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**Title:** Metanarrative of the "New Father" and Narratives of Young Finnish First-Time Fathers

**Year:** 2011

**Version:**

**Please cite the original version:**

Eerola, P., & Huttunen, J. (2011). Metanarrative of the "New Father" and Narratives of Young Finnish First-Time Fathers. *Fathering*, 9(3), 211-231.  
<https://doi.org/10.3149/ft.0903.211>

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## METANARRATIVE OF THE “NEW FATHER” AND NARRATIVES OF YOUNG FINNISH FIRST-TIME FATHERS

*The metanarrative of the “new father” has become well-established in both the public and academic discourses on families. This study analyzes the narratives and storylines about fatherhood told by young Finnish first-time fathers, and examines the interrelationship between these narratives and the metanarrative of the “new father.” Three different narratives were identified—the modern, the transition and the postmodern narratives of fathering. Although constructed differently, all three narratives engaged with the metanarrative of the new father by reflecting on it and by drawing a distinction between their perceptions of fatherhood and the narratives of the past. In conclusion, the idea of the “new father” is firmly embedded in the meta-narrative of fatherhood identified in the present Finnish context.*

*Keywords:* the “new father,” fatherhood, Finland, metanarrative, narrative inquiry

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In the Nordic countries, increasing interest has been shown in fatherhood during last few decades, both in the mass media and in the area of family research. For instance, the father’s role in the family was one of the main topics of the “familistic turn” in the Finnish media in the early 2000s (Jallinoja, 2006). Similarly, in June 2010, the New York Times reported how “in Sweden, men can have it all” (Bennhold, 2010), referring to the fact that a family-centered life-style and participation in care work have become a standard for most fathers in Swedish society. However, attention to fatherhood is not restricted to the Nordic countries. According to Miller (2011), fathering has become more visible in the UK. In fact, men’s parenting appears to be receiving attention across almost the whole of western society

In the Nordic discourses, attention has been paid to the connections between fatherhood, family policy and work (e.g., Haas & Hwang, 2009; Haataja, 2009; Miller, 2011, p. 48; Pajumets, 2010). For example, a clear effort has been made to increase fathers’ participation in children’s early nurture and care, for instance by reform of paternal

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*Fathering*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Fall 2011, 211-231.

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fth.0903.211/\$15.00 • DOI: 10.3149/fth.0903.211 • ISSN/1537-6680 • eISSN/1933-026X

and shareable parental leave systems (e.g., Almqvist, 2008, p. 194; Klinth, 2008; Vuori, 2009, p. 48). Although the proportion of fathers taking parental leave<sup>1</sup> has risen in all of the Nordic countries, in Finland and Sweden, for example, it is only 6 and 20 percent, respectively, of all the parental leave taken (Haataja). However, it is likely that the public fatherhood discourse has affected men's narration of their fatherhood.

Although the methods of studying fatherhood are numerous (Haas & O'Brian, 2010, p. 272), narrative inquiries on fatherhood are relatively few. Exceptions include narrative studies on good fatherhood with expectant fathers (Googdell, Barrus, Meldrum, & Vargo, 2010), and with fathers of special-needs children and religious fathers (e.g., Dollahite, Marks & Olson, 2002; Dollahite, 2004), while narrative inquiries into contemporary "mainstream" fatherhood are very scarce (e.g., Palkovitz, 2002). In Finland, some scholars have recognized the role and possibilities of narratives in researching fatherhood, for example, to highlight the transition to fatherhood as a turning point in men's lives and life stories (Mykkänen, 2008, 2010), to study fatherhood of middle-age (Korhonen, 1999) or to explain the metanarratives of fatherhood (Kekäle, 2007).

This article forms part of a larger longitudinal study examining the development of narratives by first-time fathers in the early years of their fatherhood. The study is being conducted at the Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, and is among the first attempts to gather narratives on contemporary (Nordic) fatherhood. Although much tacit knowledge has been accumulated and many accounts given on what 21st century fathers are like and what they think, research-based knowledge on the stories men tell is lacking. In this particular study we explore the narratives of Finnish first-time fathers as examples of Nordic fatherhood-narratives, and relate them to the metanarrative of the "new father."

#### CATEGORIZATIONS AND METANARRATIVES OF FATHERHOOD: PAST AND PRESENT

Since narrative inquiries about fatherhood are few, narrative characterizations of fatherhood are lacking. However, several typologies and classifications of fatherhood have been published. For example, one of the recent fatherhood typologies is Marks and Palkovitz's (2004) categorization of "the good," "the bad" and "the uninterested." This classification is interesting—even if similar categorizations have been documented earlier (e.g., Furstenberg, 1988)—as it seeks to draw attention to the most common (American) types of contemporary fatherhood. "The good" father is described as either the "new," involved father or as "the good provider." The "new" and involved father shares parenting with his spouse and takes an active role as a caregiver in the lives of his children, while the "good provider" balances the roles of breadwinner and mother's assistant in care giving. However, both categories refer to "good" fatherhood, to "family

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<sup>1</sup> In Finland, the father's quota of compensated parental leave is 9 weeks (consisting of 3 weeks immediately after the child's birth and 6 weeks during the first eight months). In addition, a father or a mother has a statutory right to state-subsidized stay-at-home parenting up to the child's third birthday.

men” (Coltrane 1997) who have a strong psychological bond with their family and children.

The “new,” involved father represents the same idea of the male caregiver as the concepts of the generative father (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997a), the nurturing father (Pruett, 1987), the responsible father (Doherty, Kouneski & Erikson, 1998) and the positively involved father (Pleck, 1997). As Huttunen (2006) observed, these concepts represent an intensifying (or strengthening) culture of fatherhood, which can be identified in Nordic and other western societies. Not only is the discourse (public and academic) of the “new father” well-known and established, but it also seems that these terms and concepts have shaped the idea of what constitutes acceptable contemporary fatherhood. We propose that the concept of the “new father” can be seen as a metanarrative of contemporary fatherhood, as a culturally dominant story, about what it is to be a suitable father in present-day Finland.

Postmodern sociological theory rejects the notion of a grand narrative or metanarrative (e.g., Ritzer, 2008, p. 618; Giddens, 2001, p. 674). However, in narrative inquiry, numerous concepts of dominant narratives exist. These narratives are present in our society as commonly known “truths”; these include such concepts as metanarrative, public narrative, master narrative, dominant stories and cultural stock of stories (e.g., Hänninen, 2004; Sommers, 1994). In societal and cultural discourses, these narratives are widely spread, frequently told and rarely questioned. Embedded in these concepts is the idea that differently-told and other-like narratives are rejected by the dominant stories. However, postmodern theory describes contemporary narratives as “smallish” and “localized” (Ritzer, 2008, p. 618). But, as Hänninen (2004) argues, while the concept of “relative freedom” contains divergent and localized narratives, “*on the community and group level, however, the options are often much more restricted in terms of what kinds of narrative interpretations are considered appropriate or suitable*” (Hänninen, 2004, p. 77). In this study, we prefer the concept of metanarrative: it underlines the meta-level character and cultural dominance of particular narratives, and it has recognized status in sociological discourse.

In contemporary western societies, the increasing individualization of lifestyles and life-stories (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) has affected our understanding of fatherhood. This is discussed in Kekäle’s<sup>2</sup> (2007) theory on the change in the Finnish metanarratives of fatherhood. He outlines three essentially different fatherhood metanarratives—the pre-modern, modern and postmodern. In the pre-modern metanarrative, the parental roles of males and females are fundamentally divergent: the father is seen as an authoritarian patriarch and the mother as the primary caregiver. These divergent roles represent the well-known classification in which women are seen as domestic and men as public agents (e.g., Dienhart & Daly, 1997, p. 150; Rosaldo, 1974,

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<sup>2</sup> Kekäle conducted life-story interviews with 13 first-time fathers (interviewing them twice, just before the first child was born and when the child was 1 year old), with the intention of examining, how men construct their identity as fathers in accordance with cultural and societal metanarratives.

p. 23). These descriptions are usually attached to the past narratives of fatherhood (Aalto, 2006; Griswold, 1993). In the modern metanarrative, the father is seen as a distant breadwinner. The roles of the mother and father remain divergent. The postmodern metanarrative is characterized by shared parenting and the father's role as a "mother-like" caregiver. Consequently, the central components of the postmodern metanarrative include nurture and caregiving. Despite the chronological character of the three metanarratives, their locations and turning points in timeline are blurred, and therefore features of all three might simultaneously persist in our time and culture. According to Kekäle, however, the postmodern narration has acquired the status of a cultural metanarrative in Finnish society.

The pre-modern and modern metanarratives describe a fatherhood that can be characterized as "traditional." The postmodern metanarrative describes fatherhood in accordance with the concept of the "new father." Yet a difference remains between the concept of the "new father" and the metanarrative: while the concept describes real-life fathers living their everyday lives, the metanarrative describes the cultural images of contemporary fatherhood. However, since the concept of the "new father" is widely recognized, it has influenced understandings of what constitute proper ways of being a father—that is, the metanarrative of fatherhood.

Marks and Palkovitz's characterization of "the good provider" resembles Kekäle's pre-modern and modern metanarratives, earlier described as "traditional." The categories of "the deadbeat dad" and "the paternity-free man"<sup>3</sup> also have their narrative counterparts, even if these narratives are mainly found elsewhere than in the stories told by men and fathers themselves. However, we can examine these stories as parallel and minor narratives—or counter narratives (Andrews, 2002)—of the metanarrative of the "new father." For example, in the metanarrative of the "new father," fathers appear as caregivers and nurturers, while in "traditional" narratives they appear as psychically distant but as fulfilling their parental duties by providing for their families' economic needs. In the "dead beat" and "paternity-free" narratives the father completely fails in his duties.

Recent research on fatherhood has underlined the historical, cultural and social dimensions of male parenting (Miller, 2011). Thus, the metanarrative a father is subject to depends on the historical, cultural and social context and reality in which he is living, and presumably affects the father's understanding of suitable ways of being a male parent. In addition, the historical, cultural and social context also contributes to a father's interpretations of gender, and especially masculinities. The concept of gender offers a focal framework in which fatherhood should be studied (Miller, p. 2); to adapt Connell (2005), every time a man narrates fatherhood, he also, in some particular way, narrates masculinities. Kekäle (2007) analyzed the metanarratives of fatherhood also

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<sup>3</sup> Marks and Palkovitz describes the "bad" father as a deadbeat dad, and the "uninterested" father as the paternity-free man. Whereas the deadbeat dad usually fails—even though he tries—to carry out his duties (as a caregiver, provider, etc.), the paternity-free man has sidestepped his parental duties by choice, as "being a father" is perceived as an alternative unsuited to his life.

in relation to the metanarratives of masculinity. He highlighted three parallel metanarratives of masculinity—pre-modern, modern and postmodern. The pre-modern and modern metanarratives emphasized the essentially divergent nature of masculinity and femininity, whereas the post-modern metanarrative interpreted diversity in gender roles as a natural state of affairs. Since the dividing line between the pre-modern and modern narrative is blurred and these narratives are overlapping, they can be combined to form what can be termed the traditional metanarrative of masculinity. The post-modern metanarrative critically engages with the narratives of the past, pointing out the diverse range of masculinities and their similarities with femininities. According to Connell (1987, p. 179), there are no features which are shared by all (narratives of) masculinities and which distinguish them from all femininities (or vice versa). Kekäle’s characterization also parallels the findings of DiPalma and Ferguson (2006) that gender roles appear differently in their modern (traditional) and postmodern instances.

To summarize, the concept and the metanarrative of the “new father” accords with the postmodern metanarrative of masculinity—it could hardly exist in any of the other metanarratives of masculinity. As Aalto (2006) has also noted, the discourses of fatherhood have diversified. A conceivable interpretation is that the postmodern metanarrative of masculinity has enabled more involved narratives of fatherhood. This would mean that despite the father’s masculinity, fatherhood can be narrated according to the metanarrative of the “new father.”

#### AIMS AND METHOD OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to outline the contemporary narratives and storylines of fatherhood as told by young Finnish first-time fathers within the changing context outlined above. The specific research questions were as follows:

- What narratives and storylines are produced by young Finnish first-time fathers about their own fatherhood?
- What are the similarities and connections between the narratives of Finnish first-time fathers and the metanarrative of the new father?

The method applied in the study is narrative inquiry, in which narratives are understood as constructors of knowledge. Narrative inquiry has gained an increasingly high profile in social research during the last two decades (Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou, 2008, p. 1). Hatch and Wisniewski (1995, pp. 116-118) describe the essence of narrative inquiry as follows: 1. focus on the individual, 2. personal nature of the research project, 3. practical orientation, and 4. emphasis on subjectivity. According to Hänninen (2004, p. 76), studying life changes as narrative enables us to capture the meanings people give to the most sensitive and/or difficult experiences in their lives. While there is no simple answer to the question “What is a sensitive topic?” (Hyden, 2008, p. 134), fatherhood can be considered just such a topic.

According to Polkinghorne (1995, p. 12), two primary types of narrative inquiry exist: analysis of narratives and narrative analysis. By analysis of narratives, Polkinghorne is

referring to Bruner's (1986) paradigmatic mode of cognition. In this approach the researcher gathers data in the form of stories and uses paradigmatic analytic procedures to produce classifications and typologizations. Narrative analysis is based on the narrative mode of cognition. In this approach, the researcher, by applying narrative analytic procedures, produces explanatory stories from data comprising events and happenings (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). In other words, whereas paradigmatic narrative inquiry examines stories as data, the purpose of narrative-style narrative inquiry is to produce stories as outcomes, e.g. "*How did this all happen?*" In this study, we combined both forms of narrative inquiry: applying narrative analysis, we constructed narratives from the stories of individual fathers and outlined the metanarrative of the "new father"; and applying analysis of narratives, we analyzed men's narratives with the aim of locating specific storylines in each narrative.

The empirical data of the study were obtained by a combination of narrative and thematic interviewing. Sixteen ( $n = 16$ ) first-time fathers aged 23-29 years (22-27 years at the time of the birth of their child) were interviewed.<sup>4</sup> As the average age of first fatherhood in Finland is approximately 30 years, all the men can be described as relatively young fathers. The interviews were conducted when the men's first-borns were from 6 months to 2 years of age. All the interviewed fathers were living in a heterosexual relationship (marital or cohabitation) with the mother of their child. This is the most usual path to first fatherhood in Finland and the other Nordic countries today, while other forms of fatherhood may exist at later stages of men's lives. Before the pregnancy, the men's couple relationship with the mother of their child had lasted from six months to five years.

The educational background of the interviewed men was as follows: six had a university-level degree and eight were still completing their university studies. Two men had no tertiary-level studies. Half of the men were working full-time at the time of the interview, six were full-time students and two were at home taking care of the home and child. In total, five fathers had experience of the role of the "stay-at-home father" (from 3 months to 2 years). The interviewed men represented various professional fields and disciplines, and included among others engineers, health care specialists, security guards and private entrepreneurs. In outline, the men can be described as middle-class with slightly above-average education.

The interviewees were recruited through 1) various e-mail posting lists of students with families, 2) various general and family-themed internet discussion forums, and 3) snowball sampling. These three means of recruitment enabled us to collect a sample of young first-time fathers relevant for the purposes of the study. All the interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewee and transcribed before the narrative analysis. The interviewee filled in a background information form (age, child's age, education etc.) after the interviews, which can also be understood as indicating willingness to participate. The interviewer's commitment to ethicality<sup>5</sup> in this research was dis-

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<sup>4</sup> Interviews were conducted between May 2008 and March 2010.

<sup>5</sup> For example, anonymity of the interviewee, storage of the interview material, etc.

cussed with the interviewees. The interviews took place, for example, in a convenient place chosen by the interviewee, such as a coffee shop, public library, or the interviewee’s home.

The interviews started with a narrative-eliciting question: “Tell me how you became a father and how you consider yourself as a father.” These stories lasted from 5 to 25 minutes. After this, the interviews continued as thematic interviews. The themes discussed concerned the time before the birth of the child, becoming a father, everyday fatherhood, work and family, being a young father, the couple relationship and future prospects. The interviews lasted for 90 min on average and were conducted by the first author of this article. The recordings and transcriptions of the interviews are stored at the Department of Education in the University of Jyväskylä.

We began the analysis of the interviews by reading them with the aim of finding congruencies and similarities between the different stories and answers. First, we asked what constituted the most essential content in each story, and second, how this story was interrelated with the other men’s stories. On the basis of the answers to these questions we identified three different narratives—the modern ( $n = 6$ ), the transition ( $n = 4$ ) and the postmodern ( $n = 6$ ) narrative. Our method of constructing the narratives has congruencies with the method of Palkovitz (2002, p. 58), who constructed “a composite statement of good fathering.” To clarify the three narratives that we identified, a composite of each narrative is presented in the results. The composites were constructed from the issues and expressions that characterized the men’s narration. We then analyzed each of the narratives further by extracting the most descriptive storylines in the men’s individual stories. As a result, for each narrative we identified three to four divergent storylines that captured the essential content of the narratives. Because all three composite narratives emerged from several interviews, they are hypothetical in nature; however, the stories told by individual men tended to conform to one of the three narratives. To demonstrate the three narratives that we constructed, we present authentic samples from the interviews (names and vocations anonymized). Our interpretation of the metanarrative of the “new father” (Table 1, p. 225) was constructed by examining existing conceptualizations of the “new father.” The focal content of these concepts constituted the framework for the metanarrative.

#### THE NARRATIVES, AND THEIR STORYLINES, OF YOUNG FINNISH FIRST-TIME FATHERS IN THE TRANSITION TO FATHERHOOD

##### *The Modern Narrative of Fathering*

The first of the constructed narratives is characterized by “traditional” parental roles, where breadwinning is central to the male-gendered parental role, while taking care of the child and housekeeping are the primary maternal responsibilities. However, the father participates willingly in maternal duties as a mother’s assistant, and in general, he has a family-centered lifestyle. The narrative contains three storylines: 1. *breadwinning*, 2. *gendered parental roles* and 3. *father as mother’s assistant*. These storylines are emphasized in composite narrative:



It all happened so suddenly, quite imperceptibly. Veli's spouse Jenni had been talking for a long time about how she would like to have a baby "in the future." Just after Veli's move from studying to working life Jenni started to talk more and more about having a baby. At the beginning Veli was doubtful, but soon he consented—if that's what Jenni really wants, then.... Quite soon they found out that Jenni was pregnant. After the first shock Veli became conscious that he was pleased—a family was something that he had always wanted to have someday. Jenni's pregnancy was a happy time for the couple. Veli bought a bigger car and he also accompanied Jenni to the maternity clinic a couple of times. He was working quite hard, trying to pay off the loan on their new house. Luckily, he had a wonderful wife who took on the main burden of all the preparations relating to the childbirth, in which Veli assisted every time Jenni asked. When Matias was born, Veli was amazed—how wonderful it was to hold your own son in your own arms! When Jenni and Matias came home from the maternity hospital, he immediately started his three-week paternity leave. How would Jenni have got along, if Veli hadn't been there to help her at home? Veli's family was living an agreeable and ordinary everyday life. Day by day as Matias grew, it was more agreeable than ever to be all together and play with his own son. The family spent as much time together as possible, despite that fact that Veli's weekdays mostly went on work—while Jenni was at home, he had to take care of their income. But when he came home, his reward was waiting—his family and child, the most important things in his life. (Narrative constructed from 6 interviews)

The importance for men, across the generations, of paid work and providing economically for his family has been underlined by several scholars (e.g., Miller, 2011; Palkovitz, 2002). The storyline of *breadwinning* was identified as focal in every story related to the modern narrative of fathering. It seems that in this narrative working and being a provider were reported by the men as the most appropriate ways of taking care of the family. At the same time, the family gives work its meaning. Marks and Palkovitz (2004, p. 115) write about "the good provider," the father who works a long day to provide for his family, but who nevertheless remains "the good father." They point out how "a frequently overlooked reality is that many (fathers) ... must work long hours and/or multiple jobs to provide for their families". Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) accentuate how providing should be considered as a form of involvement and participation, strengthening the emotional bond between father and child. The storyline is parallel to Palkovitz's (2002, p. 44) findings of the central role of providing in father's narratives.

Several scholars have emphasized the higher amounts of care work mothers do when fathers spend more time in paid work (e.g., Craig & Mullan, 2010; Lammi-Taskula, 2008). However, the storyline emphasizes how working and breadwinning seems not only to be something that fathers do, but an essential part of fathering.<sup>6</sup> It could be argued that this storyline conforms to the mother's wishes, that it is the most natural way for a man to take care of the family, that it is a typical family situation (in the days when the mother did not have a job), or that the father has a 'proper' salary (compared to the mother's). However, the reasons that the men gave emphasize how working and

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<sup>6</sup> Also in Doucet's (2004) study men narrated earning as a focal part of fathering.

providing are something that they have considered and questioned. Unlike in the past, providing should be seen as a choice that the father has made for his family, a choice that has made him “more of a father.”

Well, when she was pregnant, I was a bit nervous about our financial situation. And, now... Luckily, I got work, and... At the moment, my duty is to bring by salary home. And ... Actually, I've taken some extra shifts, too. So ... I have quite a lot of work to do at the moment, but... Sometimes it has been quite stressful to be responsible for the income of the whole family. (Esa, 29 years, son 18 months, security guard)

The second storyline identified in this narrative highlights the well-known discourse of *gendered parental roles* (e.g., Björneberg, 1992). It is grounded in the well-known division where women are positioned in the domestic domain and men in the public domain (e.g., Dienhart & Daly, 1997, p. 150; Rosaldo, 1974, p. 23). The storyline stresses the exceedingly high amount of parental leave taken by the mother, while the father only stays at home for three weeks. It also emphasizes how the father handles his paternal responsibilities mostly through paid work, whereas taking care of the child and home remains the mother's role.

Now that you ask... I... I try to be there (at home) as much as I can. But, you see, you've got to go to work, and... Usually I try to come home before she (daughter) goes to bed, to brush her teeth, to put on her pajamas, to say goodnight... However, as you can see, most of the daily routines are taken care of by her (wife). (Juuso, 29 years, daughter 18 months, engineer)

The third storyline of the modern narrative underlines the father's role in care work and housekeeping as *a mother's assistant*. This storyline begins in the early stages of parenthood—from the beginning of pregnancy—when the father assists the mother by doing the shopping and “supporting her in her pregnancy.” After the birth of the child, the father participates in the nurturing and housekeeping, but mainly as ordered by the mother, and under her watchful eye. The father as a mother's assistant or as a “vice-mother” has frequently been noted in previous studies on the father's role in the family, while the main responsibilities of parenthood have been assigned to the mother (e.g., Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000, pp. 87-88). The assisting type of fathering overlaps with the storyline of gendered parental roles by separating the men's and women's role in the family—both have access to each other's sphere, but only as an invited guest.

#### *From Modern to Postmodern—The Transition Narrative of Fathering*

The transition narrative of fathering is characterized by the challenges and insecurity of fathering in the early stages of a man's fatherhood. This narrative is also a story of a man's growth into responsible parenthood. In this narrative we identified four storylines: 1. *father as role-seeker*, 2. *father's challenge in engaging with a family-centered*

*lifestyle*, 3. *mother's role as gatekeeper*, and 4. *father's growth into involved parenthood*. The storylines are observed in the following composite narrative:

Things don't always go the way you expect. Jaakko found this out when he became a father at the age of twenty-five, just before finishing his MA. Jaakko had dated Emmi for three years, and had then married her. Jaakko suspected that Emmi began to feel broody right after getting married, because she started babbling and expressed admiration whenever they saw a baby. Jaakko had noticed, that she had started to talk about babies with his friends, and quite soon after that she started talking about to Jaakko as well about her broody feelings. After a little pressure, Jaakko acquiesced, saying "If a baby comes, it comes," although he felt that Emmi had made this decision for them a long time ago. Jaakko was confused when he found out that Emmi was pregnant. At the same time, he was thinking about what the heck he had done, and yet he was also happy. Jaakko had always thought that he would like to have kids and a family of his own. But not now, when he hadn't yet finished his studies, and when he was still so young! Finally when Ahti was born, Jaakko felt happy. Despite occasionally feeling unsure, Jaakko tried to take an active role as a father from the first moments. However, this was more easily said than done, because the mother of a child seemed to know so much better how everything should be done. All of Jaakko's friends were unmarried men with no children. This troubled Jaakko, because they all had a completely different life-situation. He wished he could just go out with "the boys," at least sometimes. Despite these wishes, Jaakko knew that his place was now at home, with his family. When Emmi went back to work, Jaakko decided to stay at home with his son, for a while. He felt like a real parent. (Narrative constructed from 4 interviews)

The first storyline of this narrative emphasizes the *father as a role-seeker* and draws attention to the transition in gendered conceptions of parental roles. The transition in parental roles has occupied a place in the discourse of the "new father" since it was first articulated (e.g., LaRossa, 1997). It is highlighted in the father's efforts towards nurturing and caregiving, which are usually seen as unmasculine and feminine (Doucet, 2004, p. 282). In this storyline the father is seeking his role as a parent: to be or not to be a "traditional" or a "new" father, a provider or a nurturer? Role-seeking and the transition in parental roles also appear in the narrative in the description of the negotiations about the father's role in the family. A clear example of the transition is in one father's narration about staying home with the child while the mother goes back to work.

Er, well... Let's say, it hasn't been that easy, family life. But, as day follows day, it's been much easier, and more enjoyable, too... A half a year ago, I would have chosen work instead of staying at home with her... But now, when I have to go back to work, I don't even want to. (Simo, 27 years, daughter 14 months, researcher)

One way to approach the first storyline is to analyze it as a counter-narrative to the ideology of "the primacy of the mother" (e.g., Perälä-Littunen, 2007), which can be seen

as a narrative interpretation of the ideology of domesticity (Crompton, 2006). The narrative of “the primacy of the mother” has exclusively attributed nurturing and caregiving to the mother, and has been firmly entrenched as the “one and the only” narrative of parental care. However, it seems that the storyline of the father as a role seeker questions the hegemony of the primacy of the mother by insisting that nurturing and care giving are open to men as well.

The second storyline, *the father’s challenge in engaging with a family-centered lifestyle* emphasizes the father’s efforts to find his place as a nurturer and caregiver, as a “family-man” (Coltrane, 1996). However, implementing this intention is not easy. The storyline indicates the contradictory emotions the father has felt since his wife became pregnant. Although a true intention is expressed in the man’s narrative about becoming a father someday, the narrative tone suggests that the timing was not right. Nevertheless, he assented to the mother’s desire—he became a father without fully intending it. As observed by Sevón and Huttunen (2004), speaking about “a shared decision” tends to mean that the mother has assumed the more active role in the couple’s family planning.

Previous studies have noted the influence of fathering on the man’s social activity (Palkovitz, 2002, p. 198). The second storyline also deals with these issues and highlights the challenges that a man will encounter after the child’s birth. The loss of “one’s own time” gives rise to contradictory emotions, as the father tries to negotiate his own role as a parent and as a man. Participation in the bachelor culture (“*going out with the boys*,” Kalle, 28 years, son 18 months, student) is restricted by the father’s consciousness of right and wrong. The feeling that something very important has been lost was often mentioned in this storyline.

Well ... I used to do a lot of sports, and I had other hobbies too... It’s been hard for me to let them go, for real. I still haven’t got used to it, and actually, I don’t even want to. (Kalle, 28 years, son 18 months, student)

The third storyline highlights *the mother’s role as a gatekeeper*, which is one of the most salient, and—at least to some extent—also silent, topics in the discourse of the “new father” (Dienhart & Daly, 1997; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997b). While Allen and Hawkins (1999) describe it as “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,” several scholars have argued that “the gate swings both ways” (e.g., Pruett, Arthur, & Ebling, 2007; Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf, & Szewczyk Sokolowski, 2008), implying positive facilitation for the mother and encouragement for the father in childrearing. However, the storyline represents maternal gatekeeping as an inhibiting attitude that started during the family planning stage: the man narrates that his spouse had made her own decision long ago without his fully realizing it. After childbirth, the mother “*interfered in everything I tried to do; let’s say, when I was changing diapers, she was there to tell me how to do it*” (Simo, 27 years, daughter 14 months, researcher). Fathers narrated this as a restriction on their participation in childcare and nurture.

Palkovitz (2002, p. 66) has earlier highlighted how first-time fathers narrated their fatherhood as a focal life change for them. The fourth storyline, *the father's growth into involved parenthood* dwells on the father's growth into responsible and nurturing parenthood, despite his having become a father without fully intending to. The storyline emphasizes the father's striving towards good parenting, despite the challenges he faces. The storyline highlights the moral dimension of parenting—although the father narrated how he would have liked to, for example, “*go out and have a few beers*” (Kalle, 28 years, son 18 months, student), he didn't, because “*it's (the family) the most important thing for me now, and...I've made this choice (to have a family) and I've got to stand behind it*” (Johannes, 27 years, daughter 16 months, economist). The storyline culminates in the father's inner wish to take parental leave and to stay at home and take care of his offspring.

#### *Postmodern Narrative of Fathering*

The postmodern narrative is characterized by the father's intention to engage in equally shared parenting. It is congruent with the “new father” discourse, which emphasizes a complete reversal in the “nature” of fatherhood. The narrative contains four (4) storylines: 1. *father's notable participation in family planning and preparing for fatherhood*, 2. *equally shared parenting*, 3. *satisfied couple relationship*, and 4. *nurture and care giving*. The storylines are emphasized in the following composite narrative:

Jukka had known it for a long time. Their long-term relationship had convinced him that he would like to have a child with his spouse Minna, and become a father. After they moved to a larger apartment, Jukka and Minna started to talk more and more about possibility of having a baby, and soon they found out that they were pregnant. Pregnancy was a happy time of preparing to be a parent. Jukka and Minna went to the maternity clinic, talked about the forthcoming event, and prepared their home for the newcomer. Jukka also wondered about his impending fatherhood by himself—sometimes so much he could not concentrate on the writing of his almost-ready master's thesis. When Viivi was born, Jukka understood—he was a father, now and forever. The family started their shared life in the family room of a maternity ward. When Minna was still recovering from her birthing, Jukka was able to concentrate on taking care of Viivi. After their homecoming, he saw how from now on his everyday life had changed—he used to see his friends quite often, but now he did not have much time for that anymore. His hobbies had turned into childcare and housework, too. Still, Jukka did not mind about that. This was how it should be. He had received his MA just before the child was born. Because he had no job at that moment, the decision was easy to make—he would like to stay at home taking care of Viivi. The family spent the first few months together at home, and then, after her maternity leave, Minna returned to her studies and Jukka stayed at home with Viivi. How rewarding—and sometimes tiring, too—it was! Sometimes he thought of the possibilities that working life could have offered a young graduate. Still, he was sure that it could not compare with the experiences—joys and sorrows—he had

shared with his daughter at home. His career could wait—it was time for the family, now. (Narrative constructed from 6 interviews)

The first storyline emphasizes the father’s *noteworthy role in planning the family and preparation for upcoming fatherhood*. Men’s childbearing behavior is a relatively unexplored area<sup>7</sup> (Lappegård, Rønsen & Skrede, 2011, p. 103), and in general childbearing has not earlier been seen as a major issue in a man’s life (Forste, 2002; Swanson, 1985, p. 21). Particularly in Finland, mothers are perceived to be more determined in their intentions to have children (Miettinen & Rotkirch, 2008), and more often to have “the final word” in decisions to start trying for a baby (Sevón & Huttunen, 2004). The storyline implies how, as a consequence of the father’s active role, becoming a father does not happen by “accident” or “under pressure.” Furthermore, the father narrates his having intimate conversations with his spouse, accompanying her to the maternity clinic and thinking about his impending fatherhood as important aspects of his preparation for fatherhood. Contrary to the narrative of the role-seeking father, this storyline highlights the intentional character of fatherhood—becoming a father is not something that just happened, but something that the man has intensively deliberated and contemplated. The storyline calls attention to the strong agency of the father as a parent.

The ideal of the “new father” contains the assumption of shared parenting, which especially in the Nordic countries has been linked to the ideal of gender equality (e.g., Perälä-Littunen, 2007; Vuori, 2009). The second storyline of *equally shared parenting* in turn emphasizes how parenting and parenthood are narrated as equally shared, as opposed to the narratives of the traditional and the role-seeking father. It underlines how the father perceives his participation in nurturing and care work as an equal to that of the mother. His staying at home with the child is narrated by the father as an essential part of shared parenting.

Yeah, well, I think this has been a good decision for us. I’ve been really glad about this arrangement, because he is quite a sensitive child, and... I think too that he would have been too young for day care. So... this has been good for me, good for him, and good for the whole family. Everyone has won. (Reino, 27 years, son 23 months, stay-at-home father)

The third storyline highlights *the satisfied couple relationship* as significant support of fatherhood. The connection between satisfaction in the couple relationship and father involvement has been revealed in many fatherhood studies (e.g., Allen & Daly 2007): the better the couple-relationship assessed by the father, the more engaged the father is with the care and nurturing of the child. This storyline in our narrative data implies the same phenomenon: when fathers narrate their relationship with the child’s mother as positive, they tend also to produce more involved fatherhood narratives. Fur-

<sup>7</sup> According to Lappegård, Rønsen and Skrede (2011, 103), while attention has not commonly been paid to men’s fertility behavior, the US constitutes an exception, with some recent contributions to the issue.

thermore, the involved father is also narrated as an important supporter of the mother. In conclusion, the storyline emphasizes the importance of the couple relationship in involved parenting by the father.

The fourth storyline points to the most central feature of the postmodern narrative—the father’s inner need and wish to *nurture and care* for his child. As opposed to the traditional metanarratives of fatherhood and masculinities, where nurturing was absent in fathers’ accounts, the storyline represents both nurture and care as appropriate and self-evident aspects of masculinities as they are of femininities.

The storyline is in accordance with several previous studies which have indicated nurture and care work as key factors for positive paternal involvement (e.g., Marsiglio, Day & Lamb, 2000, p. 278).

As I see it, the most important is just to be there with him... Really, what else would a one-year-old baby need? To be emotionally present, that’s the only thing that matters. (Jaska, 27 years, son 21 months, psychologist)

The storyline implies a notable change in the cultural metanarrative—the approved way of being a father is based on the man’s endogenous need to nurture and perform care work.

#### *Relationship Between the Finnish Narratives and the Metanarrative of the “New Father”*

The second research question concerned the relationship between the metanarrative of the “new father” and the narratives of Finnish first-time fathers. In Table 1, the metanarrative of the “new father”<sup>8</sup> is presented and compared with the Finnish narratives.

*The modern narrative of fathering* is located at the intersection of the metanarratives of the “traditional” and the “new father.” Although in this narrative the father appears as the breadwinner and public agent of the family, the narration about the meaning of the family implies an engaged and responsible fatherhood. The narrative approaches the characterization by Marks and Palkovitz (2004) of the “good provider”—the father who balances the roles of breadwinning and of assisting the mother in caregiving.

*The transition narrative of fathering* can be considered fragile and heterogeneous, as it contains features from several fatherhood metanarratives and typologies. The father tries to live and narrate his life in accordance with the metanarrative of the “new father,” but disengaging from the metanarrative of the traditional father proves to be difficult. The storylines identified in this narrative—such as the father’s difficulties in engaging with the requisite family-centered life-style and that of the mother’s role as a gatekeeper—differentiate this narrative from the “new father” metanarrative, while the transition in parental roles and the father’s growth into fully responsible parenthood link this narrative to the “new father” metanarrative.

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<sup>8</sup> The metanarrative is constructed on the basis of typologies and stereotypes current about the “new father.”

Table 1

*Juxtaposition of the Features of the Metanarrative of the “New Father” and the Storylines of the Modern, Transition and Postmodern Narratives of Fathering in the Transition to Fatherhood*

The metanarrative of “new father”	Modern narrative of fathering
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement</li> <li>• Engagement</li> <li>• Generativity</li> <li>• Nurture</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Shared parenting</li> <li>• “Mother-like” care giving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breadwinning</li> <li>• Gendered parental roles</li> <li>• Father as mother’s assistant</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Transition narrative of fathering</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father as a role-seeker</li> <li>• Father’s challenge in engaging with family-centered life-style</li> <li>• Mother’s role as a gatekeeper</li> <li>• Growth into involved parenthood</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Postmodern narrative of fathering</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notable participation in family planning and preparation for fatherhood</li> <li>• Equally shared parenting</li> <li>• Satisfying couple relationship</li> <li>• Nurture and care giving</li> </ul>

*The postmodern narrative of fathering* can be located mainly in the metanarrative of the “new father,” with the interesting exceptions that some storylines went further, beyond the new father ideal. Like the metanarrative, *the postmodern narrative* emphasizes the importance of shared parenting and the father’s role as a mother-like caregiver. However, in contrast to the metanarrative, the postmodern narrative was characterized by a comprehensive rejection of gendered parenting.

However, all three Finnish narratives identified here seem to engage with the “new” metanarrative by reflecting on it and by drawing a distinction between it and the narratives of the past. In all three narratives, the father can also be described as involved and engaged. According to Miller (2011, p. 3), fatherhood has a normative character, and this study implies that the metanarrative of the “new father” has acquired a normative and dominant position among the Finnish metanarratives of fatherhood. Although not all fathers narrate their fatherhood strictly according to the “new” metanarrative, they reflect it in their stories and recognize it as a dominant mode of contemporary fatherhood.

#### CONCLUSION

On the basis of our narrative analysis, three different narratives were found—the modern, the transition and the postmodern narrative of fathering. Each of the narratives contained three or four main storylines.



A pervasive characteristic of all the Finnish narratives was an undertone of family-centeredness—although with different manifestations. In the modern narrative, family-centrism appears in the father's wish to be a "family man" (Coltrane, 1996), that is, a man who spends his time mainly with his family. In the transition narrative, the father grows into fully responsible parenthood by overcoming difficulties. The postmodern narrative described a father who ignored his career for his family and acted as a stay-at-home father. The family-centered narration can be seen in light of the "familistic turn" described by Jallinoja (2006). She located an increase in familistic speech around the turn of the present century in the Finnish media. The familistic turn was also emphasized in the discourse about the intensified culture of fatherhood (e.g., Huttunen, 2006). Evidence of such a "familistic turn" was also found in the narratives of the young Finnish first-time fathers. For example, all the men narrated themselves as "family men," and emphasized the importance of "being there" (Miller, 2011, p. 54; Palkovitz, 2002, pp. 48, 57). In accordance with the family-centeredness of the fathers' narratives, shared parenting was present in each of them, although with some differences. In the modern narrative, parenthood was shared in accordance with traditional gender roles, while in the transition narrative, the parental division of labor was in flux. In the postmodern narrative, shared parenting was narrated as relatively equal parenthood, and the narrative exhibited the implicit Nordic ideal of gender-equal parenthood.

The family-centeredness observed in the present narratives prompts the question: what makes first-time fathers narrate their fatherhood in this particular way? One likely answer would be that the change in the metanarrative of masculinity (Kekäle, 2007) has allowed young Finnish men to narrate fatherhood in a more familistic and emotionally rich way. When the narration of fatherhood draws on "softer" ways of narrating masculinities, narratives of fatherhood that are more family-centered become possible. Similar interpretations have been made previously (e.g., Miller, 2001, p. 43). Another likely interpretation is that, in the process of acquiring a culturally dominant position in Finnish narratives on fatherhood, the metanarrative of the "new father" has led to a reconstruction of the cultural norms according to which fatherhood should be narrated. These norms, which include nurture, involvement and care giving, might have steered the men's narration in a more familistic direction.

Earlier studies have emphasized how having a child changes the spousal relationship (e.g., Palkovitz, 2002, p. 161). Our results also indicate that attention should be paid to the narration of the couple relationship. The couple relationship was narrated as satisfying in the narratives where fatherhood occurred in a way that the father found agreeable. In the modern and the postmodern narrative, the fathers narrated their fatherhood as fulfilling their wishes and their couple relationship as supporting their parenthood. In the transition narrative, the situation was much more complicated. The fathers producing this particular narrative reported lack of support from their spouse, and conflicts in their couple relationship caused by the partners' having different views on childcare. It seems that a positively narrated couple relationship might promote a man's fatherhood, irrespective of his view of his role as a parent. Similar results have been discovered previously (Allen & Daly, 2007, pp. 13-16).

In his study of Finnish metanarratives of fatherhood, Kekäle (2007) drew attention to their chronological character. Our study supported Kekäle’s assumption that the post-modern narrative of fatherhood, including the notion of the “new father,” has acquired a culturally dominant position in Finnish narratives on fatherhood. Our study, however, also showed the persistence of features of the modern metanarrative, such as the perception of breadwinning as primarily a paternal responsibility. On the other hand, features of the pre-modern narrative of fatherhood were not found in the present Finnish narratives. These considerations are in line with results of the family and fatherhood surveys carried out by the Family Federation of Finland (Paajanen, 2005, 2006), which have shown that contemporary Finnish fathers define themselves as an “up-to-date version of the traditional father.” This characterization applies well to the narratives produced by the fathers in our study. All three narratives highlight the difference between the past and the present; this difference is realized in small steps and stages, and thus the narratives found here can be seen as part of a continuum of fatherhood narratives. In particular, the modern narrative represents the traditional fatherhood of the 21st century. It contains the gendered differences of the earlier narratives, while also highlighting its differences from traditional metanarratives.

The present study deals with narratives by fathers who are living in the transition phase between youth and adulthood. In the men’s narration, their age did not appear as topic that would have focally affected their fatherhood. However, when these narratives are compared with those of middle-aged Finnish men (Korhonen, 1999) or first-time fathers aged 30 years on average in the early 2000s (Mykkänen, 2010), changes in the underlying metanarrative, for example, in the narration of gendered parenting and the father’s role in the family, are evident. This suggests that the narratives of fatherhood have a generational nature, with the metanarrative of the “new father” having acquired a culturally dominant position among the narratives of Finnish men living their early adulthood.

In the beginning of this article, the role of paternal leave policies in Nordic discourses (e.g., Almqvist, 2008; Lammi-Taskula, 2008) was mentioned. During the past decade, father care has been a focus of parental leave policy development in Finland, although parental leave has until now been taken mainly by mothers. As a result, more equally shared statutory parental leave rights have been under public debate for the last two years. The transition and postmodern narratives found in this study should be considered as evidence in support of the argument for extending the father’s quota in the Finnish parental leave system. Since most of the men in the study narrated their own fatherhood using expressions and storylines such as shared parenting, nurture and care giving and growth into involved parenthood, it would seem that the moment is right for preparing thorough-going revision of the Finnish parental leave legislation. For instance, in Sweden and Iceland, following legislative reform, the proportion of total parental leave taken by men grew substantially (e.g., Haataja, 2009). In addition, the storylines of men’s involved parenting can also be interpreted in terms of procreative consciousness and procreative responsibility (Marsiglio, Hutchinson & Cohan, 2001), as the reflective thinking and the highlighting of their own responsibility was frequently

present in the fathers' stories. Thus, in revising fathers' and mothers' quotas in the parental leave system, fathers' procreative responsibility should be considered as comparable with that of mothers.

This study and its results must be understood within the context of narrativity. Consistent with the narrative methodology, we have adhered strictly to narrative data in our analysis, and thus the results are not directly generalizable to the "real life that men live." That is, we cannot derive from the narrations of fatherhood how the narrators act as fathers "in real life." In our data, for example, it seems that men with higher socioeconomic status tend to produce postmodern narration more than those with lower SES. This prompts the question: does higher SES make more involved fatherhood possible or greater awareness of the postmodern metanarrative? These are considerations that have been little studied to date.

These present narratives were identified in the stories of fathers with small children, in the early stages of fatherhood. The question then arises: how will these stories continue? What happens when the novelty of fatherhood has worn off and parental leave is over? These important questions cannot be answered within the framework of this article, but are being addressed in a broader longitudinal study on the development of narratives by first-time fathers in the early years of their fatherhood currently in progress at the Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä. As recent studies suggest that in addition to a transition in fatherhood, there are transitions within fatherhood (Palkovitz & Palm, 2009), a father's first year as a parent might be a time of familiarization with the new role and a time when fatherhood is finding its way. On the narrative level, this means formulating new narratives with new storylines.

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