot and killed by the New York Police Department in 1999 in the Bronx. They fired 41 shots and hit with 19 bullets (Yancy, 2008, 26).

<sup>193</sup> 12-year-old African American boy who was killed by a police officer in Ohio in 2014. The latter was not indicted.

However, he notices they already have an awareness of racism and of police violence, saying things like, 'watch out, the cops!'. He wonders out loud, "in my mind I'm like, where, why?". It could come from their friends, he speculates, or the news he watches on television. "How do the police killings make you feel as a father?", I ask him. He responds, with a serious tone,

I'm very afraid. You know, the helicopter parents, always whirling at the playing ground, that's the direction I'm heading. Not only do I have to watch my kids with other children in the playground, I have to watch how they interact with adults, the police, because I have young boys of colour. They're automatically gonna be looked at as targets. I'm afraid, I'm afraid, where could I go in this world, the first thing that's gonna be seen when you see them is this [he touches his arm], not what's in here [he puts a hand onto his heart], up here [touches his head], but this [touches his arm], where can I go to be able to raise them without having the fear of, or have to do extra preparation because of their colour, that shouldn't be! I'm quite sure there's no white family where the dad is there, 'you know, you're white, things are gonna be wrong, you gotta be prepared for this'. That's a luxury I don't have. I have to have these conversations with my children. I have to be extra mindful because of the colour of their skin.

White parents are not concerned about the police being called on their children for playing in a public park with a fake gun and being killed because of it, like it happened to 12-year-old Tamir Rice in 2014. The officer who killed him fired "within one second of police arrival" (Jones, 2016, 96). Ross, a white father, says he is "incredibly angry at helicopter parents". He explains to me that there is a line between "overinvolvement" and "good parenting". He criticizes parents in the playground who hover and "never stay more than two feet away from their kid". "I'm all for safety but it can't be bubble wrap", he adds. Paul, similarly to Ross, is not overtly concerned about his children's safety. He likes to go to the park near his son's school on the Upper East Side in Manhattan. He has his spot; "I like it because I get to have a view of the park, under the trees so I get some shade, it's nice". I once accompany Paul and his children to the park. We are both sitting down; "do you know where your son is?", I ask, looking for him in the crowd of running children. His arms behind him on each side of the bench, relaxed, Paul smiles, and says,

I am not keeping a constant eye on him. I check on him every 20 minutes maybe, sometimes he comes and checks on me too. I'm not the type of dad who's worried,

like he's going to fall at each step. [Tim] knows where I am<sup>194</sup>.

In another conversation with Paul, he describes the playground as

a safe enough environment, and I choose very deliberately where I sit so I can see the whole playground. ... I'm with [Marie] and I give [Tim] free reign in the playground. I know he's not gonna hurt anybody, he's not gonna run away, and I can see him 80% of the time. And I know when it's getting a little too long for my comfort when I don't have eyes on him.

A final example is Earl, also a white father, who describes his interactions with strangers at the park:

There would be a wonderful situation, I'd be out with [Joshua] in the carrier, and I'm pretty extraverted, I would come in, I would say hi to everybody ... I would make eye contact directly and say hi, just because I wanted to be a good role model for my son, you walk by somebody, you greet them, you know, we don't live in such an anonymous world where you're never acknowledged by other human beings. ... we're in these big cities where we pass thousands of people every day without acknowledging them, it's just very different than what I think is a normal healthy way... we're programmed for it.

This illustrates "the habit, often unconscious, of assuming and acting as if any and all spaces -- geographical, psychological, cultural, linguistic ... -- are rightfully available to and open for white people to enter whenever they like" (Sullivan, 2014, 20). "White bodies, unlike Black bodies ... are privileged by normative structures and institutional structures that protect them, that deem them "honorable" and "safe" bodies" (Yancy, 2008, 26). The same goes for their children. Coates (2015) writes

hell upon those who tell us to twice as good and shoot us no matter. Hell for ancestral fear that put black parents under terror. (87)

[in Manhattan] [white people are] "utterly fearless [...]. That was where I saw white parents pushing double-wide strollers down gentrifying Harlem boulevards in T-shirts and jogging shorts. Or I saw them lost in conversation with each other, mother and father, while their sons commanded entire sidewalks with their tricycles. The galaxy belonged to them, and as terror was communicated to our children, I saw mastery communicated to theirs. (89)

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<sup>194</sup> From fieldnotes.



Mathias says he was never concerned about his children's safety, because they are of mixed ancestry, with their mother from Dominican Republic. "My concern has always been about their citizenry. Nothing to do with race. Everything to do with morals and ethics". He says he did not talk about race with his children. "Why didn't you talk about race and discrimination?", I ask him. "I didn't have black skinned kids until my daughter. Why would I set them up for a limited belief?", he responds. It is only after one of the police shootings in 2015 that his eldest who has two biological Dominican parents told his (adoptive) father, "we've never had that conversation". "I was waiting for you to ask", said Mathias to him. "I never wanted to project black power or proud to be... we don't go to Dominican Day Parade, Caribbean Day Parade", Mathias tells me. His children are "fortunate" that the first question they get is 'where are you from?'. "What do you mean?", I ask, puzzled. "Because they have lighter skins. My sons, in particular". "How are they fortunate?", I say. "Because there's no immediate barrier. There's more a sense of privilege ... black children stick out in predominantly white environments. My kids don't stick out". However, "*who* you are with may change that. What are you wearing, how are you wearing it?". He continues,

baggy pants hanging of their ass, hoodies... if that was your crowd, like that's what it's like here and that's the only crowd you interact with, who am I to tell you what to wear? But when you leave this place, this is how the place is governed. That's the difference between minority children and the privileged. Who governs.

11pm at night in Bedford, Stuyvesant, in the Bronx, in Washington Heights, it's dark outside and you're walking down the street and you're a black kid, I don't give a fuck who you are, what you think about people, the propensity, the criminalization of the black skin, the demonization of it is a barrier, it is a barrier to entry into society. My kids don't have that barrier ... my daughter has darker skin<sup>195</sup> but she benefits from being a woman in that there's not this overcriminalization of the black woman. What may come up later depending on her character and her way of being is this angry black woman<sup>196</sup> connotation as a stereotype. If she should raise her voice or twist her head, she falls right into that category.

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<sup>195</sup> "Research on parenting in Black families indicates that fathers are more likely than mothers to address colorism aimed at their daughters' dark skin, which is a form of discrimination" (Romero, 2017, 26).

<sup>196</sup> The angry black woman, "a socially constructed image of a confrontational, aggressive, and bitter woman who is always upset and has a perpetual "attitude"" (Wilder, 2015, 38).

Associations exist between dark skin tones, violence, criminality and untrustworthiness (Banks, 2009), and this affects both men and women<sup>197</sup>. Colourism has been for African-Americans “a continuing phenomenon since the time of slavery” (Bennett and Plaut, 2008, 757). Dark-skinned black people experience more discrimination than their light-skinned counterparts (Hunter, 2007). Dark skin is associated with masculinity, dangerousness, strength, feeding into the myth of the black male rapist, while light skin is “regarded as more feminine, refined, delicate” (Hunter, 2005, 119) and weak (Wilder, 2015, 74). Dark-skinned black women experience race, gender, class and dark skin oppression: they are more often perceived as “intimidating, militant, ghetto<sup>198</sup> and loud” (Wilder, 2015, 76) and “violent” (79).

If Mathias’ sons “don’t stick out”, they still would be identified as belonging to minority groups. More so black males, but also Latino men, are more likely to be pulled over, stopped and frisked<sup>199</sup>, searched, arrested, to have their bail set higher and to be denied bail, to be found guilty, to be imprisoned, to receive harsher and longer sentences, to be executed, and less likely to be released on probation, compared to whites (Andersen and Taylor, 2016, 265). Mathias says,

My sons, if they were to commit a crime, while they might be more the presumption of innocence first, as soon as you check off black, white, non-Hispanic, you don’t get to check white non-Hispanic, you are either checking black Hispanic or you’re checking Hispanic, and now you’re going in the system, it doesn’t matter what you look like, this is who you are on paper.

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<sup>197</sup> “Black women with light skin receive approximately 12 percent less time behind bars than their darker skinned counterparts” (Viglione, Hannon and DeFina, 2010, 255).

<sup>198</sup> Ghetto is “related not only to poverty but the idea of a low-class or “classless” attitude ... When one “acts ghetto”, one embodies poor taste, morals, and decision-making (Wilder, 2015, 76).

<sup>199</sup> ‘Stop and frisk’ in New York City or ‘Terry Stop’ in other places refers to the right to stop, search and temporarily detain someone “on the basis of their social characteristics (age, race, ethnicity, gender, neighbourhood, attire) rather than because of concrete evidence that they actually committed a crime” (Goode, 2015, 577). A ‘stop and frisk’ program was endorsed by the administration of NYC mayor M. Bloomberg in 2001. In 2011, 85 percent of those stopped and frisked by NYPD were male and of Black and Latino descent (Byfield, 2014, 65). In 2013 a federal judge rejected the practice that she assimilated as a “policy of indirect racial profiling” and deemed the practice as unconstitutional (Bergner, 2014). It was put to a stop that same year by mayor B. Del Blasio.

Logan and Leone recall how it was their daughter who brought up the subject of race first, noticing her father's and mother's different skin colours. "It was the first observation she made", Logan says. Parents' engagement with those conversations can be *proactive* but also *reactive*, that is occurring "inadvertently in response to race-related incidents that parents or children have experienced, or in response to children's general queries about racial issues" (Hughes and Chen, 2003, 272). Logan recognizes that their 5-year-old sometimes struggles to identify whether someone's behaviour is racist or not. Once, a cab driver stopped for him and her, then kept on driving and picked up a white family close by. He had the conversation with her, about why he thought the driver did not stop. He recalls another time where the three of them, him, his wife and Alice, were in a car, and another car almost hit them. The white driver, in a white car, realized she was going to hit them and hit the brakes. Alice, at the back, said something. Logan says

At first I didn't hear what she said, I thought she was just referring to the white car but what she really was asking was, 'do you think this woman was trying to hit us because she's white and you're black' ? ... she's trying to come to grips with the story of this country, she wants to understand why some of these things happen.

Leone worries that Alice would think "all white people are evil and hate black people". Logan is not worried, and knows his daughter is "not racist". She has many white people in her life – starting with her mother – to show her that it is not true. This was for him a "teachable moment" where he was able to have a conversation about race and about making assumptions about other people. This is a lesson in 'racial socialization', which refers to "how black people learn about the effect of race on their lives and the meaning of being black in America", where they develop "a race-centered consciousness" (Nunnally, 2012, 58-9). Parents and families "are most integral to the transmission of racial socialization messages" (i.d. 58). Parents from the Northeast, like most of these fathers in this study are, and more educated parents, like Logan is, tend to relay more on these types of messages (Thornton et al. 1990). A component of racial socialization is what Hughes and Chen (2003) call "preparation for bias<sup>200</sup>" (275). They suggest that "enabling children to navigate around racial barriers and to

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<sup>200</sup> It refers to "parents' efforts to promote their children's awareness of racial bias, and to prepare them to cope with prejudice and discrimination" (Hughes and Chen, 2003, 275).

negotiate potentially hostile social interactions are normative parenting tasks within ethnic minority families” (i.d.). African-American parents are more likely than any other ethnic groups to discuss racial bias with their children (Smith, Jacobson and Juarez, 2011).

The ability to read racism into situations is part of a “knowledge base” black people in the United States have relied on for hundreds of years to survive as a group, and as such have come to form an “epistemological community”, argues Yancy (2008, 23). Black people, as “we-knowers”, “construct, acquire, and negotiate knowledge and evidence regarding racism and racist acts” (8). In reading one behaviour as racist, Yancy writes, “my judgment is ... rendered reasonable within the context of a shared history of Black people noting, critically discussing, suffering and sharing with each other the traumatic experiential content and repeated acts of white racism” (7). While he recognizes his reading can be wrong at times, he argues that

To reject my having reliable knowledge about racist gestures because I got one wrong, or to say that I could theoretically be mistaken, does not thereby rule out the reliability or warranted assertability of my judgment upon future or past occasions. To do so is to reject the long history of complex brutal practices that whites have used to discipline Black bodies; it is to deny a collective memory critical to Black survival; and it is to engage in a process of elision regarding the asymmetrical social dynamics and power relations between whites and Blacks that have informed Black people about white terror. Indeed, it is to deny Black critical subjectivity and its capacity to discern correctly a racist action. (8)

Blacks ... have a long history of having become adept at recognizing these gestures for purposes of resistance and survival. This form of knowledge speaks to a socially and behaviorally complex way in which Black people have had to organize the world and recognize how that world is organized in ways that systemically and systematically vitiate their dignity and literally reduce them to a state of nonbeing. (7-8)

‘Race socialization’ practices also aim for children to develop “a positive sense of self and history” (Smith Jacobson and Juarez, 2011, 10). This is what Hughes and Chen (2003) call

“cultural socialization<sup>201</sup>” (274). In a conversation with Pete in his studio-apartment, his Dominican girlfriend also present participates occasionally. She tells him that by telling his son about African-Americans’ painful history, “it’s gonna make him already have a perspective on life before he even goes out and experience life ... you’re constantly teaching him or reminding him about how he should feel lower than white people”. It is making his son “defensive” and interpret an action as racist against him, asking, “is it because I’m black?”. She continues, “we’re planting those seeds of ‘yeah you’re gonna be facing a lot of things in your life cause you’re black, it’s messing their minds up ... they’re not taking action because of their insecurity because they’re black”. For Pete, being a father to a black son is teaching him things about his heritage, instilling self-confidence and making sure his son realises his potential, that is developing the means to succeed and “living his dream”:

That insecurity comes from a lack of instilling those things I’m instilling in him ... Just like I teach him about slavery, I teach him about before slavery, that the Egyptians knew shit that no else knew, that the pyramids still stand, and I tell him on a regular basis ‘you come from kings’, ‘you are a king’. He looks at me, a little crazy like... But I tell him that, ‘you are a king’ and now I instil him with New Guinea, this concept of me realizing who I am so that he can realise who he is ... growing up as a black man in America, it is his history, the same way New Guinea is, slavery is the same way, Egyptian kings and queens that we come from, that started civilization. I make sure there’s an even amount.

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<sup>201</sup> It refers to “parental practices that teach children about cultural heritage, ancestry and history; that maintain and promote customs and traditions; and that instil cultural, racial, and ethnic pride” (Hughes and Chen, 2003, 474). It “promotes children’s positive racial identity development and self-esteem by preparing children to interpret and cope with prejudice, discrimination and negative group images emanating from the outside world” (i.d.).



Illustration from Nicholle Kobi (Kobi, 2019).

An article in Ebony magazine entitled 'How To Teach Your Child Black' (2001) stresses the importance of exposing black children early on to black history and positive black role models, teaching them about black culture and the Civil Rights Movement, reading to them

books written by black authors, discussing the achievements of black athletes, black inventors, etc. This knowledge becomes “the first line of defence against racism and prejudice” (n.a., 2001, 65). It quotes DuBois Cook<sup>202</sup>

There are so many negative forces and stereotypes in the culture telling Black children that they are inferior and [dumb]. You’ve got to have a positive influence to counteract the negativity ... It’s a matter of self-identity, self-confidence and feeling at home in this hostile world (65).

The article continues,

all children will want to know where “they come from”. [...] grab a big colourful map and take them to the continent of Africa. Tell them about the dozens of African countries, the metropolitan cities and the secluded villages. Show them pictures of great African kings, queens and warriors.” (66)

Banks (2012) writes that “Reinterpreting African ancestry as a source of racial pride has been a way for African Americans to resist marginalization linked to having African roots” (60). She argues,

For descendants of enslaved people, the construction of pride surrounding African ancestors as royal and as warriors has particular significance. While enslaved people are cast off to the margins of society, royalty stands at the highest echelons. (i.d. 61)

To claim one’s Africaness becomes a form of resistance. West (1993) writes that “Afrocentrism ... is a[n] attempt to define an African identity in a white society perceived to be hostile. [...] it puts black doings and sufferings, not white anxieties and fears, at the center of discussion” (4). These practices go back many generations: “The genius of our black foremothers and forefathers was to create powerful buffers to ward off the nihilistic threat, to equip black folk with cultural armor to beat back the demons of hopelessness, meaninglessness and lovelessness” (i.d. 15).

## 7.9 Conclusions

The election of Barack Obama in 2008 supposedly signalled the beginning of a ‘post-

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<sup>202</sup> National president of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History.

racial' era, or a 'colour blind society'. However, as Yancy (2017) writes, a 'post-racial society' is an "illusion"; "If anything, Black people are still living in the belly of the beast" (xix). This chapter shows that black men face the particular oppression of being both male and black in America. As black fathers, they will face different circumstances and will have to think about their children's safety, in ways that other fathers do not have to. Protecting them from physical harm, but protecting them also in instilling a sense of self-worth and pride.

This chapter finds great resonance with the works of intersectional theorists on black motherhood and mothers of colour (see Collins, 1994, 2000). Collins (1994) writes that survival, power and identity are themes that "form the bedrock of women of color's survival" (374). She argues that "physical survival is assumed for children who are white and middle-class" (i.d.), a sign of privilege that is not given to children of colour. Parenting for mothers of colour, however, is about "teaching children survival skills" (Collins, 1990, 46). In telling their children about what happened to Emmett Till, in preparing them to handle themselves in front of police, when Pete tells his son "you're gonna be whoever the fuck you want to be", these black men are "preparing children to cope with and survive within systems of racial oppression" (Collins, 1994, 381) and "equipping children with skills to challenge [those systems]" (382).

This research shows the importance of taking an intersectional approach on fatherhood; it shows which interactions have the most salience in what context. It demonstrates that whiteness mattered differently for the white fathers, depending on how their social locations intersected. Race, as a source of oppression, emerges here as a key axis of differentiation, that impacts the daily lives and the parenting of black fathers. Black parents and their children "face an extra challenge because of inequalities of race" (Rollock, Gillborn, Vincent and Ball, 2015, 174). The research also shows that class is here overridden by race: as hooks (2000) argues, "All black people know that no matter your class you will suffer wounds inflicted by racism" (98).



## 8. Conclusions

Some kinds of differences are more powerful in the world than others. (Frankenberg, 1993, 229)

### 8.1 Introduction

This research set out to investigate the changing nature of masculinities in relation to fatherhood through the lens of primary caregiving in New York City. A strength of this thesis has been to use an intersectional framework which has enabled an examination of the complexity and diversity of what it means to be primary caregiving fathers, expanding our understandings of fathers' experiences in relation to wider systems of power. To look at parenting through an intersectional framework helps us understand what "shapes people's experiences every day, and limits and constrains the choices they make" (Romero, 2017, n.p.). This study has looked at a diverse group of fathers who came from multiple backgrounds. It differs from previous studies on primary caregiving fathers that have focused for the most part on privileged groups of men (Smith, 1998; Doucet, 2006; Merla, 2008).

Current exclusions or underrepresentation of different kinds of fathers include: young fathers, older fathers, lone fathers, widowed fathers, ethnic minority fathers, disabled fathers, gay fathers, unmarried fathers and grandfathers. (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003, 60)

We need to recognize that experiences of male caring are diverse and that axes of embodied difference – including age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion and being a single parent – will shape experiences of male primary caring. (Boyer et al., 2017, 58)

Another important strength of my research was its longitudinal approach; I conducted 11 months of ethnographic fieldwork in New York City which enabled a sense of 'being there'

(Geertz, 1988) as I immersed myself in the culture and in the men's lives. Qualitative methods "provide the best insights into how men present themselves as gendered beings" (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009, 279). Previous studies on primary caregivers are based solely on interviews (Latshaw, 2009; Doucet, 2006). The additional use of ethnographic participant observation in my research allows for a depth of insight into a particular group, "revealing the nuances of richness of people's perceptions and lifeworlds" (Filippucci, 2009, 321).

Drawing on a range of theoretical frameworks – men and masculinities theory, intersectional theory, theories of embodiment --, I argue that my research fills important gaps identified in the literature and provides important insights into the ways that primary caregiving fathers experience fatherhood and negotiate their identities as male carers. It contributes to widening the scope of our understanding of the meanings and practices of fatherhood in the United States, it connects issues of fatherhood with male identity and it questions traditional intersections between fatherhood and masculinities.

My research argues that there exist different kinds of fathers, depending on the social positions they occupy. Men's social identities intersect to create "unique ways of being and knowing" (Lazarus, 2018, 25), which shape fathering experiences and the meanings assigned to fatherhood. I argue that men's lives are profoundly structured by wider systems of power and oppression, which results in unequal access to choices and opportunities as parents. I stress that fatherhood, as a salient social location, can be both a location of systemic privilege and/or oppression. My research brings the focus to social statuses that interlock with gender that have often not been given the same amount of attention in the literature. "One-dimensional approaches have the consequence of creating specific aspects of personhood as the norm ... [which] erases important differences in the experiences of [people]" (Romero, 2017, 16). Markers of identity such as race and class cannot be approached separately from one another, as "they structure all relationships" (Collins, 1993, 561). While they are always present, "one category may have salience over another for a

given time and place” (560). Depending on which feels more salient at a certain time, “privilege and oppression are gained or lost” (Romero, 2013, 82).

In this chapter I summarize the points that are discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2 and highlight the contributions that this research makes in relation to our understandings of fatherhood and masculinities in the United States. I discuss the key points that emerged from the research and how it relates to existing conceptual frameworks. Finally, I identify some of the limitations of the study and offer suggestions for future research.

## 8.2 Summary

### *8.2.1 Fatherhood and rac(e)ism*

My research asked, *how do men’s multiple social locations within the ‘matrix of domination’ (Collins, 1990) impact their identities and experiences as primary caregiving fathers?* What this study found is that race, as an organizing system of difference, has profound implications on the practices of fatherhood. I argue that race emerges as the most important axis of differentiation in parenting for the men in this study. I agree with Dow (2019) who studied middle-class black mothers in the United States and who found that “race continues to be important in their lives and the lives of their children” (186).

What Chapter 7 demonstrates is that all the fathers are going to be watchful of their children’s whereabouts and behaviours, but not in the same way, and not for the same reasons. The black fathers talked about the continuing salience of institutional and interpersonal racism and other forms of violence as part of the daily experiences of people of colour in a white supremacist society. They teach their children to navigate a racist society, from how to behave with police, to be knowledgeable about achievements by black people, to “knowing your place in the world”, in Matthias’ words.

Inequality translates in the ways in which parents need *to think*, or not, about their children’s safety, because their skin colour carries either privilege or suspicion. Already during

the time of slavery, black fathers struggled to protect their children from violence (hooks, 1981). Thomas H. Jones, a black man, a father, a former slave who was born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, talks about “the desperate agony that the slave husband and father is exposed to” (Jones, 1854, 30). Still today, black fathers struggle to protect their children, from violence, from the police; they protect them also in instilling in their children a sense of self-worth and pride, “to maintain a sense of self” (Collins, 1994, 381).

151 years after the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the United States, New York City-based African-American writer Coates (2015) writes to his black son,

Now at night, I held you and a great fear, wide as all our American generations, took me. Now I personally understood my father and the old mantra – “Either I can beat him or the police”. ... I think we would like to kill you ourselves before seeing you killed by the street that America made. That is a philosophy of the disembodied, of a people who control nothing, *who can protect nothing* [...]. (82) (my emphasis)

Black men “occupy an intersectional identity in which race shapes their masculine gendered identities and vice versa” (Mutua, 2012, 88). Garfield (2010) writes about the particular “oppression to be black-and-male in America” and the “structural continuity of exclusionary and marginalizing practices” that black men experience throughout their lives. This parallels the concept of “Blackmen” that Cornileus (2010) coined to capture black men’s unique experiences of racism because of their gender. The system of race, racism and racial oppression work “with and through gender” (Howard, 2014, 41).

One can draw parallels with the writings of black feminists and black mothers, such as poet Audre Lorde, mother of two, who addresses white feminists and denounces the daily threat of violence done to “Black women and our children”: “You fear your children will grow up and join the patriarchy and testify against you, we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street” (1984, 119). Marita Golden, an African American novelist, and mother, writes about her son growing up in Washington, D.C.:

[M]y son careened into adolescence. I heard the deepening of Michael’s voice, witnessed the growth spurts that propelled him to a height that echoed his father’s,

saw the sudden appearance of muscles ... . I was flushed with trepidation. Soon Michael would inhabit that narrow, corrupt crawl space in the minds of whites and some black people too, a space reserved for criminals, outcasts, misfits, and black men. Soon he would become a permanent suspect. (1995, 68)

Mullings (1997), an anthropologist who studied black motherhood in Harlem, a borough of New York City, writes in one her essays that the women she interviewed in the 1990s

repeatedly expressed acute concern about losing the children -- to the drug culture, to early death as a result of substance abuse, to the often random violence associated with illegal drugs in poor neighbourhoods. Today the leap of faith to envision continuity through children must be as great as it was during slavery. ... Women are making adaptive reproductive decisions in a situation where the population is endangered by excessive morbidity and mortality. (93)

Collins (1994) writes that survival, power and identity are themes that “form the bedrock of women of color’s survival” (374). She argues that “physical survival is assumed for children who are white and middle-class” (i.d.), a sign of privilege that is not given to children of colour. Parenting for mothers of colour, however, is about “teaching children survival skills” (Collins, 1990, 46). She writes,

Racial ethnic women’s motherwork reflects the tensions inherent in trying to foster a meaningful racial identity in children within a society that denigrates people of color. The racial privilege enjoyed by white middle-class women makes unnecessary this complicated dimension of the mothering tradition of women of color. Although white children can be prepared to fight racial oppression, their survival does not depend on gaining those skills. [...] White children are socialized into their rightful place in systems of racial privilege. Racial ethnic women have no such guarantees for their children. Their children must first be taught to survive in systems that would oppress them. (Collins, 1994, 381)

In telling their children about what happened to Emmett Till, in preparing them to handle themselves in front of police, when Pete tells his son “you’re gonna be whoever the fuck you want to be”, these black men are “preparing children to cope with and survive within systems of racial oppression” (Collins, 1994, 381) and “equipping children with skills to challenge [those systems]” (382). They “nurture and endeavour to reinforce Black identity in their child” and that is “in part, about serving as protection from and readying for White society” (Rollock, Gillborn, Vincent and Ball, 2015, 122-3).

My thesis demonstrates that in 21<sup>st</sup> century New York, race is an ever-present reality. However, race is experienced and understood, perceived and recognized, differently, depending on men's racial positionalities. The men from the study, depending on their social positions, drew on two distinct racial discourses that have emerged in the United States throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century; one that is 'colour-blindness', or the belief that we are all "the same under the skin", and that "we have the same chances in U.S. society", and the other one, more recent, called 'race cognizance', which "insists once again on difference", however, a difference "that signals autonomy of culture, values, aesthetic standards, and so on" (Frankenberg, 1993, 14). The black fathers, who drew on the second discourse were very critical of people who said they did not see colour ("I want people to see me ... I want people to acknowledge that I'm black", says Logan).

My research shows that most of the white participants did not identify as white. It confirms that white people learn to associate 'race' with people of colour (Rockquemore and Laszloffy, 2015, 63). There has been little attention in the literature given "to the question of what it means to raise a white child in a racist society" (Perry, 1997, 181). I argue that white parents do not have to worry about what racism can do to their children. In teaching their children to not see colour, as it was discussed in Chapter 7, the fathers perpetuate white privilege, and the former continue to learn how to be white. It shows that whiteness continues to "function as [a] transparent nor[m]" (Smith, 2012, 179).

My research findings indicate that whiteness needs to be "examined and historicized ... whiteness needs to be delimited and 'localized'" (Frankenberg, 1993, 231). For the white fathers, whiteness was not completely absent: some of the fathers identified as white, however in indirect ways. My research findings shows that whiteness intersects with other axes of difference and in/equality; two of the white fathers, Dale and Manuel, who simultane-

ously occupied positions of power in being white and middle-class, and positions of oppression in being gay and transgender respectively, talked about whiteness in relation to their children and to the privileges that they know is attached to white skin.

Another finding that emerged from my research is a discussion about colourism, or how white- or fair- skinned individuals continue to be advantaged in a society that demonizes the black skin. Two fathers of this study, one white, one Asian, with non-black children of different descents did not talk about racism with them. “I don’t think there’s a real need”, Frank says to me. Kyle does not talk about race with his sons of mixed descents, however, he has been “thinking about” his oldest son’s skin colour more because he has a “darker skin tone”. Both men recognise that having a darker-skinned child/ren would mean that their role as parents would be different as the children navigate a racist society. Colourism was important for the black fathers also; Mathias, a black father, did not talk about racism with his sons; he explains, “I didn’t have black skinned kids until my daughter”.

### *8.2.2 Fatherhood and embodiment*

Another question that my research asked was, *if “bodies matter” (Messerschmidt, 1999), how do men’s bodies matter in relation to being a primary caregiver?* My research sought to bring the focus on the ways in which bodies matter in fathering, which has been missing in studies on fatherhood and embodiment (Doucet, 2009; Ranson, 2015).

Neither psychologists nor sociologists appear very much interested in the emotional and embodied dimensions of fatherhood; that is, the ways in which the discourses, meanings and practices of fathering are experienced by men themselves at a visceral, sensual and affective level. (Lupton and Barclay, 1997, 22)

Further research is called for which is able to document and theorize the changing ways in which carers think and feel about the tiny bodies they care for, the practices in which carers engage and how they negotiate the strong emotions engendered by this caring. (Lupton, 2012, 48).

I agree with Connell (2005) who writes that practices of care “requires re-embodiment for men” (233); men learn to use their bodies in ways that society does not traditionally encourage them to. “To engage with this experience is to develop capacities of male bodies other than those developed in war, sport or industrial labour. It is ... to experience other pleasures” (i.d.). The fathers in this study talked about care as an embodied practice. Signs of physical affection with their children in public were a means to display (Finch, 2008) and to confirm family relationships mainly between each other. These findings show that “embodiment matters” for fathers (Doucet, 2006, 209). It contradicts the view that “early fatherhood is largely disembodied” (Doucet, 2009, 91, citing the work of Draper, 2000).

The fathers described care as an embodied practice, through the acts of cooking, feeding, changing nappies, hugging, kissing, wearing the baby, washing the child’s hair, etc. These are all “caring and loving attributes [that] become internalised in bodies” (Hanlon, 2012, 156). Through touch, and being in proximity with their children’s bodies, the fathers described forming and deepening a bond, and developed ‘skinship’ (Tahhan, 2010). Fatherhood as an embodied practice shows how men learn to (re)connect to their bodies and to relate to other bodies in new ways. “Caring for children has radical transformative and generative changes for men and ... these changes are deeply emotional and embodied” (Doucet, 2013, 297). I agree with Ruddick (1989) who argues that “care is not tied to particular activities of female bodies as mothering is often mistakenly taken to be” (46).

To the question, “Is the concept of the caring father just an often stated norm, a theoretical concept, or is it actively practiced?” (Seward and Richter, 2008, 88), my research shows that for primary caregiving fathers whose number is on the rise, it is “actively practised”. I show that the men drew from a discourse of intensive parenting ideology: the fathers connected the role of the carer with idealised notions of selflessness and sacrifice, which are more often associated with intensive mothering (Hays, 1996). Some of the men experienced ‘baby worry’ (Walzer, 1998), felt guilty of ‘hyperparenting’ (Wall and Arnold, 2007), others performed ‘emotional work’ (Hochschild, 1979), which is also more typically expected from



mothers. These findings challenge “existing research which indicates [that] pressures around hands-on care are experienced more intensively by women” (Shirani, Henwood and Coltart, 2012b, 18).

The men also drew on the discourse of the ‘new father’, who is emotionally expressive. Emotions are embodied thoughts (Leavitt, 1996). My study demonstrates that the fathers were able to explore emotional intimacy in ways that are usually available for mothers. They appreciated the emotional aspects of caring, and they expressed their emotions with their children. “The affective relations of masculinities have been under-theorised in terms of men's involvement in emotional and caring labour” (Hanlon, 2012, 63). Moreover, “child care can allow men to explore emotional intimacy in relative safety, more so than with other intimate care relations” (204). When men are involved in intimate care work, they are challenged “to understand and manage difficult feelings in intimate relationships” (Raymond, 2008, 32). My research resonates with the research that argues that many men practice “more intimate and emotionally expressive masculinities” (Hanlon, 2012, 147).

Fathers widen the lens theoretically and empirically in terms of what we can look for in terms of parental care. If race is the most salient identity marker that shapes fathers’ experiences in New York, this lens allows us to look at practices of care in a new light. The examples of Simon and Logan doing their daughters’ hair show that care is “not only about gender” (Tronto, 2013, 12), it is also “deeply marked by all other cultural and social values and formations, including *race/ethnicity* and *class*” (68). The ritual of doing hair provides an opportunity for a father to ‘spend time with’ (Jamieson (2011) the child, to bond, to develop a relationship, to create intimacy, to communicate care “through physical contact” (Hamington, 2001, 273). For a *black* father, hair care provides an opportunity to talk, to talk about hair, in order to foster pride and confidence, to promote “positive racial identity development and self-esteem” (Hughes and Chen, 2003, 474), to expose the child to positive messages about black hair, to teach about black history, which serves to counteract dominant discourses that devalue black hair, “the most visible stigma of blackness, second only

to skin” (Mercer, 1994, 35). These are “parenting practices distinctly identified with the Black community that were developed in response to the historical circumstances of White racism” in the U.S. (Smith, Jacobson and Juarez, 2011, 10).

### 8.2.3 Men as primary caregivers

*Househusband* is a relatively new term to Americans. If I’d heard it before I became one, I’d probably have agreed that the two words together could only connote laziness. One longtime colleague of my wife’s heard about my life in Florida and said, “It’s like he’s in highschool but without all the bullshit”. I absorbed his words carefully, asking myself if he was right. He’s a nice person, doesn’t have kids, eats out every night, and he has never once made a school lunch, cooked SpongeBob mac and cheese, or convinced a little girl that her closet is empty of nocturnal ghouls. He’s never dressed as a pilgrim, utilized the back burners on his stove, wrestled a roll of Saran Wrap for twelve long minutes, cleaned out a thermos of chili, or clipped toenails during *The Voice*. I wonder if he’s stepped on Legos, tied little shoes, packed backpacks, washed socks, or followed trails of Nutella smears or crushed Froot Loops, Cheddar Bunnies or Goldfish? Has this colleague who compared me to a high school student ever dillydallied in bedtime cuddling, tiny teeth brushing, ponytail construction, ear-piece cleaning, or calling the mother of a child’s classmate to set up a playdate? I wonder if he’d keep calling it a playdate, even if his daughter made it clear that it was now referred to as a “get together”. (Braff, 2015, 31)

Another question that my research asked was, *how do men who are primary caregiving fathers negotiate their position as carers and make sense of their role in a society where caring is associated with motherhood and femininity?* The fathers in this study were either routinely confronted with social biases that portray fathers as illegitimate carers or were cast into the role of ‘superdads’ (Lynch and Lyons, 2009). Similarly to previous research (Smith, 1998; Doucet, 2006; Merla, 2008), the fathers faced “social stigma and scrutiny” (Doucet, 2006, 170), they felt “a watchful eye” (190) as if they were novelties, that assumptions are being made that they are babysitting, on their day off or that it is their visitation weekend, they received unsolicited advice from strangers, mainly women. They navigate “social environments that often assume men’s incompetence in caregiving” (Doucet, 2011, 85).

My research shows that the men constructed a form of “de-gendered ‘parenting’” (Ranson, 2015, 19). The fathers rejected gendered discourses that associate women with care work, or the idea that fathers do not care or do not care well. They understood care as “a set of technical acts” that anyone could learn and perform “irrespective of his or her gender” (Merla, 2008, 128). “Men who share care more equally tend to define men and women as basically similar” (Hanlon, 2012, 203). My research differs from previous studies on men as primary caregivers (Doucet, 2006; Hanlon, 2012) in that the men did not believe mothers had a stronger bond with the child/ren, or that women were better parents because of their gender. They did not believe their experiences as fathers to be “fundamentally different from that of mothers due to perceived embodied differences” (Doucet, 2006b, 700). They did not seek to “distinguish their caring from maternal caring” (Doucet, 2006, 194) or to “reconstruct particular kinds of masculine care that retain some relationship to dominant or hegemonic masculinity” (158). They did not draw attention to gender differences. They did not emphasize the “masculine qualities of their caregiving”, promoting risk taking, independence or outdoors activities (i.d.). They did not seek to “distinguish themselves as men, ... and as fathers” (i.d.).

These findings confirm the argument made in the previous section that men learn to use their bodies in new ways, and that there is “potential for change in the gendered habitus of ‘growing up as a guy’, as fathers take on the embodied care of babies and children” (Ranson, 2015, 27). Care work “disrupts” this habitus “that would otherwise dispose them to behave in more conventionally masculine ways” (i.d. 28). Men experience *re-embodiment* (Connell, 2005). Doucet (2009) recognises that “meanings of embodiment shift over time and in varied social contexts” (91) and that there are “categories of parents for whom caregiving might be less gender-differentiated” (Ranson, 2015, 26), including

parents of adopted children, ... couples who deeply challenge any gender differentiation in parenting, ... fathers who take most or all of the family’s entitlement to parental leave, ... gay fathers, as well as ... single heterosexual fathers who are parenting without the steady presence of a mother. (Doucet, 2009, 91)

categories which most of the fathers in the study belong to.

My research shows that care work did not threaten the men's masculinities. The men in this study did not feel insecure in their masculinities for caring for their children, even men who held low status. No father gave away the sense of failing as a man or having their self-esteem diminished for being a primary caregiver. Already before they became fathers, most of these men identified with 'nurturing masculinities' (Hanlon, 2012). This resonates with the argument made by Sevenhuijsen in 1988 that "when care is re-evaluated and freed from its gender-load and its associations with sexual difference" would men be more likely to "identify with care and adopt a caring identity" (111, cit. in Miller, 2017, 37).

We can draw parallels with the work of anthropologist Gutmann (1996) who studied Mexican working-class men in the 1990s. His research challenges the popular images of Mexican men as distant and irresponsible fathers as he found among the group he studied that a key aspect of their masculinity is active and positive fathering. He writes, "active, consistent and long-term parenting is a central ingredient in what it means to be a man and in what men do" (88). Their participation in childcare did not threaten their masculine status. Child care and working outside the house had become less gendered. Caring attributes were not understood as feminizing nor stigmatizing. Physical affection with one's children was understood as something that both genders do; he writes that the people he interviewed believed that "both mothers and fathers are affectionate with children of all ages", and "a sizeable number" said that "fathers are more or much more tender with their children" (76).

The men in my study were doing a job "that is not valued ... because it is [usually] work done in a subordinate position by people who have the general status of subordinates in society" (Delphy and Leonard, 1992, 136). Caring "attracts low status" (Hanlon, 2012, 38). In order to cope with the loss of status and the invisibility that comes with care work, the fathers constructed care, not only as 'work', but as the most important and fulfilling job they could do. They had to, like most commonly mothers do, "undertake ... 'ideological work' to make their own positions liveable" (Faircloth, 2014, 28), "to make sense of their current positions"

(Hays, 1996, 133). They redefined care, gave it value, and made it visible, a strategy “used to minimize their potential illegitimacy” as carers (Smith, 1998, 158).

What emerged from my study is that the fathers recognised the burdens of care work and showed empathy towards other carers (“how does a single parent do it?”, asks Paul). The men expressed “a more compassionate and caring masculinity” (Hanlon, 2012, 200). Some of the men expressed admiration towards other parents they met who had more than one child to take care of. “Sharing care work is a real ‘cultural revolution’ because it allows men to empathise with the invisibility, lack of recognition, and the emotional burdens of gendered and subordinated world of caring” (Castelain-Meunier, 2002, cit. in Hanlon, 2012, 206). These men are adding “their voices to a large chorus of generations of women who have argued for the valuing of unpaid work” (Doucet, 2004, 294).

#### *8.2.4 Fatherhood and masculinities*

Society does not prepare nor expect men to become primary caregivers. While most of the men in this study wanted to become fathers, some had known they wanted to be fathers from a very young age, most however had not envisioned becoming primary caregivers. All the fathers were asked a set of questions designed to uncovering “the process by which it happens – the physical, cognitive and emotional learning they must do to become competent caregivers” (Ranson, 2015, 27). Most of the men were ‘apprentices’ (Wacquant, 2004) or “novices’ (Crossley, 2007), they had not had previous experience of caring for children. How did they acquire a “repertoire of caregiving skills” (Ranson, 2015, 135) and how did they feel about their competence as hands-on fathers?

In my conversations with the men, two types of responses emerged, which answer one question that my research asks, which is, *if men are encouraged by society to display competence, self-reliance and control in what they do, to what extent do these traditionally masculine qualities translate in the realm of parenting?*

In Chapter 3, I identified two groups of men in my study: the 'Experts' and the 'Apprentices'. The 'Experts', a group of men privileged by their race, their class, their sexuality, and/or their gender, drew on discourses of autonomy, control, and self-reliance. These men never had a doubt about handling a baby, do not ask for help, do not reach out to others about their parenting. They also drew on a middle-class discourse of expertise; parents are supposed to develop "skills" (Jaysane-Darr, 2013, 104). Also, they drew on a discourse of 'instincts', they talked their "instincts" to care, that it comes 'naturally' to them, that it is "inscribed in their D.N.A.", challenging "perhaps the most common and deeply held discourse about gender" which is that "men and women are essentially different types of human beings" (Hanlon, 2012, 182).

The 'Apprentices' occupied multiple and overlapping positions of oppression in relation to race, class, sexuality and/or their gender. They were black, transgender, gay, young, and/or of a working-class background. These men drew on a discourse of 'alternative masculinities' (Carabi and Armengol, 2014). They challenged hegemonic masculine norms by admitting vulnerable feelings in relation to being fathers, such as fear, doubt and failure ("I embraced being a father, but I was scared as shit, I was scared to death, retrospectively. I was scared, so scared", Pete shared with me). They identified with nurturing and "emotionally expressive masculinities" (Hanlon, 2012, 147). These men asked for help, reached out to others, calling their family members or writing to the Facebook community.

The two categories were not, however, mutually exclusive. Two men in this study, the two middle-class, men of colour, were both 'Experts' and 'Apprentices'. They sought to project an image of confident and competent carers, they talk about trusting their "instincts" or how care is "inherent to our nature", however, they also admitted vulnerable feelings in relation to being a parent. These men were both benefitting from, and were oppressed by, systems of power, shaping access to legitimate resources of masculinity. "A matrix of domination contains few pure victims or oppressors. Each person derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from multiple systems of oppression which frame everyone's lives"

(Collins, 1990, 229). Frank originally presented himself as an 'Expert', until he and I reached a level of trust and comfortability, which demonstrates but not only the strength of ethnography: developing rapport and getting to know these men over an extended period of time often yields different results as trust develops.

Once men have been allowed to signify a creditable masculine self ... they may be willing to return to topics and reveal more uncertainty, confusion, vulnerability and weakness. ... they may be more willing to give accurate accounts of their experiences. (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001, 212)

My research challenges what the literature has written on the 'new man', who is white, middle class, well-educated, and who rejects traditional aspects of hegemonic masculinity which include "stoicism and emotional inexpressivity" (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner, 1994, 207). The men that we identified as 'Experts' did appreciate the emotional sides of caring, however, they purposefully avoided vulnerable feelings when asked to talk about their experiences as fathers, projecting an image of confidence and control. This could be because men navigate environments that assume men's incompetence as fathers and they feel watched and judged as carers; "fathers are rarely given the opportunity to learn ... competence [in caring] because at the first sign of incompetence, the mother or another family member would take over leaving little room for fathers to learn" (Roy, Schumm and Britt, 2014, 80). I also argue that these men draw on traditional masculine resources, -- autonomy, control, competence --, to regain something that they have lost in terms of power and privilege as they became primary caregivers.

Moreover, my findings challenge the literature on marginalised men who are supposedly "the bearers of uneducated, backwards, toxic masculinities" (Bridges and Pascoe, 2005, 294) and of "regressive masculinities" (291). They "possess symbolic [masculine] currency that they utilize to secure non-economic forms of capital, such as social status" (Ocampo, 2012, 468). Hanlon writes that low-status men "hold more rigid ... definitions of masculinity that denies vulnerability" (75). In the context of fatherhood, where fathers are not expected to be primary caregivers nor to be knowledgeable, I show that men from minority groups were open about expressing vulnerable emotions via-à-vis

their role. I agree with Hanlon (2012) who writes that “doing caring appeared to support men to develop a ‘softer’ masculinity, to reform their lives and construct other-centred sensibilities, and to engage with fears surrounding vulnerability” (203). I argue that the ‘Apprentices’ are aware of their oppressed statuses and as a strategy “form their own standards for masculinity” (Coston and Kimmel, 2012, 100, 102).

That a lot of the men sought to project an image of independence and self-reliance was challenged as well in the discussion about networks. In the interview process, men tend to project images of control and to provide “an account that exaggerates autonomy” (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001, 212). The ‘family trees’ presented in Chapter 7 were a methodological way to try and circumvent that, that is, to ask who was important for them. Asking the men whether they believed that ‘it takes a village’ also shed light on how they were connected and *felt* connected to the people around them. My research argues that a lot of the men in this study were in fact connected and embedded in care and friendship networks. I demonstrate that men form networks of relationships that provide “emotional support and understanding as well as friendship” (Marsiglio and Roy, 2012, 142) and “guidance or support in their efforts to be involved fathers” (149). Men are embedded in a set of “interdependent relationships” that enable them think of themselves as “independent” (Hansen, 2005, 1). I agree with Hansen (2001) who argues that men make a “significant contribution” to family networks (183).

#### *8.2.5 Fatherhood and paid work*

Another theme related to men’s masculinities that emerged from my research is related to the ways in which men navigate a context that constructs fathers as economic providers. The literature has pointed to the decline in traditional male breadwinner models (Dermott, 2008; Hanlon, 2012) but also that “the breadwinner ideology is still in play” (Doucet, 2012, 306). My research found elements of both, as the men felt judged and sometimes unmanly for not earning money; however, I also found evidence that doing primary work changes their masculinities and their relationships to paid work.



The fathers in this study who were working full-time while providing primary care demonstrated behaviours found in egalitarian heterosexual fathers (Coltrane, 1996; Henwood and Procter, 2003), in gay fathers (Mallon, 2004) and more commonly in working mothers (Garey, 1999; Cooper, 2000; Roxburgh, 2006). They were concerned that their work demands could affect “their identities as good parents” (Walzer, 1998, 27), and not the other way around; they made adjustments to their work schedules, they took pay cuts, they reduced their hours, they made career sacrifices. They thought less about work, but they did work less also, and wanted to spend more time with their children. A ‘good’ father was not someone who is, like their fathers were, away from home earning money, but someone who is “involved and available, involved in their kids’ lives”, to use Victor’s words. My findings are similar to what Ranson (2015) found among her participants who took a paternal leave, as she noticed “a shift away from conventional understandings of fatherhood and masculinity, ... a shift in their attachment to paid work as a result of their attachment to their children. ... They became ‘working fathers’ in the sense usually reserved for ‘working mothers’ (Ranson, 2012)” (91).

The other men in the study also have a “tenuous” relationship to work (Doucet, 2004, 296) when they convince their boss for them to work part-time from home or leave their career to stay home. However, the weight of the breadwinner ideology remains “a continuing force” (Dermott, 2008, 28); the majority of the men maintained ties to paid work by working part-time, studying for a new career, working for an organisation, creating a fathers’ group, doing some work on the side, developing a business. Moreover, the men saw their caring responsibilities as “a temporary alteration to normal working practices” (Shirani, Henwood and Coltart, 2012, 280). Framing it as temporary serves to “counter the illegitimacy” (Smith, 1998, 163). My research shows that all the fathers planned on going back to work, even though some could afford to continue not working, being supported by high-income partners. It is clear also that the fathers carried the weight of social scrutiny for not working, which confirms the argument made in the literature that “mothers’ and fathers’ ‘moral

responsibilities' as carers and earners remain differently framed and experienced" (Doucet, 2004, 278). Mothers "feel judged for not caring enough" and men who are primary caregivers "feel judged for not earning enough" (Doucet, 2010, 176).

I found in my research a stark difference between the white, heterosexual, middle-class fathers and the low-income, heterosexual, men of colour, as it relates to the imperative of earning money. The first group of men did not show feelings of resentment or emasculation because their partners were earning the main income or at least more than them. The ones who did not work for pay did not feel guilty for not providing financially for their families. They understood their work as caregivers as an important and valuable economic contribution, supporting to their partners' careers and saving money that would be spent in child care should both of them work. Is included in this group Logan, a black, middle-class, heterosexual father, married to a high-income woman. The decline of the breadwinner model among middle-class couples "has lessened men's obligations to provide financially -- or at least to be a sole financial provider -- for their families" (Lane, 2011, 127), this added to a move towards egalitarianism (Zuo and Tang, 2000). These men were "members of a dominant gender and class group" (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson, 2013, 28), and had "access to resources and corresponding choices [that] are greater than those in less advantaged groups might enjoy" (Miller, 2010, 3).

The story is different for low-income men of colour, who experience gender, racial, and class oppression. "Race and racism work with and through gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality ... as systems of power" (Howard, 2014, 41). One of the main arguments I make in this thesis is that black men "experience gender differently from privileged white men" (Le Espiritu, 2008, 10). Also, black men are more likely to "find themselves at or near the bottom of most social and economic indices" (Howard and Reynolds, 2013, 44). And lastly, black people are "more likely than any other group to be victimized targets or racism, discrimination, and exclusion from mainstream opportunities" (Howard, 2014, 42).

My research finds that the breadwinner imperative is “a source of particular pain” (Williams, 2000, 28) for low-income men of colour. I chose the particular example of Pete who liked being an at-home father with his son, which contradicts the view that “men from low-status groups often find doing primary caring to be particularly emasculating” (Hanlon and Lynch, 2011, 50); however, he struggled with the fact that his wife at the time was earning the family’s income. The breadwinner role is a role that was defined for white, middle-class men (hooks, 1981), which was “founded on the belief that men are in control of their destinies, independent of any historical, institutional, or structural” (Pass, Benoit and Dunlap, 2014, 169). Collins (2006) writes that black men have to navigate “competing definitions of black masculinity – some defined by white men, others by black men, and still others in terms of African American community norms – all coalesce in a value system that may create conflict for individual African American men” (85). Working class masculinity is constructed “around the obligation to work hard, earn a family wage, and be a good provider” (Acker, 2006, 153). Working-class black fatherhood is associated with the breadwinner role (Cazenave, 1984). However, men of colour, especially black men, face structural and institutional barriers to fulfil that role (Williams, 2000).

#### *8.2.6 Fatherhood and motherhood*

Another question that my research asked is, *how is fatherhood constructed in relation to motherhood? More generally, how does becoming a primary caregiver shape, and is shaped, by the men’s relationships with women?* This research shows that to study fathering has the potential to widen popular and academic understandings of mothering. More largely, I argue that the men in this study receive a lot of support from the women in their lives, and these relationships are instrumental in making the men feel accompanied and supported and in enabling them to be committed fathers.

As I interviewed some of the men’s wives, it became clear that these women played an important role in ‘opening the gates’ (Holmes et al., 2013), giving the fathers the space to be nurturers, trusting them in their abilities to care, supporting them in their role as primary

caregivers, validating them as 'good' fathers and competent caregivers. We are very far from what Aitken (2000) wrote about not being able to calm his son down one time at a family reunion, and his sister-in-law took the baby and said to the latter, "Your Daddy just does not have the necessary accoutrements" (112). He adds, "I folded my bony arms around my hard, breastless chest and smothered my anger and my shame so as not to show the pain" (i.d.). In my research, we are in the opposite situation; a lot of the women praise the fathers and the relationships they have with their children. One of the mothers interviewed became emotional and started crying, just thinking about the relationship her husband and their daughter have ("it's the most amazing, beautiful thing I've ever seen and I feel very proud that I can provide that to them").

Irina, Bradley's long-time best friend, tells me the first time I meet her that "he is the best father I know". Bradley and her other male friends are all primary caregivers. She says,

They are really exception to the stereotype of the father, they've all taken on a great deal of responsibility, not like the father who comes home from work and dinner is on the table, they do into their study. They've really been really aggressive in taking care of the kids, being home with them, taking them out. [Bradley] has a great curiosity, he takes his kids on outings, the zoo, museums, trips. What I love is that if [his daughter] is reading a book and she likes it, [Bradley] will read it, if Tom is excited about a subject, [Bradley] will get excited about it ... he likes to cook ... he was always the more domestic ... he created a safe environment, a genuine hearth ... sometimes I wish he'd shut up about his kids but I love them too so I have a high tolerance [she laughs].

In looking at how the men in this study were connected, my research demonstrates that a lot of the men were part of networks of care. They relied on familial and other sorts of relationships to provide care for their children. I show that a lot of these networks are composed primarily of women: wives, aunts, grandmothers, babysitters, nannies, etc. Among these networks, there were "those involved in daily interactions with the children" or those "who live outside the geographic orbit of daily life, but who contribute invaluable advice and emotional support" (Hansen, 2005, 15). This echoes Doucet's (2006) research where she found that sole-custody fathers "draw heavily on *another woman* to assist them" (82). The men had also built friendships with female friends, other parents whose children went

to the same school, women they met in parents' groups, or long-time friends. A lot of these women are integrated into the men's lives and become part of their 'families of choice' (Weston, 1991).

### 8.3 Limitations of thesis

One of the limitations of this research is that it is highly context specific. Ethnographers and anthropologists cannot generalize in the way that more quantitatively oriented researchers using larger samples can. In qualitative research, "contexts, situations, events, conditions and interactions cannot be replicated to any extent" (Abbas, 2019, n.p.). Ethnographic research "is not representative in the way that findings can be generalised statistically to a wider population from which a representative sample has been drawn" (O'Reilley, 2004, 199). However, ethnography offers a greater depth of understanding and nuance. It enables us to understand the specificities of particular social contexts and from that understand how context is a key factor in how the world works. Moreover, "the value of ethnographic research comes in its being able to contribute to concepts and theories that are used more widely, and are therefore more generally applicable" (i.d.). It would be useful in further research to explore the extent to which my findings resonate in other contexts.

Another limitation of this research was in terms of access. In some ways, being a (young) woman was beneficial for the research in terms of the men opening up, trusting me and being vulnerable, especially in one-on-one interviews; that I was childless also helped, in that there was no competition between their knowledge and mine. However, there were moments where I was conscious that my gender did limit my access or shaped the men's responses in particular kinds of ways. The dynamic was different when men were with other men, at the Fathers' Group meetings or at the convention for at-home fathers in North Carolina for instance. To be a woman meant therefore that I had a particular *kind* of access, it was at times a limitation but also at other times an enabler.

#### 8.4 Futures

This thesis has built upon existing theories of fatherhood and of men and masculinities and has applied ethnographic and intersectional approaches in order to broaden and to deepen our understandings of fatherhood and masculinities in the United States. More particularly, it sought to give a portrait of a diverse set of fathers and fathering practices in the contemporary setting of New York City.

The majority of studies done on primary caregivers have focused mainly on privileged groups of men. Yet, statistics from the Pew Research Center (Livingston, 2014) show that in the United States, among fathers who live with their children, those who are more likely to be at-home fathers are black, Hispanic, and Asian American. At-home fathers are more likely to have lower educational attainment and to live near the poverty line. This diversity that exists statistically is missing in studies on primary caregivers. Given how central I found race as an issue in terms of men parenting and given the statistical data that exists, that suggests that one piece of vital future research would be to do more research specifically with men from minority groups who father full-time.

## Appendixes

### **APPENDIX 1:** The Fathers' Group Principles.

#### Our Commitment To Our Children

- We are committed to creating happy, well-adjusted, and successful children, and make our fathering choices based on what we believe will best serve this goal.
- Our children are a top priority in our lives and we commit our time, attention, and resources accordingly.
- We put our children before our egos by consciously understanding and managing our own needs and reactions.
- We honor the uniqueness of each child and adapt our fathering strategies accordingly.
- We hold that actions speak louder than words and strive to embody the values we want our children to live.

## **APPENDIX 2:**

The Fathers' Group Team Standards.

### Our Commitment To One Another

- Honor confidentiality
- Be a good listener
- Treat one another with respect
- We share our experiences and opinions humbly, recognizing every man's right and responsibility to make his own fathering choices
- Be supportable
- Our focus is on fathering



**APPENDIX 3: Interview Guide: Full-time Fathers (from Latshaw, 2009, pp. 37-41).**  
Questions in parentheses were not asked.

I. Greetings

- Hi, (name of interviewee). How are you today? Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research study.
- Re-explain topic of interview and assure interviewee of your interest in studying the full-time father experience (his feelings towards fatherhoods and his activities/behaviors in the home) and the confidentiality of his answers and identity.
- Before we begin, I would like to collect the time diary that you filled out. While I look it over, I'd like to give you a consent form to sign. I also have a very brief survey I'd like you to fill out to get some of your basic background information. This will be helpful in comparing you to other stay-at-home dads and understanding what factors make men more likely to stay home.

II. Personal Background & Career History

- First, let's talk a little about your childhood. Where did you grow up?
- Did you live with your mother, father or both growing up? Are you parents still married? If not, did they divorce? If so, when? Did they remarry?
- Did you have any siblings? If so, are they older or younger?
- What occupations did your parent(s) hold during your childhood/adolescence? Did they work full or part-time?
- (How much time did you spend with your father and mother growing up? Would you say you spent more time with one of them? If so, which one and why? )
- (What sorts of extracurricular activities were you involved in when you were young? Did your parents ever help you with these activities? If so, which parent?)
- (Did your parents help you with your homework and educational pursuits growing up? Who would you say spent more time helping you?)

- Can you tell me about your educational history? Where did you go to school? What about your spouse, where did she go to school? Is this your first marriage? If not, did you divorce? When? Are you remarried?
- If someone asked you what your current main occupation is, what would you say? (Answer will likely be stay-at-home father unless works part-time or on-the-side)
- How long have you been doing (current occupation)? Did you work somewhere else prior to this job? If so, where and for how long?
- Were you satisfied in your former occupation? If so, what did you like about it? If not, what did you dislike about it? What other places did you work before that? For how long? (Try to establish a career history)
- [If said an occupation besides stay-at-home father above] You considered yourself to be a (occupation besides stay-at-home dad) when I asked you for your current occupation above. Do you still work or are you currently employed in that occupation right now, even as you father full-time? About how many hours do you work each week? Each month? Each year?
- [If said stay-at-home father was occupation] You said your main occupation was a stay-at-home father, so do you consider yourself to be currently unemployed or do you consider yourself to still have another occupation? If so, what is it?
- Do you plan to reenter the labor force or increase your hours of work in the future? If so, when? What do you plan on doing? How many hours a week would you like to work?
- Are you currently looking for employment? If so, what are you currently doing to seek employment?
- (What are your current and future occupational goals? What do you hope to accomplish?)
- (Would you be content if you remained out of the labor force permanently? Why or why not?)
- Do you think your spouse, friends and family would say that being a stay-at-home father is a full-time occupation? Why or why not?
- (How would you define a person who fits the category “stay-at-home dad”? (Ex: Must he be married, must he be completely out of the labor force, must he have kids under a certain age, etc?) How about a person who fits the category “stay-at-home mom”? How are they the same or different?)
- (The US Census Bureau defines a “stay-at-home dad” as a “married father with children under 15 years old who have remained out of the labor force for more than one year primarily so they can care for the family while their wives work outside the home.” Do you fit this definition? Why or why not? Do you agree with

this definition? Would you modify it? If so, how? Do you know any stay-at-home fathers who do not fit this category? If so, how do they differ from it?)

### III. Transition to Full-time Fatherhood

- How long have you been staying home full-time?
- How did you decide to stay-home? Was it a gradual or sudden decision?
- Did your spouse/partner help you make this decision? If so, what role did she play in the decision making process?
- Was your spouse/partner supportive or questioning of this decision?
- What was the most crucial factor that led you to stay home (economic/job issues, day care fears, spouse got a promotion, etc.)?
- (Did you ask advice from any other friends or family members before or when making the decision? If so, were they generally supportive? If not, did you wish you had other people to ask advice from? Is there a reason you didn't seek advice from certain people?)
- How did people you know react when you told them you were going to be a stay-at-home father? Is there anyone you've avoiding telling? If so, why?

### IV. Typical Day as a Stay-at-home Dad

- Could you tell me what a typical day is like as a stay-at-home father? What sorts of things do you do? What are your major activities and responsibilities?
- Do you spend most of your time in the house or outside of the house? If you leave the house, where do you go?
- (What other adults do you interact with during a typical day as a stay-at-home parent? Are they mostly men, women or both? How do you interact with them?)
- How do people respond when they see you with your children in public? What is their reaction?
- (Do you do any housework (such as cooking or cleaning) while you are home with your child during the day? If yes, what sorts of things do you do? If no, who does the housework in your household?)

- (HOUSEWORK ACTIVITY: Now I'm going to give you a list of cards and I want you to sort them into piles: tasks you do more often and tasks you wife does more often. If you do the tasks equally, you can tell me that too.)
- (Is there a reason you tend to do some tasks more than others? Is there a reason your spouse tends to do some tasks more than others?)
- (Are you generally satisfied with the way housework is divided up in your household, or do you wish you did more or less of certain tasks?)
- (Do you think your spouse is satisfied with the way housework is divided up in your household, or do you think she wishes you did more or less of certain tasks?)

#### V. Perceptions of Fatherhood, Masculinity, and Social Support

- Parenthood can be very rewarding and challenging ... what has been the most rewarding aspect of stay-at-home fatherhood? What has been the most challenging?
- How do other mothers (perhaps of your children's friends) treat you? Are they generally friendly or is there any source of tension/awkwardness?
- Have your friends continued to be supportive of your decision to be a stay-at-home dad? Your parents? Your former coworkers? People from religious or community groups? If not, in what ways have they been unsupportive?
- Has your spouse continued to be supportive of your decision to be a stay-at-home dad? If not, in what ways has your spouse been unsupportive?
- Who is the most supportive person in your life? The least supportive? In what ways do you actually feel supported or receive support? In what ways do you need or wish you received more support?
- Do you know any other stay-at-home fathers? If so, do you talk to them frequently? Do you ever help each other with babysitting, etc? If not, do you wish you knew more full-time fathers?
- Do you think men are able to care for children as well as women? Why or why not? Did you believe this before you became a stay-at-home dad, or has this belief grown since you took on this job?
- Do you think your spouse wishes she spent more time with the children, or is she content with her role as breadwinner for the family?
- Has it been difficult to be home full-time and not having formal employment/labor force participation? If so, why?

- How would you define a good father? A good mother? How do you think making money for a family is related to parenthood?
- Do you feel masculine when you are caring for your children? ... When you tell people you are a stay-at-home father? ...When you talk to your wife about financial decisions/bills?
- (Do you think men who stay home “mother their children” or do you think fathers care for children differently than mothers?)
- How do you think society (generally) perceives stay-at-home fathers? Is their perception accurate? Why or why not?
- Do you think the media accurately portrays stay-at-home fathers? What about fathers generally? What would you change about the media portrayal of them?

Thank participant for their time.

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