

# Fathering has changed, but not all that much

By Mary Jo Kochekian  
The Hartford Courant

A lot of fighting is going on over what one authority calls "one of the great myths of the late 20th century — that fathering has radically changed." "Don't get me wrong, fathering certainly has changed. And many fathers have changed," said Jay Belsky, distinguished professor of human development at Pennsylvania State University.

"But there are still many men out there whose involvement, especially in the early years, is, if you would, perfunctory. And that statement is not meant to slander anybody. It's just descriptive."

It's a mistake to confuse the "transforming families" with all families, Belsky said. "And I think it creates lots of difficulties for men, women and children."

The problem: "unmet rising expectations."

Belsky's book "Transition to Parenthood" (Dell, \$12.95) shows some of the fallout.

Recent research by Belsky and colleagues, reported in the journal of Family Psychology, rated father involvement by studying fathers and their 15-month-old sons in their homes. In the 69 families in the study the parents were married couples

raising their first-born children.

They found four categories of dads. The majority were in either the "disciplinarian" or "disengaged" categories, which hew to the old school.

The others — "caretaking" and "playmate-teacher" — were in the minority. There were nine in the caretaking group. The playmate-teachers, who seemed to be having the most fun, numbered 12. (There were 18 disciplinarians and 30 disengaged fathers.)

By observing the fathers with the toddlers at around dinner time, the most hectic time of the day, researchers found four categories that would describe what dads do:

> Caretaking — tending to the basic physical needs of the child — diapering, feeding, soothing.

> Play — having fun playing run and chase games, physical play such as swinging the child, imitation games and the like.

> Teaching — showing and labeling objects, reading to the child, showing how to do things.

> Discipline — reprimanding and encouraging good behavior.

The traditional dad seems to be, Belsky says, "in one sense the uninvolved dad who is behind the paper, out of the room, in the garage — he always has to do besides be with the kids or around the kids."

"But then there's a kind of father who is not quite different, but he'll interrupt what he's doing to say 'stop it, do this' or 'do that.' At least at this young age, he wasn't all that involved."

The caretaking dads and the disciplinarians seem "to get dragged in by child demands — he's got a wet diaper; he needs a nap; he's crying; he's getting into something."

The playmate-teachers, though, "are jumping in willingly, readily and participating."

It's not as if there's a good group of dads and a bad group, Belsky says. The categories are observations, not value judgments.

But the traditional approach might be considered "bad," he says, in the sense "that children want more than this from their dads."

On the other hand: disciplinarians scored highest on neuroticism — "the tendency to be anxious, depressed, hostile." Second-highest were the disengaged guys. So some kids may be better off not even getting discipline at this early age from their dads.

"But if push came to shove, as long as the discipline is not truly hostile, the kid's better off with that than nothing. Because that sends the message, 'I'm paying some attention.' And the kid takes that as, 'Daddy notices me. I matter.'"

So there is change, but rare is the family in which the roles of mother and father are somewhat interchangeable.

*Recent research by Jay Belsky and colleagues rated father involvement by studying fathers and their 15-month-old sons in their homes. In the 69 families in the study the parents were married couples raising their first-born children.*

## Raising compassionate boys is a challenge

### Youth and values

By Eugene C. Roehrkopf

"Boys will be boys." It rolls easily off the tongue. But what does it mean? It's typically our way of saying that boys will be insensitive, competitive, aggressive, disrespectful and irresponsible.

A Search Institute study of 5,000 Minneapolis young people shows that boys are less likely than girls to value caring and compassion (see graphic).

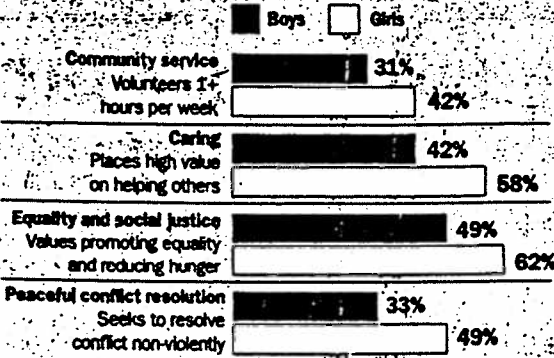
One reaction to these differences is to shrug them off to biology, namely testosterone. But that's not the whole story. Boys' values and character are also shaped by external influences. Furthermore, we have provided few role models to show how men can be both strong and caring.

A result is that many boys don't learn how to express their feelings or show compassion and empathy. What can we do?

> Provide opportunities to give and serve. One of the best

### Boys lag behind girls in caring

Here are the percentages of Minneapolis middle and high school boys and girls who report each caring value or behavior, based on a 1996 Search Institute study of 5,000 Minneapolis Public School students:



Source: Search Institute

Star Tribune graphic

ways to nurture caring and compassion is through service to others. Most boys are willing to serve, but they're rarely asked,

because we assume boys don't want to do these things.

> Challenge stereotypes. Media messages must be challenged.

One way to do this is to help boys learn to listen or watch critically.

("What did you like about that show? How did people treat each other?") Another way is to urge the institutional purveyors of violent messages (such as TV stations, toy stores and advertisers) to pay more attention to what they're encouraging in boys.

> Nurture empathy. In their book "Bringing Up the Moral Child," Michael Schulman and Eva Mekler suggest that teaching a caring point of view begins by helping children notice their own and other people's feelings.

> Be positive role models. A way to nurture values in boys is for them to see men treating people of both genders with care and respect and engaging in acts of compassion and service.

Eugene C. Roehrkopf is director of publishing and communication for Search Institute, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit, nonsectarian organization dedicated to practical research benefiting children and youth.

# Commentary

A forum for opinions, reactions, dialogue and disagreement

## Demands of home, work create a new 'time bind'

By Ellen Goodman  
Boston Globe

**BOSTON** — We are sitting over tea and salad, talking about time. Or, rather, the lack of it. A table of working mothers and working daughters are sharing strategies and confounding tactics.

One admits that she gets conversations with her ailing mother "done" by car phone between home and office. Another acknowledges that she bribes her sleepy preschooler into the carpool with a breakfast bar. A third runs through the bedtime ritual that has become a struggle between her desire for a fine end to her son's day and her desperation to just end her own day.

Time has become our daily weather report. My friends treat time now as if it were an act of nature.

We discuss the prevailing winds of timelessness, the occasional hurricane of a child's illness, the tornado of a mother's broken foot. A day that proceeds smoothly has become as appreciated as a balmy summer weekend in Anchorage.

I am reminded of the old adage: Everybody talks about the weather but no one does anything about it.

Arlie Hochschild has heard all these conversations. She reports them in a new book called "The Time Bind."

This is her second chronicle of the lopsided nature of the social change we call the women's

movement. In "The Second Shift," the Berkeley sociologist dissected life in families where women were working two jobs: one inside and one outside the home.

We already knew that too few men were sharing the family workload. But the people in her book brought real life out from under the list of chores and complaints.

Now in "The Time Bind," she looks at the well-heralded work-family conflict. If it's been easier to adapt to male life patterns than to get men to adapt to female life patterns, it's also been easier for women to adapt to the traditional male values of the workplace than for men and society to adapt to the traditionally female values of family life.

Hochschild studied the time-deficit complaints of people who work in a "family-friendly" Fortune 500 company she calls Amerco. Not surprisingly, beneath the policy veneer, there is a company ethic that rewards men and women who work long hours. But what is new, as Hochschild describes it, is that however stressed and torn women feel, "growing numbers of working women are leery of spending more time at home."

Family was once the "haven in a heartless world" of regimented workers. But now the office has become more like home, and home has become more like work.

"In this new model of family

and work life, a tired parent flees a world of unresolved quarrels and unwashed laundry for the reliable orderliness, harmony and managed cheer of work," she writes. The emotional magnets beneath home and workplace are in the process of being reversed.

This is by no means true for every worker. Or for every family. At times, Hochschild seems to be blaming the victim.

But her sense that family work has been devalued rings true. The second shift now feels like just that — more work. And family investments themselves feel risky.

"For now at home, there is an atmosphere of emotional 'deregulation' which is creating a basic crisis of security," she says. "People wonder: Where do we feel the safest? Even among those with lousy jobs, the answer is sometimes 'at work.'"

Hochschild might have made a stronger link between her earlier book about inequality at home and the female drift toward work. The trend toward two-workaholic families may well be connected to women's search for full partnership.

Today women are raised as partners. They are coeds and co-workers. The great divide begins for many at parenthood. Sometimes it's easier for women to do less cleaning than to get men to do more. Maybe it's also easier to "work like a man" than to get men to share "women's work" at

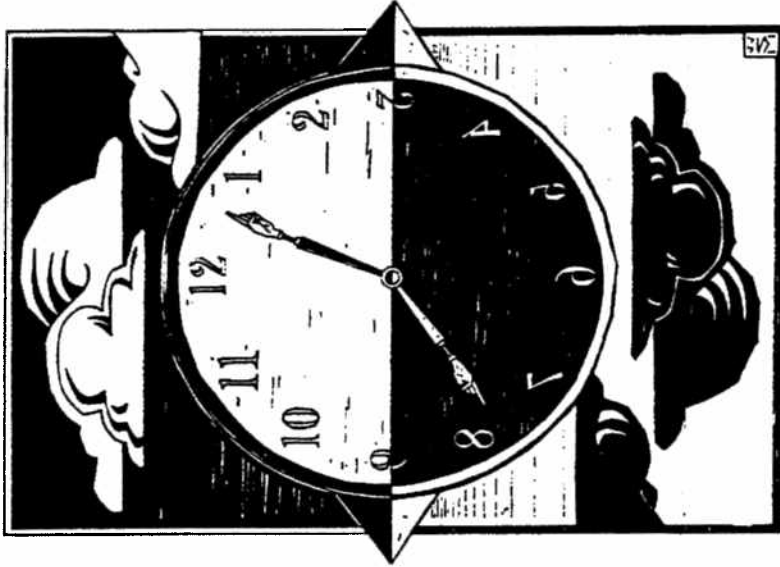


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home.

But in the time bind created by all these cultural and economic forces, we have fewer hours with and for family. We have even created a third shift: managing the daily troubles of an overburdened home life and a "hurried" child.

If this is a weather pattern, it spells trouble for kids. Not trouble with a capital T, but the

small t of unhappiness and loneliness. What is squeezed for all of us is the sense of nurturing, the pleasure in each other's company.

Hochschild calls for a time movement to right the imbalance. But the weather pattern she has drawn on the national chart looks very unsettled.

# Seeing the joys of outrageous boyhood

*Stan Jubb* p. A21  
July 16

I was serving lemonade to a herd of my daughter's friends when one of them made me an honest bet. The gamble came from a lanky guy in an oversized t-shirt and baggy khakis.

"Two bucks says I can drink this upside down," he said as he held the tall glass over his head.

"Two bucks has it," I said. We shook on the deal as my daughter moaned in humiliation.

He swaggered toward the porch awning, lemonade in hand. Smiling, he dropped his head between his knees, turned his face toward the glass and poured 16 ounces of lemonade into his left ear, missing his mouth by 4 inches.

How could you help but love a guy like that? Maybe his own mother would disapprove, but I was happy to pay my two bucks for the honor of his wager.

My daughter's male friends spend so much time at our house I've started to call them the "summer sons."

I've known most of them since birth. Some were members of our "play group" when my girl was a toddler. The boys have all changed, of course. Their feet are bigger and their voices lower. But to me, they will always be the same little guys who used to brag about their newest Transformer or challenge my kid on the hottest Nintendo game.

These are the fellows who taught my daughter to spit and use the "f" word in a sentence. They are the same little guys who slathered Play-Doh in her hair in first grade and who showed her how to build a cylinder with Legos. And they are her dear friends.

## Not in my day

When I was a child, nice girls did not have male friends. Boys and girls were segregated at the first sign of puberty.

Physical education, sex and health classes were all single-sex. Girls studied home economics; boys studied industrial arts.

Scouting was single-sex. Piano lessons were divided by gender. At church, my confirmation class met in a room with a split down the middle. Boys on one side, girls on the other.

School gender rules were formidable. No pants or culottes in class. Skirts had to touch the knee. Unnatural hair color could get a girl suspended.

Boys suffered under similar rules in a parallel universe. No stubble on the chin. No fuzz on the upper lip. Filthy tennis shoes.



## Kristine Holmgren

ceptable. Hair below the ear and a guy was sent home.

Like other good girls I believed the laws were made for my benefit. Their existence let me know I needed to pay close attention to the behavior of the unruly opposite sex. If I didn't, I might damage something called my "reputation."

Even the dimmest girl was bright enough to get the message; boys were dangerous. They wanted only one thing from a girl. No self-respecting female would have one as a friend. A girl who thought otherwise was either stupid or a slut.

But I get no respect when I

reminisce about the bad-old-days with my daughter's guy-friends. They've seen too many seductive movies about my generation. "I thought the '60s were supposed to be cool," they say. Or, "What about sexual revolution? Women's lib? Flower power and group sex?"

If I had the energy, I would explain the weird social/political context in which these movements were incubated. But I'm no fool. The effort would be lost. Might as well try describing the Sahara to an Inuit.

Besides, my stroll down gender-biased memory lane only makes me sad. I am reminded of the human evil that prevailed when half the human race feared the other half.

These summers are too short to sour with my grim history. And my "summer sons" are too charming to interrupt when they are on a roll.

Talk about entertaining. Some of them have memorized entire episodes of "South Park." One can do a great imitation of Chris Kattan's "Saturday Night Live" character Mango. Another

can recite every detail of the latest summer flick, including the director's intentions behind specific camera angles.

So when they visit, I yield the floor. It is the least I can do, considering what they have done for me.

Watching them grow has changed my life. Thanks to them, I'm not afraid of rock music, weird clothing, body piercing or potty humor.

I have escaped becoming one of those frightened little women who scurry down public thoroughfares, eyes darting, clutching her purse next to her chest.

Not me. I am no longer afraid of random gangs of adolescent males. Their elaborate postures and animal noises are like a fresh breeze blowing across my old conclusions.

I am forever changed. The summer sons have opened my eyes to the joys of outrageous boyhood.

And redeemed my sexist soul.

— Kristine Holmgren is a writer, pastor and broadcast commentator.



