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# ‘New fatherhood’ — fact or fiction? The perceptions and experiences of fathers in South Africa

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During the past two decades, fatherhood has become an increasingly important issue, not only in scholarly debates but also in popular forums in South Africa. This article reports on some findings of a quantitative study, undertaken in the Gauteng province of South Africa, that aimed to shed light on the extent to which men are embracing the “new fatherhood” culture and have become active, nurturant fathers. Although men are becoming more actively involved in child-care, many still find it difficult to manifest high levels of active fatherly involvement, even if they consider it fair to expect a man to perform active fatherwork and define fatherhood as synonymous with nurturant paternal involvement. The research results also indicate the existence of a positive correlation between a man’s perception of his paternal involvement and his experience of marital quality.

## ‘Nuwe vaderskap’ – feit of fiksie? Die persepsies en ervarings van vaders in Suid-Afrika

Vaderskap het gedurende die afgelope twee dekades toenemend meer aandag in beide vakkundige geskryfte en populêre forums in Suid-Afrika begin geniet. Hierdie artikel doen verslag van die bevindinge van ’n kwantitatiewe studie wat in die Gauteng-provinsie van Suid-Afrika gedoen is, met die doel om lig te werp op die mate waartoe mans die “nuwe vaderskap” kultuur aanvaar en aktiewe koesterende vaders geword het. Alhoewel mans meer aktief by die versorging van kinders betrokke geraak het, vind talle mans dit steeds moeilik om hoë vlakke van aktiewe vaderlike betrokkenheid te toon. Ten spyte hiervan beskou talle van hierdie mans dit as regverdig om van ’n man te verwag om aktiewe vaderskapwerk te verrig en definieer hulle vaderskap as koesterende vaderlike betrokkenheid. Die navorsingsresultate dui ook aan dat daar ’n positiewe korrelasie bestaan tussen die man se persepsie van sy eie vaderlike betrokkenheid en sy ervaring van huwelikskwaliteit.

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In recent research within the cadre of Family Studies, the role of the man in the family (especially that of the father) has become an important topic, as is evident in extensive public deliberation and scholarly inquiry. Due to changes in the family economy and the continuous rise of feminism, the cultural saliency of the patriarchal model of the role of husband and father has been challenged, especially insofar as more and more researchers and theorists are focusing on the shift in the man's role within the family from that of sole breadwinner to that of involved nurturant father.

The dynamic qualities of the man's role as father and the nature of the father-child relationship, in particular, have been central topics in both research and debates among theorists. Griswold (1993: 244) grasps the essence of the changing nature and the diversity of fatherhood when he says:

[F]atherhood of recent decades has become a kaleidoscope of images and trends, a sure sign that it has lost cultural coherence [...] Buffered by powerful demographic, economic and political changes, fatherhood [...] is now fraught with ambiguity and confusion. Not so surprisingly, so, too, are the fathers themselves.

## 1. The changing role of fatherhood and the changing nature of fatherwork

Viewed historically, the man's roles in the family have undergone changes throughout time. This is especially true with regard to the role of father, with special reference to more nurturant/expressive qualities being merged into the ("traditional") role of family breadwinner. Although these changes have been evident in some societies for centuries, it is not as if a unilinear change process has taken place, but rather that a situation has existed in which society's definition of fatherhood has oscillated between two poles, ie the father as provider and the father as nurturer (Atkinson & Blackwelder 1993: 975).

Apart from this historical flexibility pertaining to fatherhood (Marsiglio *et al* 2000: 1175), Daly (1993: 510) emphasises that, in researching the changes in the "culture" of fatherhood (the shared values, norms and beliefs regarding the role of father and fatherhood

practices), it is important to note that the behavioural component attached to fatherhood does not necessarily fit the changes that are taking place with regard to the cultural definition of the role. It is thus important to take into consideration, when referring to concepts such as the “absent father”, “new fatherhood” and “involved fathering”, that the changes in the culture of fatherhood are not necessarily in congruence with the actual behavioural patterns of fathers.

### 1.1 The ‘absent father’

The phenomenon of the “absent father” is far from a contemporary one. Although many fathers have been “absent” from family life in numerous historical epochs, this became more predominant at the time of the large-scale manifestation of the process of industrialisation. According to Lamb (1987: 5) this was the dawn of an era during which the role of the father was conceptualised in terms of breadwinning — a function to be performed beyond the boundaries of the home. The lives of more and more husbands and fathers became synonymous with long working hours spent away from home and family life, while the role of the nurturant custodian of children was impressed on the wife/mother as the ideal (Griswold 1993: 14).

Authors such as Griswold (1993: 43), Cilliers (1960: 47) and Posel & Devey (2006: 44), discussing men’s family involvement during the early 1900s as well as the post-World War II years in the USA and South Africa, respectively, are of the opinion that geographical separation did not only have an impact on the marital relationship (in most cases a negative one), but above all brought about a situation in which men were even less involved in their children’s lives. It is thus understandable, when reading the literature of the time with reference to parenthood, that society’s comments and researchers’ theorisation involved the juxtaposition of the “bad father” and the “triumphant mother” (Stearns 1991: 39). Numerous scholarly studies and publications of the era consequently focused on the role of the wife/mother while the role of the husband/father was largely negated (LaRossa & Reitzes 1995: 223).

The phenomenon of father absence is, however, still prevalent in many present-day families, across all socio-economic classes. Smit

(2001: 542) and Posel & Devey (2006: 45) write about father absence among African families in South Africa as a result of men's involvement in labour migration. Fathers in the lower socio-economic class can also be "absent" due to being primarily involved in routine and/or physical demanding (blue-collar) jobs, characterised by long working hours and sometimes also being compelled to work overtime, shifts and weekends (Lynn 1974: 7, Hosking 2006: 220).

Father absence or paternal deprivation does not only entail the actual physical absence of the father, for example as a result of being geographically separated from his family on the basis of work-related responsibilities. It may also refer to a situation in which, although a father may be available to the child, he is absent on the more psychological and emotional level (Biller 1995: 72, Morrell 2006: 18). It thus seems that fathers in the middle and higher socio-economic classes, who fill managerial and/or professional career positions, are more likely to be perceived by their family members as being "absent" despite the fact that they are in close proximity to their children. These professional positions (the so-called "greedy occupations"), usually demand high levels of commitment to the career itself as well as to the formal organisation as a whole, and bring about a tendency towards preoccupation with the content of the work.

The attempt to identify the possible impact of father absence has initiated a heated debate among several researchers. Shapiro *et al* (1995: 7) report on the findings of those who are of the opinion that a father's prolonged absence may have negative effects on a child's life, especially due to the absence of an appropriate father role-model and a significant father-child relationship. Father absence may affect children's lives negatively in terms of their self-concepts, peer-group relationships, scholastic performance, psycho-social adjustment and gender-role identity, among other things (Biller 1995: 74, Lamb 1995: 31, Morrell 2006: 18).

Other researchers, however, consider this argument to be an oversimplification. They are of the opinion that the negative impact of father absence may be due to a combination of factors, rather than the "absence" *per se*. For example, Lamb (1995: 31) contends that the broader context of an individual's family life must be taken into con-

sideration before the possible destructive impact of the phenomenon of father absence can be made generalised.

It is within the context of this concern about the prevalence of families in which fathers are not actively involved in the lives of their children and the renewed interest in the ideology of “new fatherhood” that “involved fathering” has become a criterion by which to appraise “good fathers” (Lamb 1987: 6).

## 1.2 ‘New fatherhood’ and active father involvement

The ideology of “new fatherhood” — with men becoming more involved parents — originally came to the fore during the 1920s (Griswold 1993: 6), but was to some extent limited to men in the middle socio-economic classes in countries such as the USA (Griswold 1993: 91) and Sweden (Hwang 1987: 119). This new model of fatherhood incorporated atypical role behaviour qualities such as more expressive and nurturant involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. The major contributing factors in the development of this so-called “masculine domesticity” included the rise of feminism in the 1920s, legislation amending family law with special reference to the rights of children, and the promotion of a therapeutic culture with regard to parenting in general and fatherhood in particular (cf Hwang 1987: 119, Griswold 1993: 6, 60, 108, LaRossa & Reitzes 1993: 455).

The new fatherhood of the 1920s was, however, far from being indicative of either a more egalitarian relationship between the spouses or an equal allocation of child-care responsibilities (LaRossa & Reitzes 1995: 229). This masculine domesticity was still in the main very conservative in nature and “rarely if ever questioned the traditional gender-based division of labour [... m]en would spend more time in the domestic sphere, but it remained women’s domain” (Griswold 1993: 117).

The second wave, originating in the mid-1970s and the early 1980s, differs from the first wave insofar as the ideology of new fatherhood touched on more levels of the husband-wife and father-child relationships and was realised in the lives of a greater diversity of

men in both Western societies (Griswold 1993: 7) and developing countries such as South Africa (cf Smit 2004: 102). The emphasis of this wave is on the husband/father, who still retains his role as provider (although not in all cases as a sole provider), but who is also shifting towards becoming a competent parent in terms of his participation in the lives of his children on a day-to-day level, both physically and emotionally (Atkinson & Blackwelder 1993: 976). Rather than accentuating the traditional gender-stereotyped roles of “father” and “mother”, the focus falls on non-gender-specific parenting, with both parents incorporating instrumental as well as expressive qualities in their parental role behaviour.

The concept of the “new father” thus refers to a man who has moved towards higher levels of active father involvement — defining his role as father as being committed to addressing the physical, mental and emotional needs of his children, rather than merely conforming to cultural and social norms on paternal role obligations (Ishii-Kuntz 1995: 103, Dollahite *et al* 1997: 18). This conceptualisation of fatherhood relates strongly to the views of theorists such as Dollahite *et al* (1997) and Hawkins & Dollahite (1997). They define the concept of “generative fathering” as involving far more than merely providing financial support, but also being committed to and working hard at lovingly nurturing the children — being actively involved in enhancing the children’s well-being (Hawkins & Dollahite 1997: 15, Cherlin 2002: 327).

In studying fatherhood from the point of view of generativity and combining it with a symbolic interactionist approach (as was the case in this study), the focus falls on men’s subjective experiences of being fathers, not only in terms of the way they define their roles as fathers, but also with reference to how they perceive and construct their identities as fathers in various circumstances (cf Daly 1995: 26, Morrell 2006: 14). This perspective thus takes into consideration men’s own definition of their realities, influenced by conflicting images of ideal fathering and the complex nature of the changes currently taking place in family life (cf Marsiglio *et al* 2000: 1177).

Although a few researchers have, during the past few years, started to focus on fatherhood within the South African context, it is clear

that a significant lacuna still exists. Richter (2006: 62), for example, contemplating the importance of research on fathering in South Africa, emphasises that “[i]n general, [...] little is known about how males develop a perception of fatherhood, their status as fathers, and the roles associated with being a father”. Taking the theoretical overview of the dynamic nature of the role of the man as father as a point of departure (as outlined above), this article will discuss some of the findings of a quantitative study conducted in the Gauteng province of South Africa, focusing, among other things, on the perceptions and experiences of men in dual-earner families with regard to fathering.

## 2. Fathering: the perceptions and experiences of a sample of South African men

In order to address the gap in the literature with regard to fathering in South Africa, the following research questions were posed:

- What is the man’s perception of the extent to which he is involved in fatherwork (ie, manifesting active father involvement)?
- To what extent does he consider it to be fair to expect a man to be involved in active fathering?
- To what extent do the abovementioned perceptions relate to the man’s experience of marital quality?

### 2.1 Research design

Four hundred men from dual-earner families throughout Gauteng were selected by means of purposive and snowball sampling. They were married men with Afrikaans or English as their vernacular and at least one child under the age of thirteen. They were approached to participate in the quantitative study by completing a self-administered questionnaire. Several key biographical/demographical variables, identified in the literature as being significant in research dealing with fatherhood, were included in the study as control variables. Examples include age, educational qualifications, occupation, the number of hours spent at work per day, the duration of the (current) marriage, the wife’s occupation and educational qualifications, and the number, gender and ages of the children. The response rate of the study was 94%.

Although the research population had to comply with the above-mentioned specific criteria, and no probability sampling method was used, the respondents comprised a wide range of men. The discussion which follows provides a broad overview of their profile in terms of the biographical variables. Their ages ranged between 21 and 61, with the average being 35.02 years. As far as home language was concerned, 60% were Afrikaans-speaking and 40% English-speaking. The average duration of their marriages to their current spouses was 10.03 years. With regard to their educational qualifications, 8.2% had a postgraduate degree, 7.0% a Bachelor's degree, 19.5% a Grade 12 certificate plus a diploma, 40.5% a Grade 12 certificate, and 28.8% a lesser qualification than Grade 12.

The men's average age at the birth of their first child was 26.7. The average age of their youngest child was 5.07. In addition, more than half (52%) of the respondents had two children, 32% had only one child, and a few (16%) had three or more children.

In terms of occupational categories, 10.6% of the respondents held managerial positions and/or had professional careers, 30.0% had semi-professional careers, 23.3% were in clerical positions, 7.3% were in service-related jobs, and 28.8% were artisans. The average number of hours they spent at work per day was 9.18, with another 1.07 hours being spent working on job-related tasks after hours at home.

The following three scales were developed in order to address the research questions:

- Scale 1: The man's perception of the extent to which he demonstrated active father involvement

The concept of active father involvement, or fatherwork, was operationalised by making use of Lamb's threefold dimensions of father involvement (Lamb 1987: 8 & 1995: 23). The first dimension refers to the extent to which the father is in interaction with his child. Interaction, in this context, refers to situations in which the father converses one-to-one with his child or is involved in interaction with his child during the performance of child-care activities. Items include questions such as: How often do you help your child with his/her homework? How often do you have a conversation with your



child? How often do you play games with your child? The possible responses on the five-point Likert-type scale range between “never” and “always”. The second dimension deals with the extent to which the father takes responsibility for and is accountable for the well-being and care of his child (Lamb 1995: 24). Questions include: How often do you take care of you child when he/she is ill? How often do you take responsibility for making dental/medical appointments for your child? The third dimension is accessibility. This does not require person-to-person interaction with the child, but refers rather to the father’s physical and psychological availability when in proximity to his child (Lamb 1995: 24). Related questions include: How often do you watch television with your child? How often do you supervise your child while he/she is doing homework? This scale consists of a total number of 20 items, with a Cronbach’s coefficient  $\alpha$  value of 0.910.

- Scale 2: The man’s perception of the extent to which it is fair to expect a man to be involved in active fathering

In addition to the man’s perception of his actual active fathering conduct, his perception of the extent to which it is fair to expect a man to manifest active fathering was also subjected to scrutiny. The twenty items in this scale correspond with the items in Scale 1, except that rather than emphasising the respondent’s actual fathering conduct, the focus falls on his perception of the fairness and justness of expecting a man to perform fatherwork. Related questions include: To what extent is it fair to expect a man to take care of his child when he/she is ill? To what extent is it fair to expect a man to get up during the night when his child needs a parent? The items are ranked on a scale ranging from 1 (to no extent) to 5 (to the greatest extent). This scale has a Cronbach’s coefficient  $\alpha$  value of 0.964.

- Scale 3: The man’s experience of marital quality

In this context, the man’s experience of marital quality refers to the extent to which the man perceives his marriage to be successful, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the level of satisfaction or happiness he experiences with regard to his marital relationship. Items include questions such as: To what extent does your marriage meet

your expectations? To what extent do you feel emotionally fulfilled in your marital relationship? To what extent do you feel frustrated in your relationship with your wife? Once again, the items are ranked on a scale ranging from 1 (to no extent) to 5 (to the greatest extent). This scale, with its 19 items, has a Chronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$  value of 0.935.

## 2.2 Hypotheses

A number of hypotheses were formulated to guide the research. The first dealt with the relationship between the various (independent) biographical variables (which were identified to act as control variables) and the two dependent variables, ie the respondent's perception of the extent to which he demonstrated active father involvement, and his perception of the extent to which it is fair to expect a man to perform fatherwork. Thus, it was hypothesised that men with higher educational qualifications will be more inclined than men with lower educational qualifications to manifest active fathering themselves and to consider it fair to expect a man to perform fatherwork. Furthermore, it was hypothesised that the older a man is at the birth of his first child, the more involved he will be in active fathering and the more likely he will be to consider it fair to expect a man to be an active, nurturant father.

Three other hypotheses read as follows:

- The more involved a man is in active fathering, the more likely he will be to consider it fair to expect men to be involved in active fathering.
- The more involved a man is in active fathering, the better his experience of marital quality will be.
- The fairer a man perceives it to be to expect men to be involved in active fathering, the higher his experience of marital quality will be.

### 2.3 Results and discussion

The frequency distribution of the respondents' scores on the relevant scales provides a bird's-eye view of the possible answers to the first two research questions. It is interesting to note that analysis of this frequency distribution on the scale measuring the men's perceptions of the extent to which they demonstrated active father involvement reveals that 54.2% of their scores were higher than the median of 60 (arithmetic mean = 61.05; mode = 44; standard deviation = 14.63). This distribution indicates that more than half of the men in the study considered themselves to display moderate to high levels of active father involvement, while 45.8% considered themselves to be involved in the care-taking of their children to a lesser extent or not at all. This shows that a large number of men in the sample were of the opinion that the culture of "new fatherhood" had become a behavioural manifestation in their lives.

On the fairness scale, 87.2% of the scores were higher than the median score (60), which means that the majority of the respondents felt that it was fair and just to expect a man to manifest active father involvement (arithmetic mean = 80.76; mode = 100; standard deviation = 17.18). In this regard, 61 respondents (15.3%) scored the highest possible scale value (100). Only 12.8% of the respondents were of the opinion that it was to a lesser extent fair, or even unfair to expect a man to be actively involved in child-care.

It thus seems that, although only somewhat more than half of the respondents indicated that they were active, nurturant fathers (scale 1), it was nevertheless the perception of nearly 88% of the sample that it is to a large extent fair to expect a man to be actively involved in the lives of his children. This, once again, shows that the actual conduct of active fathering is not on a par with the perceived culture of fatherhood (the shared norms, values and beliefs with regard to the man's role as father).

This brings the discussion to the question of the possible relationships between the independent biographical variables and the two fatherhood-related scales (cf Table 1).

Table 1: The relationship between the biographical variables and the man's perception of the extent to which he demonstrates active father involvement (scale 1) and the man's perception of the extent to which it is fair to expect a man to be involved in active fathering (scale 2)

Biographical variables	Active father involvement	Fairness: fathering
Man's personal information		
Age (n = 400)	$r = 0.028$ $p = 0.581$	$r = 0.060$ $p = 0.229$
Age at birth of first child (n = 400)	$r = 0.027$ $p = 0.594$	$r = 0.274$ $p = 0.000^{**}$
Home language (n = 400)	$t = -0.64$ $p = 0.588$	$t = 3.23$ $p = 0.015^*$
Educational qualification (n = 400)	$F = 0.794$ $p = 0.530$	$F = 11.246$ $p = 0.000^{**}$
Marital status at time of contract of marriage (n = 400)	$F = 0.528$ $p = 0.870$	$F = 0.528$ $p = 0.870$
Years married to present spouse (n = 400)	$r = -0.010$ $p = 0.845$	$r = -0.059$ $p = 0.235$
Man's occupation-related information		
Occupational category (n = 400)	$F = 2.698$ $p = 0.030^*$	$F = 11.112$ $p = 0.000^{**}$
Working hours per day spent at work (n = 400)	$r = -0.140$ $p = 0.005^{**}$	$r = 0.040$ $p = 0.423$
Working hours per day spent at home (n = 400)	$r = 0.133$ $p = 0.008^{**}$	$r = 0.131$ $p = 0.009^{**}$
Utilisation of flexible work patterns or not (n = 400)	$F = 0.943$ $p = 0.504$	$F = 0.943$ $p = 0.504$
Utilisation of paternity leave or not (n = 400)	$t = 3.93$ $p = 0.000^{**}$	$t = 3.93$ $p = 0.000^{**}$
Information related to the man's wife		
Educational qualification (n = 400)	$F = 0.249$ $p = 0.910$	$F = 10.884$ $p = 0.000^{**}$
Occupational category (n = 400)	$F = 0.478$ $p = 0.697$	$F = 12.715$ $p = 0.000^{**}$
Working hours per day spent at work (n = 400)	$r = -0.001$ $p = 0.981$	$r = -0.061$ $p = 0.220$

Biographical variables	Active father involvement	Fairness: fathering
Working hours per day spent at home (n = 400)	$r = -0.018$ $p = 0.716$	$r = 0.066$ $p = 0.185$
Information related to his children		
Number of dependent children (n = 400)	$r = 0.050$ $p = 0.322$	$r = -0.104$ $p = 0.037^*$
Age of youngest child (n = 400)	$r = -0.009$ $p = 0.865$	$r = -0.105$ $p = 0.036^*$
Gender of children (n = 400)	$F = 1.205$ $p = 0.242$	$F = 1.205$ $p = 0.242$
General information		
Man's mother's occupational status (n = 400)	$F = 1.973$ $p = 0.118$	$F = 8.518$ $p = 0.000^{**}$
Man's mother's occupational category (n = 212)	$F = 0.203$ $p = 0.839$	$F = 6.182$ $p = 0.000^{**}$
Man's father's occupational category (n = 400)	$F = 0.712$ $p = 0.584$	$F = 2.555$ $p = 0.039^*$
Man's image of the ideal family (n = 400)	$F = 4.633$ $p = 0.010^*$	$F = 15.818$ $p = 0.000^{**}$
Nature of domestic help in household (n = 400)	$F = 3.377$ $p = 0.005^{**}$	$F = 1.688$ $p = 0.136$

\* Significant at the 5% level of significance

\*\* Significant at the 1% level of significance

Active father involvement (scale 1): the man's perception of the extent to which he demonstrates active fathering.

Fairness: fathering (scale 2): the man's perception of the extent to which it is fair to expect a man to be involved in active fathering.

The independent variables can be grouped together into five sets, the first of which relates to the man's personal biographical information. It is interesting to note that none of these variables played any significant role in the man's perception of his own level of active father involvement. It therefore seems as if the respondents' levels of father involvement do not vary in terms of their age, mother-tongue (either Afrikaans or English), marital status at the time that

the marriage was contracted (ie single, widowed or divorced), or the duration of the marriage. Furthermore, there was no significant relationship between the man's perceived level of paternal involvement and either his educational qualifications or his age at the birth of his first child. This is in contrast with the views of a number of theorists (cf Cooney *et al* 1993: 206, Coltrane 1995: 265, Walker & McGraw 2000: 567) who consider the man's level of education and his status as either an "early" father (becoming a father in his early twenties) or a "late" father (having delayed fatherhood until after the age of 30) to be predictors of active paternal involvement.

"Early" versus "late" fatherhood does, however, play a significant role in the man's perception of the fairness of the expectation that a man should be involved in active fathering (scale 2). From the results it is clear that men who became fathers for the first time at an older age were significantly more inclined to perceive it to be fair to expect a man to be an active, nurturant father than was the case with men who became fathers at an earlier age ( $r = 0.274$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ).

In terms of the men's educational qualifications, it is interesting to note that the men with postgraduate degrees, in contrast to those with other educational qualifications, were significantly more inclined to view the expectation that a man needs to manifest active fathering (scale 2) as fair ( $F = 11.246$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). This finding links with the work of Erickson & Gecas (1991: 124) who are of the opinion that a man's educational background is more likely than his actual paternal behavioural patterns to affect his attitude towards fathering.

Another biographical variable that relates to the men's view on the fairness of expecting a man to be an active father is that of home language. English-speaking men (arithmetical mean = 83.86) are more inclined than Afrikaans-speaking men (arithmetical mean = 79.35) to perceive it to be fair to expect a man to be an active, nurturant father ( $t = 3.23$ ;  $p = 0.015$ ).

The variables relating to the man's employment or working sphere constitute a second set of independent variables. In the first place, with regard to the man's occupational category, it is evident that men who are involved in professional careers or managerial

positions were not only more inclined than men in other occupational categories to consider it fair to expect a man to manifest active, nurturant fathering ( $F = 11.112; p = 0.000$ ), but also showed a higher tendency to view themselves as active, nurturant fathers ( $F = 2.698; p = 0.030$ ). This finding is in contrast to the work of Spruijt & Duindam (2002: 690), who found no significant relationship between men's occupational levels and the extent to which they were involved in active fathering. It also differs from the findings of Erickson & Gecas (1991:124), which indicated that men who had highly-paid professional careers were less inclined to be involved in domestic and child-care-related tasks, due to time and energy constraints. A possible explanation may be that men with professional careers may manifest higher levels of father involvement related to enhancing the emotional and cognitive well-being of their children (such as reading them stories), rather than performing the specific routine child-care-related tasks measured in the studies cited by Erickson & Gecas (1991).

It is clear, in the second place, that the more hours a man spends at work per day, the lower the likelihood is that he will perceive himself to be an active, nurturant father ( $r = -0.140; p = 0.005$ ). This negative correlation relates to the work of both Barclay & Lupton (1999: 1019) and Spruijt & Duindam (2002: 691), who are of the opinion that long working hours are an impediment to increased levels of paternal involvement.

However, the more hours a man spends per day at home doing occupation-related work, the higher the probability is that he will view himself as demonstrating active father involvement ( $r = 0.133; p = 0.008$ ) and the more likely he will be to perceive it to be fair to expect a man to be involved in active fathering ( $r = 0.131; p = 0.009$ ). This may, among other reasons, be due to the fact that although such men spend their time at home doing occupation-related work, they may be in close proximity to their children, increasing their accessibility — to use Lamb's (1995) concept — when it comes to addressing their children's needs.

In contrast to studies referred to by DeGenova & Rice (2002: 263), no statistically significant relationship was shown to exist between whether or not a man made use of flexible or alternative work

patterns (such as flexible work schedules, telecommuting, part-time work or job sharing) and the man's perception of his level of father involvement ( $p = 0.504$ ), or his perception concerning the fairness of expecting a man to be an active father ( $p = 0.504$ ). A possible explanation may be that, although the number of family-friendly organisations in South Africa may be increasing, the Commission on Gender Equality (2000) is of the opinion that such organisations are still few and far between. This can be seen in the fact that, in contrast to the majority of men (85.8%) in the sample, who were not exposed to flexible work patterns, only a few men (14.3%) reported that they were given the option to make use of alternative work patterns by their employers.

There was, however, a statistically significant relationship between the men's utilisation of another workplace family-friendly arrangement, ie paternity leave, and the two fatherhood-related variables. Men who indicated that they would take paternity leave ( $n = 311$ , arithmetical mean = 62.8039), unlike those who would decline the option ( $n = 89$ , arithmetical mean = 54.8989), showed a higher tendency to view themselves as demonstrating father involvement ( $t = 3.93$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Those who said that they would like to utilise paternity leave (arithmetical mean = 83.2540) were also more inclined to perceive it as fair to expect a man to be an active, nurturant father ( $t = 3.94$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) than those who said they would not consider using paternity leave at all (arithmetical mean = 72.0225). This may possibly relate to the idea that men who are prepared to take paternity leave are also likely to be committed to devoting this time to being involved in the care of their children, rather than viewing such leave as a waste of time.

Apart from the variables related to the men's personal biographical information that may influence their perception of whether it is fair to expect a man to be involved in active fathering, other independent biographical variables, such as those related to their spouses, may also be significant. The first of these is the educational qualification of the wife. Here it is evident that men whose wives had postgraduate degrees, rather than those whose wives had lesser educational qualifications, were more likely to consider it fair to expect men to be involved in active fathering ( $F = 10.884$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). It is



interesting to note that a similar pattern exists for the scores on this scale with regard to men with postgraduate degrees and men whose wives had postgraduate degrees.

The second of the relevant biographical variables is the occupational category of the wife. Men whose wives held managerial positions or had professional careers were significantly more inclined to perceive it as fair to expect a man to be an active, nurturant father than those whose spouses fell into other occupational categories ( $F = 12.715; p = 0.000$ ). This may, among other reasons, be due to the fact that women with high educational qualifications and/or professional careers are more likely to be exposed to feminist ideas and may therefore influence their husbands' views on equal parenting.

It is, however, clear from Table 1 that none of the variables related to the respondents' spouses had a significant bearing on the men's perception of their own levels of father involvement (scale 1). This is in contrast to research findings that indicate, for example, that there is a positive relationship between a wife's level of education and her husband's level of active paternal involvement (Erickson & Gecas 1991: 124, Spruijt & Duindam 2002: 686). It also differs from the work of Moen (1992: 64) and Erickson (1993: 893), who state that women in more professional careers usually have husbands who are to a large extent involved in the fulfilment of domestic and child-care-related obligations. A possible explanation for these findings may be found in the fact that, in South Africa, parents in well-paid professional careers are likely to have a full-time domestic service to assist them in performing time-consuming child-care-related tasks.

There is no significant correlation between the man's level of paternal involvement and, on the one hand, the spouse's average number of hours per day spent at work and, on the other hand, the spouse's average number of working hours per day spent at home. These findings are in contrast to other reported studies, which indicate that so-called active caring fathers have wives who work long hours away from home (Aldous *et al* 1998: 818, cf Spruijt & Duindam 2002: 685). Once again, the utilisation of domestic help in the South African context may operate as an intervening variable.

A number of studies emphasise the importance of variables related to the man's children in relation to his level of paternal conduct. It is, however, evident from Table 1 that there are no significant relationships between the level of active father involvement and the three variables related to the man's children, ie their number, their gender, or the age of the youngest child in the household. These findings differ from those of researchers such as Gerson (1993: 219); Aldous *et al* (1998: 811); and Spruijt & Duindam (2002: 686), who state that fathers are more involved in the care of their sons than of their daughters, and that levels of active fathering are higher when the children in the household are fewer and younger. It thus seems that, irrespective of the gender, the number and the age of their children, the men in the sample were of the opinion that they manifested father involvement to at least some extent.

There is, however, a significant (negative) correlation between the man's perception of the fairness of the expectation that men should be involved in active fathering (scale 2) and the number of dependent children in the household. Although weak, this negative correlation ( $r = -0.104$ ;  $p = 0.037$ ) suggests that, as the number of children in the household increases, fathers will be significantly less likely to consider it fair to expect a man to manifest active father involvement. In addition to this relationship, there is also a negative correlation between scale 2 and the age of the man's youngest child ( $r = -0.105$ ;  $p = 0.036$ ). This means that the older the man's youngest child, the less inclined he will be to perceive it as fair to expect a man to be involved in active fathering.

The fifth and last set of variables comprises independent variables of a general nature. Three variables, relating to general information on the respondent's family of orientation, play a significant role in his perception of the fairness of the expectation that a man should be involved in active fathering (scale 2). The first of these is the occupational status of his mother while he was still at school. It is striking that respondents whose mothers held full-time positions ( $n = 153$ , arithmetical mean = 85.96) were significantly more inclined to consider it fair to expect a man to be an active, nurturant father ( $F = 8.518$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) than those whose mothers were part-time workers

( $n = 59$ , arithmetical mean = 77.34) or not formally employed in the labour market ( $n = 188$ , arithmetical mean = 77.01).

Similar results were found with reference to the mothers' occupational categories. Respondents whose mothers held managerial/professional positions were significantly more inclined to perceive it as fair to expect a man to be an active, nurturant father than those whose mothers were in other occupational categories ( $F = 6.182$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). These results relate to the work of Kiecolt & Acock (1988: 711) who are of the opinion that a mother's labour market participation may generate a more liberated gender-role orientation in a son. This effect is accentuated in cases where a mother has a professional career, thus exposing her son to a non-traditional female role-model.

There were also corresponding findings with regard to the occupational category of the respondents' fathers while they were still at school. Respondents whose fathers were in managerial positions or professional careers were significantly more inclined to perceive it as fair to expect a man to be involved in active, nurturant fathering (scale 2) than those whose fathers were in other occupational categories ( $F = 2.555$ ;  $p = 0.039$ ). Using the scale developed for the purposes of this study to measure the man's feminist orientation (Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha = 0.923$ ), it is interesting to note that there was a significant positive relationship between the fathers in professional careers and the degree to which the respondents had a feminist orientation ( $F = 4.661$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). This links with the work of Spruijt & Duindam (2002: 686), who are of the opinion that a man's "gender-role ideology and attitudes about his role appear to be becoming more important for the father's involvement in child care".

Men who have an egalitarian outlook on family life ( $n = 168$ ) not only demonstrate a greater inclination to view themselves as being actively involved in the lives of their children ( $F = 4.633$ ;  $p = 0.010$ ); they are also more inclined to consider it fair to expect a man to be an active, nurturant father ( $F = 15.818$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). This is in contrast to those men who consider the traditional family ( $n = 83$ ) or a modified version of the traditional family ( $n = 149$ ) to be the ideal, and worth striving for. The findings of theorists such as Glass (1998: 823) and DeGenova & Rice (2002: 151) concur with this. These authors

emphasise that men who define their marriages in terms of companionship and an equal partnership, and who have a more egalitarian gender-role orientation, are more likely to be actively involved in taking care of their children and to be advocates for a more equal allocation of domestic and child-care tasks between the spouses in the household. According to Schwartz (1994: 4), one of the characteristics of the so-called peer marriage (in which both spouses have an egalitarian gender-role orientation within the context of the marital relationship) is a more equal distribution of child-care responsibilities between the spouses.

According to official statistics more than 850 000 people, mostly women, were involved in the service sector as domestic workers in South Africa in 2005 (South African Institute of Race Relations 2006: 161). Considering that many of these workers are also involved in child-care activities in the households of their employers (cf Cock 1980, Preston-Whyte 1991), domestic workers may therefore assist parents in performing the more mundane child-care-related tasks. In view of the high prevalence of domestic service in South Africa, it is not surprising to find that men living in households making use of the services of a full-time domestic worker (arithmetical mean = 54.65) were less likely to perceive themselves to be active, nurturant fathers than men in households employing domestic workers only on an occasional basis (arithmetical mean = 68.85) ( $F = 3.377; p = 0.005$ ).

Apart from the relationships between some of the independent biographical variables and the two fatherhood-related scales, as discussed above, it is clear from the results of a Pearson's product moment correlation test that a positive correlation exists between the two fatherhood-related scales (cf Table 2). This positive correlation ( $r = 0.446; p = 0.000$ ), although modest in strength, implies that the more a man perceives it as fair to expect a man to be actively involved in caring for his children, the more inclined he will be to manifest active, nurturant fathering himself (and *vice versa*).

Table 2: Inter-correlation matrix of the three scales

Scales	Active father involvement (scale 1)	Fairness: fathering (scale 2)
Fairness: fathering (Scale 2)	$r = 0.446$ $p = 0.000^{**}$	
Marital quality (Scale 3)	$r = 0.431$ $p = 0.000^{**}$	$r = 0.533$ $p = 0.000^{**}$

\*\* Significant at the 1% level of significance

Active father involvement (scale 1): the man's perception of the extent to which he demonstrates active fathering.

Fairness: fathering (scale 2): the man's perception of the extent to which it is fair to expect a man to be involved in active fathering.

Marital quality (scale 3): the man's experience of marital quality.

Taking this positive correlation as a point of departure, thus, the question arises as to whether the scores on the scale measuring the perception of fairness were significantly higher/lower than the scores on the scale measuring the perception of real behaviour. In order to answer this question, a t-test was done. The results show that, rather than manifesting active, involved fathering in their own behaviour (arithmetical mean = 61.04) the men were significantly more inclined to perceive it as fair to expect a man to be an active, nurturant father (arithmetical mean = 80.75). This finding corresponds with the work of LaRossa (1988: 451) and Daly (1995: 21), who state that the "culture" of fatherhood (the normative component of fatherhood practices) is not necessarily in congruence with the actual behavioural component of fathering.

Does a man's experience of marital quality correlate with either of the two fatherhood-related scales? In this study the results show that there was a positive correlation between the men's perception of the extent to which it is fair to expect a man to be involved in active fathering (scale 2) and their experience of marital quality (scale 3) ( $r = 0.533$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). The same pattern is also clear with regard to active father involvement (scale 1) and marital quality (scale 3), ie the

higher the level of active father involvement, the higher the experience of marital quality (and vice versa) ( $r = 0.431$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). These findings correspond with the work of Pruett (1993: 49) and Kalmijn (1999: 409), who agree that a high level of father involvement is linked to the experience of a high level of marital satisfaction.

#### 4. Conclusion

In comparison with to motherhood, fatherhood has been far less studied as a socio-cultural phenomenon. This is particularly the case with regard to literature on South African men's perceptions of the nature of their own paternal conduct. In an attempt to get a clearer view of the extent to which men consider themselves to be active, nurturant fathers, this study has drawn on the results of a quantitative research project focusing on a sample of South African men and their views regarding fatherhood, fatherwork and the extent to which it can be considered fair to expect a man to be involved in child-care. From the results it seems that the "new fatherhood" has become more fact than fiction in the lives of many of these men. Although some of the respondents, for a number of reasons, may not have shown high levels of active father involvement, many of them did consider it fair to expect a man to perform active fatherwork. They also viewed fatherhood as synonymous with an ethical calling for responsible caring and paternal involvement.

Numerous social changes have contributed to the process of renegotiating the meaning of parenthood in general and fatherhood in particular. This brings to the fore the importance of research dealing with men's social construction of their identities as fathers and the definition of their "paternal conduct realities". This is not only significant in terms of addressing the gap in the literature with regard to South African men's views on fatherhood, but may also be of importance to provide men with a 'space' to take cognisance of the meanings they attach to fatherhood as well as the opportunity to share their definitions and experiences with others.

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Acta Academica 2008: 40(1)

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