

Petteri Eerola

# Responsible Fatherhood

## A Narrative Approach



JYVÄSKYLÄ STUDIES IN EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL RESEARCH 520

Petteri Eerola

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A Narrative Approach

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## ABSTRACT

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Finnish summary

Diss.

Over the last three decades in Finland, men's share in child care has broadened notably. At the same, the cultural expectations of fathers and understanding of men as parents have also changed and become more care- and nurture-oriented. In this thesis, situated at the intersection of the family and gender research traditions in education and sociology, my aim is to study the narratives of responsible fatherhood produced by Finnish men in their early fatherhood years. In more detail, I analyze in what terms responsible fatherhood is conceptualized, and what gendering of responsibility men's narratives reveal. The thesis draws on narrative methodology, that is, fathers' accounts are analyzed as narratives, and the data were gathered using narrative interviews. In total, the empirical data comprises 60 interviews conducted with 44 fathers during the first three years of their fatherhood. The data analyses are described in the three peer-reviewed articles appended to the thesis.

In the men's narratives, the comprehensive engagement of fathers in caregiving from the very beginning of parenthood emerged as a major feature of responsible fatherhood. That is, nurture and hands-on care by fathers were seen as self-evident and performed on the father's initiative. In many ways, differences between fathering and mothering were not emphasized, as the narratives were close to or parallel with the cultural portrayals of "good" motherhood. Also, traditional paternal responsibilities such as breadwinning were narrated as shared parental duties in principle, though the fathers' accounts highlighted how these ideals were not always realized in everyday life. However, it seems that fathers have moved closer towards the intimate and emotional core of the family, and fatherhood has become a life domain in which men are allowed, even required, to show their emotions and act in many ways that run counter to what has traditionally been understood as masculine. Conceptually, the narratives highlighted issues such as taking a comprehensive share in nurture and care that have not previously been seen as part of responsible and involved fatherhood.

Keywords: first-time fatherhood, early fatherhood, gendered parenting, parental responsibility, men's studies, narrativity, narrative analysis

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Tampere, December 20<sup>th</sup> 2014,  
Petteri Eerola



## ORIGINAL ARTICLES

This thesis is based on the following peer-reviewed articles. In the text, the articles are referred to by their Roman numerals.

- Article I Eerola, P. & Huttunen, J. (2011). Metanarrative of the “new father” and narratives of young Finnish first-time fathers. *Fathering* 9 (3), 211–231.

*In this article, the analysis was performed by the first author, who also gathered the empirical data. The role of the second author was to comment on drafts and to support the first author in the writing process.*

- Article II Eerola, P. (2014). Nurturing, breadwinning and upbringing: paternal responsibilities by Finnish men in early fatherhood. *Community, Work & Family* 17 (3), 308–324.

- Article III Eerola, P. & Mykkänen, J. (2013). Paternal masculinities in early fatherhood: dominant and counter narratives by Finnish first-time fathers. *Journal of Family Issues*. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X13505566.

*In this article, the analysis was performed by the first author. The role of the second author was to comment on drafts and contribute to the section on narrative inquiry. The empirical data were gathered by both authors.*

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Premises of the study

In the western societies, starting from around the 1980s, significant changes in men's parenting have become increasingly evident (Sigle-Rushton, Goisis & Keizer 2012; Doucet 2012; Smart 2011; Morgan 1996). That is, involved and active caring fatherhood has, at least to some extent, become more widespread and culturally more accepted, and even required, as the norm of male parenthood (e.g. Doucet 2006; Miller 2011a). This development has been described as a profound "gender revolution" (Goldscheider, Bernhardt & Lappegård 2014), and, as more sensitive and hands-on ways of men's involvement have gained ground in the cultural conceptions of responsible fatherhood (e.g. Doucet 2006; Kekäle 2007; Ives 2014; Solomon 2014), it has become clear that the so called traditional tasks of fathering such as begetting, protecting and providing (see Coltrane 2011, 171; Parsons 1955) no longer meet the expectations and demands of contemporary male parenting. These shifts in cultural understanding have likely involved novel moral duties that have affected men's sense of their parental responsibilities, especially in child care. From a global perspective, the Nordic countries in particular have often been perceived as forerunners in men's active and caring involvement with their children (Goldscheider, Bernhardt & Lappegård 2014; Coltrane & Behnke 2013; Johansson & Klinth 2008).

This development has also occurred in Finland, one of the Nordic countries, where men's involvement in child care has notably expanded during the last two decades (Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012). In Finland, just as in the other Nordic countries, the discourses of male nurturance and men's role in the family already familiar in the public arena have also spread into the societal policy-making and academic family research domains, particularly since the millennium (Mykkänen & Aalto 2010). The most noticeable focus in all of these domains has been on early fatherhood, particularly men's role in early care. Also, although it has been stated that currently people are experiencing more transitions

in their lives than ever, becoming a parent is still probably one of the biggest life changes that most of people face. These observations constitute the premises on which this thesis has been constructed.

In this research, I analyze narratives by Finnish men during their early fatherhood. As described above, during the last decades male parenting has undergone a number of crucial transformations, which have probably also affected fathers' feelings and experiences. If so, it is reasonable to assume that these changes will be reflected in the way fathers perceive their paternal responsibilities in early fatherhood. This makes the narratives produced by contemporary Finnish men living their early fatherhood especially interesting. My aim is to expand understanding of the men's own accounts of being a father to an infant, and to analyze the cultural relations and the positions of these present-day fatherhood narratives. The thesis is based on three empirical and peer-reviewed articles, in each of which the emphasis, and thus the context, of the men's narratives is different. In the first article, I analyze the fathers' accounts in relation to the concept of the "new father", and in the second one, I focus on how they narrate their paternal responsibilities. The third article analyzes the narratives from the perspective of gender. The articles are based on three different interview data sets comprising a total of 60 interviews with 44 fathers conducted during the first three years of their fatherhood. The articles are appended to this dissertation.

In discipline, this thesis is situated at the intersection of education and sociology, and draws on the research traditions of both disciplines in relation to the family and gender. First, it continues the Finnish tradition of educational research, in particular that originating at the University of Jyväskylä, in which issues concerning upbringing, family life, parenthood and childhood have been studied (e.g. Huttunen 1990; Bök 2001; Katvala 2001; Kemppainen 2001; Perälä-Littunen 2004; Valkonen 2006; Linnavuori 2007; Sevón 2009; Mykkänen 2010; Murtorinne-Lahtinen 2011; Tuovinen 2014). This "Jyväskylä School" has focused on research in which the encounter between personal experience and cultural understanding has been studied through personal accounts and interview-based narratives. The thesis also shares interests and engages with the more recent and geographically more diverse developments within Finnish educational research, where the focus has been on gender (e.g. Kelhä 2009; Ojala 2010; Manninen 2010; Huuki 2010). Second, sociologically and more globally, it connects with the heterogeneous tradition in which personal lives, and especially family issues, are discussed through the lens of gender (Doucet 2006; Morgan 20011; Jokinen 2014). Within and at the edges of this by no means uniform tradition, gendered parenting and men's paternal practices, through their self-reported experiences and narratives of their own fatherhood, have been studied relatively broadly during recent years by several scholars (e.g. Doucet 2006; Miller 2011a; Dermott 2008). In the field of fatherhood research, this sociological approach supplies the key framework for the study. However, the thesis also engages with more psychologically oriented studies focusing on early fatherhood as a major developmental transition in a man's life (e.g. Palkovitz & Palm

2009, 3; Palkovitz 2002), and it is also related to the research on the issues of fatherhood, family policies and work carried out in the Nordic countries (e.g. Haas & Hwang 2009; Vuori 2009; Almqvist 2008; Klinth 2008; Pajumets 2010). It also continues the Finnish tradition of fatherhood research that has been quite lively throughout the 2000s (Korhonen 1999; Huttunen 2001; Kokkonen 2003; Aalto & Kolehmainen 2004; Kekäle 2007; Mykkänen 2010; Pirskanen 2011; Aalto 2012; Eerola & Mykkänen 2014).

The epistemological and methodological premises of the study are based on narrativity, as I have applied narrative methods to understand paternal responsibility as seen by first-time fathers. Narrative methods occupy a recognized role in the field of social sciences, probably because of their particular benefits in seeking to understand people's lives and experiences. Among the studies using a narrative approach, intimate topics, such as life stories and life changes, have been especially popular (e.g. Hänninen 2000; Riessman 2003), as studying such topics through narratives makes it possible to capture the meanings people give to the most sensitive experiences in their lives (Hänninen 2004, 76). These issues, which have led to narrative approaches to fatherhood in previous studies as well (e.g. Mykkänen 2010; Doucet 2006), are the main reasons behind the present decision to lean on narrative epistemology and to apply narrative methods in this thesis.

Last but not least, an issue that needs to be mentioned before embarking further on this thesis concerns my own position with respect to the topic of interest, which is that I, too, am a father. At the beginning of the thesis process, I was a first-time father at around the same age as my interviewees. I have since, during the process, fathered more children, just like most of my interviewees. Also, like the fathers studied here, I share a couple relationship with the mother of my children, as well as a relatively high education and somewhat middle-class lifestyle. Together, these personal facts emphasize my insider position in relation to my data and to the topic of my thesis. Although being an insider in the research one is engaged on is quite common in the social sciences, it should be reflected on by the researcher, as it is something that can hardly not affect the whole research process. I shall ponder these questions further at the end of the thesis (see section 5.4. Reflections on the research process).

## 1.2 Aim and structure of the thesis

This thesis is the outcome of a process in which narratives and accounts on fatherhood by Finnish first-time fathers have been analyzed and reported in three empirical articles. The aims of thesis, which have further clarified during the process, are:

1. In what terms is responsible fatherhood conceptualized in men's narratives?
2. What gendering of responsibility do men's narratives reveal?

Answers to both these questions are given in all three empirical articles. However, as the first article (I) contributes to the results on a more general level, question 1 is addressed, in particular, in the second article (II) and question 2 in the third article (III). The research questions asked in the original articles are presented in Table 1.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. In chapter 2, I introduce the reader to the background and the context of the thesis. The chapter is divided into three sections, in the first of which I describe fatherhood in the Finnish context. In the second section, I discuss the changing concepts of fatherhood, and in the third section the issue of gendered parental responsibilities. Chapter 3 deals with the narrative research process. First, I give a brief introduction to the narrative methodology, after which I present the empirical interview data analyzed in the articles. Then, I describe the analyses conducted in the original publications. In chapter 4, I summarize the main findings of each of the articles. Chapter 5 is divided into six sections. In the first, I give answers to the research questions stated above. I then discuss the readings of the fathers' narratives as indicators of contemporary Finnish fatherhood. Next, I highlight some of the practical implications of the study, and reflect on the research process. After a discussion of ethical issues, I offer some suggestions for future research. The original empirical articles are given as appendices at the end of this thesis.

TABLE 1 Research questions addressed in the original articles

	Title of original paper	Original research questions
Article I	Metanarrative of the "new father" and narratives of young Finnish first-time fathers	What narratives and the storylines do young Finnish first-time fathers narrate about their fatherhood?  What similarities and connections emerge between the narratives of Finnish first-time fathers and the metanarrative of the new father?
Article II	Nurturing, breadwinning and upbringing: Paternal responsibilities by Finnish men in early fatherhood	What duties and practices do Finnish fathers narrate as paternal responsibilities in their early fatherhood?
Article III	Paternal masculinities in early fatherhood: dominant and counter narratives by Finnish first-time fathers	What are the dominant and possible counter-narratives of paternal masculinity that Finnish first-time fathers narrate regarding their early fatherhood?



## **2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE THESIS**

### **2.1 Early fatherhood in Finland**

#### **2.1.1 Father-friendly culture**

Finland is one of the Nordic countries, a group commonly cited as models of gender-equal parenting and shared parenthood and as pioneers in gender-equal family policies (Coltrane & Behnke 2013, 421; Vuori 2009; Almqvist 2008; Goldscheider, Bernhardt & Lappegård 2014; Wall 2014). Although the Nordic countries are not an unambiguous and uniform whole, as differences can be found in e.g. family policies, work/family balancing and attitudes towards gender equality, when examined from a more global point-of-view, they clearly show many resemblances in parenting practices and family life in general. Like its Nordic fellows, Finland is numbered among the most equal countries in the EU (European Institute for Gender Equality 2013) and in the world. For example, in 2013 Finland was ranked as the world's second best country in closing the gender gap in several life domains (World Economic Forum 2013). This situation is the outcome of a long process, as gender equality has been a core issue in Finnish social and family policies since the 1960s onwards (Forsberg 2005). In today's families, this is visible in men's participation in child care, women's participation in the outside-the-home work force and the widespread adoption of the two-breadwinner model (e.g. Forsberg 2005). For example, owing to the dual earner model, the institution of housewife has never really existed on a large scale in Finland; instead, for the past few decades, there has been an orientation towards more or less shared parenting and men's participation in child care.

In Finland, as elsewhere in the Nordic countries, the discourses of shared caring are strong (e.g. Lundqvist 2012, 35), and in light of the prevailing cultural atmosphere and of recent trends, Finnish culture and society can be understood as relatively father-friendly. Within the last few decades, for example, parental policies have been developed in accordance with the principle of gender equali-

ty, to increase men's participation in the domestic domain and to promote women's standing in working life. Moreover, support targeted to prospective fathers via training courses and sessions provided by institutional prenatal and child care clinics have become a major goal of Finnish family policies (e.g. Rantalaiho 2003; Tiitinen 2015). Fatherhood has also been a favorite topic of parental experts and family specialists, particularly during the last two decades (Vuori 2009, 50). The perspective adopted has usually been that the father makes a difference in a child's development and that the father should participate in child care from the very onset of parenthood. In addition, the mass media have played a notable role in furthering a father-friendly culture in Finland. For the last couple of decades, images of caring fathers with their babies have been abundant in mainstream advertising, weekly magazines and, more recently, in social media.

The prevalence of a father-friendly culture can also be observed in fathers' own accounts of their fatherhood, which, probably influenced by the cultural atmosphere, have become more care- and nurture-oriented (e.g. Mykkänen 2010; Paajanen 2006; Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012). Men's accounts and attitudes were studied in a family survey commissioned by the Family Federation of Finland. The survey showed that over 90% of fathers with children aged 3 or under reported that it is crucially important that a father engages in child care from the very beginning of parenthood (Paajanen 2006). The survey also illustrated how over 70% of men reported that taking immediate parental leave after childbirth is an integral part of good fatherhood, whereas less than 30% were of the view that breadwinning belongs mainly to the paternal and care work to the maternal domain. The survey also found that working fathers participated significantly in child care when at home, and that most fathers definitely wanted to spend one-to-one time with their infants, without the mother, to acquire parental skills and to promote their father-child relationship. As these results suggest, men's share in infant nurture, beginning with early care, has become a cultural norm that men interpret as one of the key features of "good" fatherhood (Paajanen 2006). However, educational, socio-economic and regional (cities vs. sparsely inhabited areas) factors have been found to contribute to differences between men in how they view fatherhood and their roles as fathers (e.g. Paajanen 2006; Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012), with young and highly educated city-dwelling fathers in the vanguard of the shifting practices of male parenting. Altogether, these observations suggest that the present-day Finnish fatherhood culture is in many respects in line with the idea of the "new father", which emphasizes the importance of men's share in nurture and care (e.g. LaRossa 1988; LaRossa 1997; Marks & Palkovitz 2004; Hawkins & Dollahite 1997; Pruett 1987; Doherty, Kouneski & Erikson 1998).

While the discourses on and interest shown in fatherhood have covered a broad field, one topic has tended to dominate, especially over the last ten years: men's share of family leaves. In Finland, paid paternity leave became a legal right in 1977 and gender neutral parental leave in 1980. Both have since been regularly updated and improved (Miettinen 2012). Currently, pay-compensated

leave aimed at supporting the early care of an infant comprises paternal leave, maternal leave, parental leave and a home-care allowance. Discussion has recently arisen in the public arena on the question of whether, and if so to what extent, fathers and mothers should share the right to stay-at-home periods in the child's infancy. Generally, attitudes towards extending the share of men have been positive, providing this is not done at the expense of maternal leaves. Paternal leaves were last increased in 2013. Since then, paid paternal leave has been 9 weeks (of which a maximum of 3 weeks can be taken while the mother is simultaneously on maternal or parental leave), paid maternal leave 18 weeks, and negotiable parental leave (applies to mothers and fathers) 26 weeks, after which a home care allowance is paid for up to 3 years to the parent who stays at home to take care of the child(ren) (see Salmi 2012; Salmi & Lammi-Taskula 2013). To date, the home care allowance has been paid to one or other parent; however, in autumn 2013 the Finnish government decided that in the near future it will be split fifty-fifty between both parents, in order to increase men's share in home care and to promote women's status in working outside the home. In addition to these early care leaves, Finnish family policies include other paid benefits e.g. short-term leave to take care of a sick child under age 10 years at home and shorter working hours for the parents of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders, all of which are gender-neutral. Thus, at the level of official family policies, men are expected, or at least enabled, to undertake parental duties and practices to the same extent as mothers.

### 2.1.2 Fatherhood in daily practice

In light of the above, the Finnish culture of fatherhood can be described as father friendly in many respects. Its outcomes on daily fathering practices, however, are not unambiguous. For example, although men's share in child care has increased notably since the 1980s, and the gap between fathers and mothers has narrowed substantially (Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012), some important gendered differences in male and female parenting continue to exist.

To start on a positive note, probably in part due to the father-friendly and equality-based atmosphere prevalent in Finland, the amount of time spent by men on care work for children under age 6 years has increased by over 60% during the last two decades, from 52 minutes in the late 1980s to 83 minutes in 2010 (Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012). While mothers continued to perform a greater share of child care, also in families with two working parents, men's share in all child care-related activities has significantly increased, as in 2010 men performed over 40 % of all child care work, meaning that the share of mothers had fallen to less than 60%. According these time-use statistics, there were no gendered differences across different forms of care, as men took an equal share in both hands-on care and indirect care. These statistics demonstrate that Finnish men, along with their Nordic colleagues, are among the most care-sharing fathers in Europe (see also Jokinen & Kuronen 2011, 34). According to the same study, other housework and domestic duties were also shared to much the same extent (see also Holter 2014, 533). In parallel with the fathers' accounts

described in the previous section, differences were also perceived their occupational and socioeconomic background, as fathers in white-collar occupations spend notably more time on care and housework and share much more, for example, the basic care of children and domestic duties than those in blue-collar occupations (Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012).

Recent studies have shown that Finnish fathers engage in a wide range of different kinds of activities and practices with their children (Paajanen 2006; Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012; Halme 2009). According to a family survey (Paajanen 2006), almost all fathers took part in such daily care work as feeding, clothing and putting a child to bed. Whereas one-half of the fathers participated in daily care equally with the mothers, the other half did so to a lesser extent than the mothers. This demonstrates the broad engagement of Finnish fathers in care work, as only very small percentage of the fathers surveyed did not participate at all in the daily child care. The fathers' relationships with their children were also perceived as intimate and psychologically close, as almost all the fathers reported showing their love and care of their children by nurturing, cherishing and cuddling them on a daily basis. In addition to direct care, the fathers' stressed playing, reading and engaging in outdoor activities with their children, as well as participating in their hobbies and taking them to and from day care. In contrast to the "traditional" understanding of the paternal role (see Parsons 1955), most of the fathers, while at the same time emphasizing their role in childrearing and upbringing, especially in terms of inculcating values and morals, did not see the father's role as clearly gender-specific (Paajanen 2006).

Despite the fathers' relatively broad commitment to care work, gendered differences and imbalance in parental responsibilities were rather evident in some areas. Although both parents had share in all the parental duties, the mother's responsibility was often broader, including e.g. cooking and buying new clothes for the children, whereas fathers engaged more in tasks such as playing with the child and spending time together outside the home. In some areas, the father's share was significantly low, with mothers having responsibility for e.g. taking children to the doctor, staying at home and taking time off from the work to look after a sick child, as well as filling in official documents such as day care applications and children's personal data forms (Paajanen 2006).

However, the most gendered feature of early parental practices was the rareness among men of stay-at-home periods. Despite the fact that in contemporary Finland parental leaves of several months have become more frequent among men, female dominance in the take up of leaves is highly evident. In 2012, 84 % of all fathers took paternal leave after the birth of their child. The paternal leaves taken were mainly three weeks or less in duration, this being the maximum entitlement immediately after childbirth that can be taken simultaneously with maternal leave. Only 32% of fathers continued on paternal leave after the mother's formal period of leave had ended (Social Insurance Institution 2013; Salmi & Lammi-Taskula 2013). Men's share of parental leave days was only 9%, and was even less in leave supported by the home care allowance,

even though these are gender-neutral in nature (Social Insurance Institution 2013; Salmi & Lammi-Taskula 2013). A correlation has been observed between a father's take-up of parental leave and his educational level and SES (Takala 2005, Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012), as higher education and working in a health care occupation or doing white-collar work correlated with the taking of more and longer paternal leaves, whereas lower education and self-employment in an industrial context were linked with a lower rate of leave-taking (Takala 2005). Although mothers' higher take-up of leaves is quite often justified for family economic reasons, it seems that this decision is made more often on the basis of tradition, parents' understanding of parental roles, and, quite interestingly, mothers' wishes (e.g. Lammi-Taskula & Salmi 2014).

Despite Finland's father-friendly culture with its stress on equality, when leave is not father-or mother-specific it tends primarily to be taken by mothers (Lammi-Taskula 2012), and while in a growing number of families the question of who takes care of the children at home may be thoroughly discussed, in a markedly high proportion of the families gender-neutral leaves are interpreted as "mother's leave". Regardless of the fathers' broad participation in child care outside their working hours, the problem remains that the asymmetrical sharing of leaves affects the responsibilities of the two parents for a period far beyond the duration of the leave itself. That is, if the mother takes all the gender-neutral leaves, she is also quite likely to carry a broader share of child care afterwards, whereas if both the parents have had stay-at-home periods, it seems reasonable to assume that parental responsibilities will be more fairly shared afterwards as well (see Almqvist & Duvander 2014).

## 2.2 Changing concepts on fatherhood

According to a generally accepted view in current sociology, peoples' lifestyles and life-stories have become increasingly individualized (e.g. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Ritzer 2008). This might be thought to imply, in the context of fatherhood, that the cultural concepts of fatherhood would also have become more blurred and unclear; however, this is not the case, at least not on the surface. According to Aalto (2012; 2006), a strong cultural belief prevalent in western societies is that there has been a transition from unambiguous "traditional", remote and breadwinning-oriented fatherhood to an obvious "new", emotionally close and caring fatherhood. Although this belief in the existence of a clear transition is oversimplified and tells only one side of the story, as fatherhood is a multidimensional issue with many simultaneous transformations that cannot be reduced to a single one-way development (Kolehmainen & Aalto 2004), it also indicates the changes in the cultural understanding and practices of fatherhood that have appeared on the general level in western societies during the last few decades.

This issue is discussed by Kekäle (2007) in connection with his theory on the change in the cultural narratives and understanding of fatherhood. Drawing

on heterogeneous sociological theories of modernization (e.g. Ritzer 2008; Jalilinoja 1991), he presents three diverse, time-, locality- and culture- specific fatherhood narratives – the pre-modern, modern and postmodern narratives – to show how our cultural understanding of fatherhood has drastically changed. The pre-modern narrative, which is attached to the fatherhood of the past (Aalto 2006; Griswold 1993), describes fundamentally divergent gendered parental roles and responsibilities: the father is described as an authoritarian patriarch and the mother as the primary caregiver. This distribution of parental roles accords with the well-known classification in which women are seen as domestic beings and men as public beings (Dienhart & Daly 1997, 150; Rosaldo 1974, 23). In the modern narrative, the father is described as a distant breadwinner, the roles of the mother and father continuing to diverge. Whereas the pre-modern and modern narratives share some focal characteristics and together can be seen as “traditional”, the postmodern narrative is essentially different from them, as it is characterized by shared parenting and a paternal role that is more one of a “mother-like” caregiver. According to Kekäle (2007), the three narratives are chronological, with the postmodern narrative currently somewhat in the ascendant in contemporary Finland. However, he notes that these three narratives also coexist, as understandings of fatherhood differ in Finland according to such factors as age, class, education and gender, in the same way as in western societies in general.

The fatherhood described by the postmodern narrative is also discussed in the concept of the “new father” (LaRossa 1988; LaRossa 1997; Marks & Palkovitz 2004; McGill 2014), which has received broad attention in fatherhood scholarship since the 1980s. As in the postmodern narrative, the concept indicates how “traditional” and gendered parental roles have fundamentally changed, i.e. the “new father” is assumed, for example, to be loving, caring and capable of “mother-like” nurture, and to participate in early care and take comprehensive responsibility for the child, untrammelled by gender. During recent years, the idea of the “new father”, which includes characteristics that have traditionally been understood as belonging to “mothers-only” (Johansson 2011), has been variously termed the generative father (Hawkins & Dollahite 1997), the nurturing father (Pruett 1987; also Marsiglio & Roy 2012), the responsible father (Doherty, Kouneski & Erikson 1998) and the positively involved father (Pleck 1997). According to Huttunen (2006), all these conceptualizations suggest an intensifying culture of fatherhood, described also in the postmodern narrative (Kekäle 2007), which can be identified in Finland and other Nordic and western societies.

However, the cultural narratives and concepts of fatherhood are dependent on social context and reality, i.e. culture, place and time (see Marsiglio 1995 3; Kekäle 2007). That is, our understanding of fatherhood is fundamentally bound to our understanding of “man” as a gender category. What it means culturally to be male has been studied in the social sciences under the heading of masculinity since the mid-1970s (Coltrane 1994, 41), and addresses the ideas and characteristics attached to men in social interaction (Connell 2005), the cul-



tural conventions appropriate for men (Pease 1999) and men's practices (Hearn 1996, 214). The cultural concepts of masculinity are also strongly context-bound, and in the last few decades, understanding of what constitutes a suitable and appropriate masculinity has varied broadly. Thus, according to Kekäle (2007), it is the change in the cultural understanding of masculinity that has enabled the transformation of fatherhood narratives: whereas the "traditional" understanding of masculinity rests on an essentially binary conception of masculinity and femininity, contemporary concepts are based on more gender-neutral and equal notions. Without this change in the concept of masculinity, the postmodern narratives of "new" and nurturing fathers would probably not exist.

### 2.3 Gendered parental responsibilities

The concept of *parental responsibility* has been utilized to describe anything from daily parental duties and taking care of the child's everyday needs to an all-encompassing commitment to care for the life of the child as a totality (Böök & Perälä-Littunen 2008). In cultural stereotypes, in particular, men's and women's responsibilities as parents have traditionally been understood as divergent. However, as cultural understanding on male and female parenting has changed, so too have the duties and responsibilities that are counted as belonging to the paternal and maternal domains. Nevertheless, although gender equality on a more general level has expanded and fathers have taken a greater share in family practices during recent decades, these responsibilities continue to be gendered in many ways in Finland, as they are throughout the western world (Sevón 2012; Morgan 2011, 45; Beck-Gernsheim 2000, 130; Doucet 2006; Miller 2011a; Evertsson 2014; Weinshenker 2015; Cooklin et al. 2014; Creighton et al. 2014). The gendered character of paternal responsibilities can be observed in two different ways. First, according to the statistics and published research, men's duties and practices as a parent usually differ from those of mothers. Second, the concepts used to describe men's responsibilities are also gendered, as they assume that male and female parental responsibilities are essentially different. In this section I address both of these issues, starting with the latter.

Since the 1980s, in the scholarship on fatherhood, men's parental responsibilities have been studied through the concept of *father involvement* (Lamb, Pleck Charnov & Levine 1987; Pleck, Lamb & Levine 1985). The concept has been used to emphasize the extent of a man's commitment to his fatherhood and to portray the father's involvement with his child and parenthood through the components of engagement, accessibility and responsibility. While engagement refers to the father's participation in hands-on care work and his physical and psychological presence, and accessibility to the father being available for direct interaction with the child, responsibility refers to ensuring that the child is taken care of and providing resources for the child. Thus, in this conceptualization, responsibility is subordinate to general-level involvement and parallel with the components of interaction and accessibility. However, the sociologist

Andrea Doucet (2009, 84) has suggested that responsibility should rather be considered as a pervasive feature of involvement, as interaction and accessibility also have a dimension of responsibility. The conceptualization, although frequently used in research to date, has been also criticized for its narrowness and inability to account for the multifarious ways in which men involve themselves with their children (e.g. Palkovitz 1997; Pleck 2010).

Most of this criticism, however, takes no account of the fact that the concept itself, or more exactly the ways that it has been operationalized and conceptualized, is gendered. That is, responsible fatherhood is studied using a different scale and on different premises from those generally applied to responsible motherhood. For example, it forgets characterizations such as “caring” or “loving”, which are usually attributed to motherhood, although there is no reason why they should not also be understood as features of responsible fatherhood. Probably the closest attempt to examine men’s responsibilities without drawing on gendered premises is by Doucet (2006; 2009), who has emphasized paternal responsibilities in child care by applying the cultural definitions of maternal demands (see Ruddick 1995). Doucet’s classification of responsibilities is threefold, comprising emotional, community and moral responsibilities. By emotional responsibility, she refers to the preservative and protective care that is culturally generally attached to motherhood, but which contemporary fathers in western societies commonly perform by nurturing and doing care work (see Dienhart 1998; Doucet 2009). By community responsibility, she refers to community-based and inter-institutional responsibilities, i.e. facilitating children’s growth outside the domestic sphere, and by moral responsibility she refers to cultural conceptions of parental responsibilities, i.e., how they should act and operate as parents (Doucet 2009).

Doucet’s conceptualization, which complies with Morgan’s (1996, 97-98) distinction between *caring about* as having emotional meanings and other “higher level” care-related content and *caring for* as actual care work and practices, makes it possible to observe male and female parental responsibilities using equivalent concepts; however, this means that it mainly lacks perceptions of extra-domestic parental responsibilities, i.e. breadwinning. If a comprehensive conceptualization of parental responsibilities is desired, it needs also to acknowledge the breadwinning-dimension of parenting. While it has been suggested that economic providing can be understood as psychological involvement with both the child and family (Dienhart 1998) and should be considered as a form of involvement that strengthens the emotional bond between parent and child (Christiansen & Palkovitz 2001), this has been considered only in respect of fathers, although it is just as nurturing and caregiving and should be considered the equal responsibility of both parents.

Recent studies on parenting in early parenthood draw attention to the gendered character of duties and responsibilities, as mothers commonly have the upper hand in “hands-on” parenthood and taking care of the home and infants’ indispensable needs and fathers in breadwinning (Miller 2011a; Morgan 2011, 45; Craig & Mullan 2010; Evertsson 2014). However, the gendered charac-



ter of parenting is already evident long before the actual birth of the child. For example, although men's childbearing behavior is a relatively unexplored area (Lappegård, Rønsen & Skrede 2011, 103), mothers-to-be seem commonly to have more decision-making power when couples are negotiating the having of children (Miettinen & Rotkirch 2008; Sevón & Huttunen 2004; see also Bailey 2014). This disparity continues after childbirth, when comprehensive commitment to nurture work and the role of primary care giver becomes automatically assigned to the mother, while the changes in men's lives are often less dramatic.

This is especially true of western countries such as United States, where father-friendly parental policies do not exist, but is also evident in the Nordic countries where, despite a father-friendly culture, fathers continue to be at greater liberty to decide the terms of their engagement and participation (Miller 2011b, 1096), take parental leave less often (Brandth 2012, Lammi-Taskula 2006; Haataja 2009; Forsberg 2005) and work significantly more hours outside the home than mothers (Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012, 34), all of which tend to stress the mother's primacy in infant nurturing and care giving and the father as economic provider and mother's assistant in care giving. As children grow out of the infancy, this usually lead to a situation in which men help their wives by taking a share in child care and household work, yet remain subordinate to their spouses, who continue to make sure that everything is under control (Coltrane 1996).

This aspect of the division of parental responsibility is also discussed in the Canadian study by the sociologist Bonnie Fox (2009). According to Fox, in early parenthood both men and women describe their parental responsibilities in similar ways and their domestic duties as equally shared, but yet quite soon after the initial stages, most couples become more conventional with respect to who does what, i.e. women take on the greater proportion of child and household care while men concentrate on the provider role, becoming the mother's assistant and the baby's playmate (Fox 2009, 293; see also Oláh, Richter & Kotowska 2014). This development underlines how parental responsibilities have a relational character, as mothering practices shape fathering practices in families, and vice versa (Dermott 2008, 77; Doucet 2012, 298), and how, according to Fox, (2009, 6), parenthood in itself creates and reproduces gendered practices. While it would be to overstate the case by claiming that the mother's conceptions of care-sharing define the limits of the father's involvement, it is definitely one of the most important factors affecting men's understanding of their possibilities as fathers. That is, if, for example, a mother has a strongly rooted ideology of maternal primacy in child care, this will most likely also affect the father's understanding of his role as a parent. In her study, Fox found that among first-time parents this led quite often to a situation where the mother "protected" her spouse from the disruptions of infant life, restricting the father's hands-on involvement with the child and narrowing his possibilities to achieve parental skills (Fox 2009, 306). The term maternal gatekeeping has been used to characterize such a situation where a mother's (usually unintentional) attitudes and practices, based on a cultural understanding of good motherhood, have the ef-

fect of inhibiting men's equal learning of parental caring skills (Allen & Hawkins 1999; Adamsons & Pasley 2013). Gatekeeping can also be considered to be institutional, as maternity and child welfare clinics and parental policies tend to charge mothers with more profound parental responsibilities than fathers, whose responsibilities and involvement are perceived rather as a private choice within the family. However, gatekeeping can also be practiced by fathers themselves in cases where their views on male nurturance and capability to child care are overly restricted (Dolan 2013; Doucet 2012).

To conclude, parental practices and responsibilities in the early years of parenthood have retained their gendered character and the family continues to be a gendered institution in which relationships and practices are profoundly gendered in multiple ways (Doucet 2009; Miller 2011a; Morgan 1996). Although early parenthood is not a gender-equal phenomenon in all respects due to the physical facts of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding, they should not be understood as barriers to gender-equal parenting in other ways. According to Coltrane (2011, 186), "maternal thinking" (see Ruddick 1995) and the ability to respond to the infant's needs can be achieved just as sensitively by the father as the mother, providing the father has the same degree of investment in hands-on parenthood from the very beginning. It seems, as implied by the statistic on Finnish fathers (above on p. 17) and the recent scholarship on fathers in the Nordic countries and western world generally, that men and their spouses have started to acknowledge this, as fathers have become more involved and "hands-on" with their children over the past few decades (see Smart 2011).

## 3 NARRATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

### 3.1 Methodology

This thesis draws on narrative epistemology, and applies narrative methods in which narratives are understood as constructors, mediators and reproducers of personal meanings and cultural conceptions. Since the expansion of divergent narrative approaches, i.e. the “narrative turn”, in qualitative research in the late 1980s, narrative methods have become widely adopted in several branches of the social sciences (e.g. Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou 2008, 1; Riessman 2003; Loseke 2007; Hänninen 2000; Brannen 2013). Instead of referring to any one approach in particular, the umbrella term narrative methods refers to a mixed bundle of approaches in which research subjects are studied as narratives, or understood within the context of narrativity. The basic premise of narrativity is that telling is an innate and familiar way for people to produce meanings and indicate their perceptions of the world. Thus, narrative methods are applied to gain a better understanding of how people narrate their lives, and, because narratives have a socially organized character, how their narratives are connected to the wider social context (Somers 1994; Sevón 2012; Eronen 2012; Plummer 2001, 186; Hatch & Wisniewski 1995; Ewick & Silbey 1995, 206).

In this research, using narrative methodology, my aim has been to produce knowledge on men’s subjective accounts and cultural conceptions. While it is not possible to draw direct conclusions on lived reality from narratives, narratives can nevertheless give us insights on how things are spoken, experienced and lived through by individuals. Narrativity appears in many different ways in research; in this thesis, it forms a flexible framework, appearing in different ways in the different phases of the research process. Three main methodological issues need to be considered in the context of this thesis: 1) the relations between personal and cultural narratives, 2) the role of narrativity in the analysis and 3) the intimate character of the research topic. At the end of this section I also briefly present the narrative concepts applied in the original articles.

First, as narratives can be located on both a cultural and personal level, they can be broad or narrow in scope, and explicitly told or inner and protected. Here, my interest is in both levels, i.e. the narratives told by fathers and the cultural narratives currently circulating on what constitutes responsible fatherhood. Thus, my purpose is not to analyze, e.g., men's "inner narratives" or interpret what lies behind them, but analyze them within the existing cultural framework. I understand narratives as social constructions, in which personal meanings, experiences and feelings are discussed in relation to external and cultural expectations and norms. This reading shares common ground with the well-known conceptualization formulated by the narratologist H. Porter Abbott (2009), according to whom narratives are representations of events that consist of a story (what has happened) expressed in the form of narrative discourse (how it is told). That is, fathers produce narratives which are based on their own experiences, but negotiated in relation to cultural understandings of "good" and favorable fatherhood.

The relations between personal and cultural narratives have also been broadly discussed in earlier research. Since social and cultural norms and habits affect the narratives that people produce, narratives have been described as "social acts" (Ewick & Silbey 1995, 197) that are always timely and situationally produced in a particular social context. As already argued, a variety of narrative alternatives are available for telling in the "cultural stock of stories" (Hänninen 2004; Ewivk & Silbey), although some are more culturally established than others (e.g. Ewick & Silbey 1995; Sommers 1994; Bamberg & Andrews, 2004). These narratives, described e.g. as hegemonic, dominant or master narratives, might be "common knowledge" for a large number of individuals over a wide geographical area, or vice versa, they might be local and occupy a hegemonic position for a few people only. They can also be used as a tool for making sense of one's own life, and for narrating one's life to others (Hänninen 2000). In present-day Finland, according to fatherhood researchers Jari Kekäle (2007) and Ilana Aalto (2012) (see section 2.2. Changing concepts on fatherhood), among the culturally favored fatherhood narratives, those describing fathers as nurturing and attentive, if not to the same degree as mothers, but certainly in contrast to the fathers of previous generations, have been dominant. On this view, counter-narratives, such as "father as breadwinner" have had significantly reduced, and even minor, status (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004; Andrews, 2004). On the other hand, however, the drawing of such a clear distinction between dominant and counter-narratives on the societal level can be also questioned, as in post-modern sociological theory, contemporary narratives have been described as "smallish" and "localized" (Ritzer 2008, 618), and thus it is possible that different narratives of fatherhood are dominant in different social and cultural groups, e.g. highly educated white-collar city-dwellers compared to lower educated blue-collar workers in a non-metropolitan environment.

Second, I view the accounts given by men in interviews as narratives, but equally, I construct narratives from the men's accounts and on this basis sketch the outlines for cultural understanding of responsible fatherhood. Thus, I have

applied two main narrative approaches, an analysis of narratives and a narrative analysis (Polkinghorne 1995, 12). According to Polkinghorne (1995, 5), whereas in the former approach the researcher gathers and examines narratives as data and produces classifications and typologies, in the latter, the data are analyzed as narratives and the researcher produces narratives as outcomes. For example, I gathered the data by applying a narrative interview method (see section 3.2. Interview data), and analyzed the key characteristics of men's paternal responsibilities (II), but also constructed condensed narratives from their accounts (I; III).

Third, I chose narrativity as the framework of this thesis on account of the opportunities it offers for getting close to the feelings, experiences and private accounts of fathers. This perspective guided the gathering of the interview data (see section 3.2. Interview data), but was also a general precept when analyzing the fathers' accounts. Through narratives, individuals are able to construct their lifespan as a timeline (Frank 2002), normalize and "naturalize" the experiences and events in their lives (Abbott 2009), and create coherence by linking sporadic events into meaningful wholes (Loseke 2007, 672; Polkinghorne 1991). Thus, in the same way as in this thesis on men's personal narratives, narrative approaches have been commonly applied in studies analyzing personal, sensitive and intimate issues, such as life stories and life changes (e.g. Hänninen 2000; Riessman 2003; Hyden 2008). According to the social scientist Vilma Hänninen (2004, 76), for example, studying life changes through narratives enables us to capture the meanings people give to the most sensitive experiences in their lives. As becoming a father and early fatherhood can be considered a personal and intimate experience and a concrete life change for the majority of fathers, analyzing men's accounts in a narrative framework enables the researcher to capture the meanings, wishes and expectations that men have towards their fatherhood and new situation in life.

In each original article, different narrative concepts were utilized depending on the aim and the focus of the research. Thus, the concepts applied are clarified more in detail in the original articles; however, for a brief introduction, see Table 2.

TABLE 2 Narrative concepts applied in the original articles

Narrative (I; II; III)	Representation of an event or process that consists of a story (what has happened) expressed through narrative discourse (how it is told); narratives have a socially organized character and they construct, mediate and reproduce personal meanings and cultural conceptions <i>e.g. transition narrative of fathering</i>
Metanarrative (I)	Widely spread, frequently told and rarely questioned narrative that appears as "common knowledge" or as "well known truth" in a society <i>e.g. metanarrative of the "new father"</i>
Dominant narrative (III)	A narrative with culturally dominant status, either for large number of individuals globally or for few people only locally <i>e.g. "decent father" as a dominant narrative of paternal masculinity</i>
Counter narrative (III)	A narrative distinct from, but subordinate to, a dominant narrative in the hierarchy of culturally established narratives <i>e.g. "masculine father" as culturally subordinate counter narrative in relation to "decent father"</i>
Storyline (I)	A key feature or plot in a narrative <i>e.g. breadwinning as one of the storylines in the modern narrative of fathering</i>
Narrative sphere (II)	A sphere or theme that attracts narrative attention <i>e.g. nurturing as sphere that has significantly attracted attention in the narratives on paternal responsibilities</i>

### 3.2 Interview data

According to the sociologist David Silverman (2011; Atkinson & Silverman 2007), for the last couple of decades we have been living in an interview society, in which interviews have been gathered and utilized to make sense of people's thoughts, accounts, feelings, emotions and, in general, their lives. It thus seems that interviews and narrative research share many common interests. However, on a closer look, interviews are often gathered to obtain facts and "truths" (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2005) rather than personal experiences and intimate experiences. Fact gathering is not, however, the aim in narrative interviews, in which a deliberate effort is made to provide room and space for narration and narratives by directly asking or encouraging interviewees to produce narratives, or asking questions that are likely to induce narrative speech (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2005; Brannen 2013). As in narrative methods in general, there is no "pure" way of conducting a narrative interview. Thus, the degree of narrativity present in narratives produced in interviews, for example, can vary from thick to thin, or there may be more or less of it (Fludernik 2000). In this thesis, the terms narrative interviews and narrative interviewing relate to two important issues: first, to my aim of providing a space in which fathers can narrate their fatherhood and lives in a confidential atmosphere just as widely or narrowly as they feel comfortable; and second, to my own position as listener.

Thus, the data for the study were gathered by conducting qualitative, narratively-oriented research interviews with a group of Finnish first-time fathers in 2008-2011 (Data 1; 2) and 2003 (Data 3). I gathered Data 1 and 2 mainly for this dissertation, although a few interviews in Data 1 had previously been conducted for my MA thesis. I have since also analyzed both of these data sets in articles which are not part of this dissertation (see Eerola 2009; Mykkänen & Eerola 2013; Eerola 2014). Data 3 was gathered in 2003 by Johanna Mykkänen of the University of Jyväskylä, originally for her doctoral dissertation. In this section, I focus on Data 1 and 2 and briefly introduce Data 3, as it is comprehensively discussed in the original publication (Mykkänen 2010). The main features of all three data sets are presented in Table 3. Detailed information on the fathers interviewed for Data 1 and 2 are given in Appendix 2.

The interviews for Data 1 were conducted from 2008 to 2010 with 16 first-time fathers aged 23 to 29. Most of these men were in the transition period from studying to entering working life, and were slightly younger than first-time fathers in Finland in general. At the time of the interviews, each of the fathers had one child aged from 6 months to 2 years. All the fathers were living in a heteronormative relationship, either married or cohabiting, with the mother of their child; this is the most common path to becoming a first-time father in present-day Finland, while other forms of fatherhood may occur at later stages in men's lives. Before the pregnancy, the men's couple relationship with the mother of their child had lasted from a couple of months to 5 years. All the interviewees were living in major or midsize cities in southern and central Finland. As Finnish society is still relatively homogenous in terms of ethnicity, all the participants were native Finns. The interviewed men represented a broad range of occupational fields, although their educational background was relatively high and above the national average (6 fathers had a university-level degree and 8 were studying at a university; only two men had not engaged in any studies at the tertiary level). Generally, their spouses were also university students or graduates and thus were on the same educational and professional level as the fathers. Eight fathers were working full-time at the time of the interview, 6 fathers were full-time students and 2 were at home taking care of the home and child. In total, 5 fathers had experienced a stay-at-home period, lasting from 2 months to 2 years, and thus had taken family leaves more often than fathers in general. As these figures indicate, the interviewed fathers need to be understood as a selected group in many respects, and hence as one on which direct and generalizable conclusions cannot be drawn. The strength of this data set lies, however, in its possibilities to give new insights into Finnish middle-class fatherhood through the informants' detailed accounts of the process of becoming a father.



TABLE 3 Interview data

	Participants	Number of interviews (and transcribed pages <sup>1</sup> )	Time of interview	Age of the interviewees (years)	Age of the interviewees' first-borns	Key themes discussed in interviews	Article	Interviewer
Data 1	First-time fathers: most were in transition from studies to working life; relatively highly educated	16 (254p.)	2008–20010	23–29	6 months to 2 years	Time before childbirth; pregnancy; childbirth; child's growth; daily fathering practices; couple relationship; future aspirations	Articles I, II and III	Petteri Eerola
Data 2	2 <sup>nd</sup> interviews with the Data 1 fathers , conducted 2 years later	16 (271p.)	2010–2011	25–31	2,5 to 4 years	Fathering an infant; fathering several children; everyday parenting practices in a family with children; gendered parenting practices	Article II	Petteri Eerola
Data 3	First-time fathers: working; educational background ranging from primary school to postgraduate university degree	28 (580p.)	2003	21–44	6 months to 3,5 years	Time before the child; family planning; pregnancy and childbirth; being a father; paid work; future plans	Article III	Johanna Mykkänen

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<sup>1</sup> Line spacing 1



All the interviewed fathers were asked to choose a place which they felt was convenient to them and where they could be interviewed. This place was usually either a coffee shop, their home or place of work or study. The interviews started with a narrative-eliciting question "*Tell me about how you became a father and how you consider yourself as a father*". These narratives lasted from 5 to 25 minutes, and established the basis for the whole interview, as the issues that emerged in the men's accounts were often returned to later on during the interview. This was often on the initiative of the interviewees, as they referred to or continued their earlier narratives, but also prompted by the interviewer, as the fathers' narratives functioned as bridges to the few interview themes decided on beforehand, such as the time before the child, becoming a father, everyday fatherhood and the couple relationship (for the full list of the interview topics, see appendix 1). Thus, the interviews did not proceed structurally; rather, the themes were discussed in the order that they were brought up by the interviewees themselves, the interviewer only attempting to ensure that all the key topics were dealt with. Moreover, as an interviewer, I encouraged the fathers to talk freely about their experiences and issues about their fatherhood, family life and life in general that they found personally meaningful and important, without intervening and guiding their narration too much. The interviews were conducted in Finnish and lasted for 90 minutes on average. All the interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees, and afterwards transcribed. In total, the data comprised over 24 hours of interview speech.

I recruited the interviewees through various e-mail posting lists of students with families, various general and family-themed internet discussion forums, and snowball sampling. Using these methods, it was relatively easy to obtain an adequate number of participants, although with the disadvantage of limiting the generalizability of the data. First, all of the participants were probably already interested in sharing and reflecting on their thoughts on fatherhood. They had probably also pondered their own fatherhood and parenting relatively extensively beforehand. Second, the most fruitful sites of recruitment, which were the mailing lists of university students (of 3 different universities) and the university intranet of a single Finnish university, also probably shaped the data.

As all the interviewed fathers accepted the invitation to participate in the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview approximately 2 years later, Data 2 comprises re-interviews of the fathers interviewed for Data 1. The re-interviews were conducted from early 2010 to late 2011. At that time, the fathers were aged from 25 to 31 years and their first-borns from 2,5 to 4 years. Thirteen of the men had fathered more children, and one had got divorced and was living apart from his children, although keeping regularly in touch with them. During the second round of interviews, 11 of the men were working full-time, 3 were full-time students and 2 were having a stay-at-home period. Ten of them now also held a BA- or MA-level degree (or equivalent). At the time, seven men had experienced being a stay-at-home father.

The re-interviews were conducted with the very same method as the original ones, the focus being on free narration by the fathers around various issues of fatherhood and family life. The interviews begun with a narrative-eliciting request *“It has been 2 years since we last met. At the time, your first-born was (X years/months) old, you were living in (place/apartment), and you were (working fulltime/studying/in stay-at home period etc.). Now, tell me in your own words, what has happened in your life since then, and what’s happening at the moment?”* Again, these narratives set the basis for the interview. As the interview proceeded, themes such as responsibility and daily fatherhood were addressed, if not raised spontaneously, with questions such as *“Tell me in your own words, what are your key duties as a father”* and *“Tell me, for example, a story or a description of a typical situation in your daily family life”*. As with the first interviews, these were conducted by the present author, and lasted for 90 min on average. Thus, the data set comprised approximately 24 hours of interview speech.

To diversify and enhance the data sets conducted by the present author, Data 3, gathered by Johanna Mykkänen, was analyzed in the third article (III) in addition to Data 1 (for a full description of the data, see Mykkänen 2010, 50–53). The data comprised 28 interviews with native-Finnish first-time-fathers aged from 21 to 44 years with first-borns from 6 months 3.5 years. With the exception of one unemployed father, all of them were working fathers. Four of them had experiences of opting out from their work for a stay-at-home period. The men’s educational background varied from primary school to postgraduate university degree. The participants were recruited through the municipal day care system of a midsize Finnish city and through snowball sampling. Like the interviews conducted by the present author, these interviews were also conducted in accordance with the narrative interview method. For example, interviews were started with the leading question *“Tell me about your experiences of the early stages of fatherhood. I’m interested in the whole journey, from life before the child until life after the birth of the child”*. After this, the interviewees were free to talk about their becoming and being a father, although some pre-decided themes such as childbirth, being a father and paid work were also contributed by the interviewer. Thus, in many respects, the interviews were conducted in a manner rather similar to that of the interviews of Data 1 and 2. The key differences in the data sets lie in their participants’ divergent backgrounds in terms of age, education, occupation and use of family leaves. Whereas in Data 1 and 2 the fathers were highly educated and had taken family leaves substantially more often than fathers in general, in Data 3 the fathers were notably closer to the statistical average. While these fathers also participated in the interviews on their own initiative, and thus probably had a personal motivation for participation and shared interest in the interview topic, the differences between the data sets had the advantage of extending the qualitative information on fatherhood beyond that contained in Data 1 and 2, thereby adding value to the research.

Reflections on the interviews and data are given in section 5.4 (Reflections on the research process).

### 3.3 Analysis

The aim of this thesis was to make sense of men's narratives on first-time and early fatherhood and especially on their responsibilities as fathers. Thus, the analyses conducted and presented in the articles were carried out by means of narrative methods. As there is no such a thing as a "one and only" narrative method in its pure state, and narrative analyses have been performed in numerous of ways, doing narrative research can be understood as applying, examining and developing several qualitative techniques and methods in order to achieve greater understanding of the narrative character of the topic of interest. This was also the case in this study. The analyses were conducted differently according to the focuses and research aims of the original articles, the method of analysis in each article being chosen in line with the objective set. Generally speaking, in all the articles, the analyses can be described as data-based, though carried out with broad awareness and knowledge of recent scholarship and discourses on male parenting.

As I both conducted the interviews (with the exception of Data 3) and carried out the analyses, the initial interpretations of the data were made in the interview situations when listening to the fathers' narration. The interviews were then transcribed and read through several times before the actual analysis. The analyses in turn comprised several stages during which the data were repeatedly chopped up, molded and reconstituted over again and again. Mostly this was done using pen and paper or a word processor, but sometimes also collectively during PhD seminars or discussions with friends and colleagues, or alone on runs or during sleepless nights in bed. As in most studies applying a qualitative research method, the interview data analyses also overlapped with the writing of the original articles. While still working with the data and sketching the initial results, I already had begun work on the articles, and vice versa, even during the final stages of the articles, I returned to my interview data time and time again.

In their unique and detailed features, the data analyses of the articles were conducted somewhat similarly in the first and third articles in which the men's narratives about their fatherhood (I) and paternal masculinities (III) were studied. These studies shared a similar focus, as the aim was to obtain a "bigger picture" of the fatherhood narrated by the men and to bring to light the narrative wholes that they produced. To better describe the fathers' accounts and to highlight their narrative character, I undertook narrative constructions in which I tried to condense the essence of each narrative that I found in the course of my analysis. These constructions were formed by merging congruent narrations, content and actual phrases from several fathers to produce illustrations of the narrative models that the fathers seemed to adopt in their accounts. While this is not a very common method in narrative research, a similar approach has previously been utilized, e.g. by Hänninen (1991). According to her, such narrative constructions, in which several somewhat similar accounts are condensed into a

single narrative, are a useful way of foregrounding the central features of the narrative, without incorporating all the details of individual accounts (Hänninen 1991). In the first article (I), in line with Hänninen (1991), the narrative constructions were reported in the third-person singular, while in the third article (III) the narratives were constructed in the first-person singular to emphasize their personal and intimate character. In the analysis of the first article (I) attention was also paid to the individual storylines of the narratives, whereas in the third article (III) special emphasis was placed on the relations between, and cultural positions adopted by, the different narratives.

The focus in the second article (II) was different; here, I took a detailed look at the “building materials” or ingredients of the fathers’ accounts of paternal responsibility to be able to identify what “narrative spheres” of responsibility seemed to be the most central in them. Using the concept of narrative sphere, the areas of nurture and breadwinning emerged as the ones that most significantly characterized the men’s narratives of their paternal responsibilities, and that were the topic around which much narrative discourse coalesced, either in qualitative (e.g. an issue that was significantly emphasized) or in quantitative (i.e. something that was widely talked about in the interviews) terms. Although in this article the men’s accounts were also studied with narrative methods, the analysis was influenced more broadly by other general qualitative methods of analysis such as qualitative content analysis and the grounded theory approach.

Empirical data samples are given in all the articles, in addition to the narrative constructions, to improve the reliability of the study and to deepen the analysis. As the interviews were conducted in Finnish, the narrative samples presented have been translated into English with the aim of extracting the general sense and meanings of the narratives rather than producing a literal word-for-word translation (see Nikander 2008). This practice is in line with the aim of gaining a holistic understanding of the meanings and experiences behind the men’s narratives and narrative spheres, rather than rendering precise nuances of meaning, as, for example, in a discourse analytic approach.

## **4 SUMMARIES OF THE ORIGINAL ARTICLES**

In this chapter, I give an overview of the main findings presented in the original articles by focusing on the narratives and narrative spheres described. The section on each article is named according to the narratives and narrative spheres analyzed. The theoretical background, research questions, data utilized and main findings of the articles are presented in Table 4. For details of the constructed and condensed narratives and empirical data samples, see the original articles.

TABLE 4 The original articles

	Title of original article	Theoretical background	Original research questions	Empirical data (see p. 32-28)	Results
Article I	Metanarrative of the "new father" and narratives of young Finnish first-time fathers	The "new" father (e.g. Marks & Palkovitz 2005; Huttunen 2006)	What narratives and storylines do young Finnish first-time fathers narrate about their fatherhood?  What similarities and connections are there between the Finnish first-time fathers' narratives and the metanarrative of the new father?	Data 1	Modern, transition and post-modern narratives, containing 3 to 4 storylines each, of fathering  The fathers' narratives reflect and engage with the "new" metanarrative
Article II	Nurturing, breadwinning and upbringing: Paternal responsibilities by Finnish men in early fatherhood	Paternal involvement and responsibility (Lamb et al. 1985; Doucet 2006)  Gendered parental responsibilities (e.g. Miller 2001; Doucet 2006)	What duties and practices do Finnish fathers narrate as paternal responsibilities in their early fatherhood?	Data 1 and 2	Nurturing, breadwinning and upbringing, framed by everyday duties and comprehensive commitments, as the constituents of paternal responsibility
Article III	Paternal masculinities in early fatherhood: dominant and counter narratives by Finnish first-time fathers	Fields of masculinity (Coles 2009)  Gendered parenting (e.g. Doucet 2006; Fox 2009)	What dominant and possible counter-narratives of paternal masculinity do Finnish first-time fathers narrate regarding their early fatherhood?	Data 1 and 3	"The decent" as the dominant and "the equal" and "the masculine" as the counter narratives of paternal masculinity

#### 4.1 Article I: Modern, transition and postmodern narratives of fathering

The first article of this thesis aimed to find out what narratives and storylines about their fatherhood would be produced by first-time fathers. The narratives were also observed in relation to the concept (or, as referred to in the article, the metanarrative) of the new father, which was sketched by referring to the conceptualizations and categorizations portraying men as “new”, “changed” and / or “nurturing” fathers. Interviews with 16 first-time fathers (Data 1) were studied. At the time of interview, the fathers were aged 23 to 29 years and their children from 6 months to 2 years, and thus the articles emphasized the men’s narratives and paternal responsibilities at the very onset of their fatherhood. Though at the time of the interviews the fathers were slightly younger than first-time fathers in Finland in general, this issue did not seem to affect the narratives; other matters, such as the men’s relatively high education and stable life situation were more likely to influence their stories. In the analysis, three different narratives of fathering – modern, transition and postmodern - were identified, each containing three to four main storylines. Because the narratives describe the fluctuating and relational character of fatherhood, they were labelled in light of sociological modernization theory, highlighting their link to the broader societal context. In the article, the narratives were clarified by presenting composite narrative constructions, as described above. These composites each combined data drawn from 4 to 6 interviews. For the composites and authentic data excerpts, see the original article. Some of the names and concepts used in this article have since been reconsidered; see section 5.4. of this thesis (Reflections on the research process).

*The modern narrative of fathering* was characterized by three storylines: 1) breadwinning, 2) gendered parental roles and 3) father as mother’s assistant. Although the storylines referred to parental roles commonly understood as “traditional”, they also highlighted the father’s engagement, especially on the psychological but also on the practical level, with a family-friendly life-style. Also, the fatherhood described in the narrative was portrayed as a responsible and “natural” way of fathering. For example, as the storyline of breadwinning emphasized, being a provider was narrated as an appropriate and valued way of taking care of the family, especially during the infancy stage. According to the storyline, breadwinning was “working for the family”, as the family gave a higher level of meaning to work and the absences from the family that it occasioned. Breadwinning was also related to the storyline of gendered parental roles, which implied, in addition to the father as breadwinner, the dominant role of the mother in taking care of the daily child care routines. According to this storyline, family leave was understood primarily as the duty of the mother, although the father’s 3-week leave entitlement was also highlighted as a narra-



tive norm. Despite this gendered dichotomy, however, the storyline emphasized how the father was also committed to spending time with his children, as spending time with the family and playing with the child were described as his most focal outside-work activities. Also, as in the storyline of the father as mother's assistant, the father's participation in nurture and hands-on caring practices was also present, but rather as a mother's substitute and supporter than as a self-assertive, stand-alone doer.

If the description of fatherhood in the modern narrative was relatively self-evident and unquestioned, *the transition narrative* portrayed it as more diverse and complicated. The narrative, characterized by expressions indicating insecure feelings and challenges during the early stages of parenthood, contained four storylines: 1) father as role-seeker, 2) challenge faced by father of engaging in a family-centered lifestyle, 3) mother's role as gatekeeper and 4) father's growth into involved parenthood. The first storyline, the father as a role-seeker, drew attention to the transition in gendered parental roles and negotiation of the father's position in the family. The fact that fathering practices and ways of being a father that are deemed appropriate on the societal level have become increasingly manifold, and that cultural expectations towards the father taking a greater share in child care has grown, emerged in the fathers' narratives as uncertainty and confusion about whether to be a "traditional" breadwinner, who remains at some distance from the daily care-giving routines, or a "new" nurturer. The parallel and conflicting expressions of these roles highlighted the essence of the transition narrative, i.e. negotiating fatherhood in relation to the old and new modes of being a father. However, this process of negotiation was also present in the storyline of the challenge of engaging in a family-centered lifestyle faced by the father; this storyline emphasized both the father's efforts, and also struggle, to find his place as a nurturer and caregiver. According to the storyline, these contradictory emotions arose to a notable extent from the father's feeling that the "shared" decision of trying for a baby had been made under pressure from the mother. The mother's primacy in family life was also discussed in the storyline of the mother's role as a gatekeeper, which emphasized maternal practices that inhibit the father's sharing in hands-on child care, and more broadly, of responsibility for the child in general. For example, this cropped up in daily routines, where in performing his share the father gained the impression that he wasn't good enough, as the mother, probably without intent, invariably implied that "she knew how everything should be done". The last storyline of the narrative, the father's growth into involved parenthood, however, emphasized the father's striving towards, and attaining, active and responsible fatherhood, despite the challenges encountered. It also highlighted the moral dimension of parenthood, as it implied the father's reflection on his own parental role. This storyline, like the whole narrative, can be seen as a transition phase, in which old and new cultural expectations of fathering collide, as it questions the self-evident primacy of the mother by insisting that nurturing and care giving are open to, and also the responsibility of, men as well as women.



The promises and the expectations of nurturing and the fully equal father present in the transition narrative were fulfilled in *the postmodern narrative of fathering*. This narrative, characterized by the father's engagement in equally shared parenting, contained four storylines: 1) father's notable participation in family planning and preparing for fatherhood, 2) equally shared parenting, 3) satisfying couple relationship and 4) nurture and care giving. As described by the storyline of the father's notable participation in family planning, becoming a father did not happen by "accident" or "under pressure", but rather, it emphasized the intentional aspect of becoming a father, and the equal share and active role of the father in family planning. The storyline also described the father's active preparations for his upcoming fatherhood, such as sharing thoughts with those closest to him, reading parenting books and guides, doing necessary shopping for the baby, and above all, thinking and pondering about his new life situation. Thus, while it opposed family planning and preparations as self-evident maternal duties, the storyline highlighted mutual support and becoming a parent as a shared situation and experience, in which the spouses act together as equal prospective parents. On reflection, a more representative label for this storyline than the one originally used would have referred to the father's equal share in family planning and active preparation for fatherhood. Moreover, corresponding discourses were also present in the storyline of equally shared parenthood. This storyline was fundamentally bound to the idea of gender equality, and thus the father's share in nurture and care was emphasized as equal to that of the mother. The storyline highlighted the comprehensive sharing of parenthood as a conscious and responsible decision, and thus a stay-at-home-period with the infant was portrayed as an obvious part of fathering. To a notable extent, the shared parenthood described was built on mutual spousal support, as also illustrated in the storyline of the satisfied couple relationship. Accordingly, a warm (and as described in the previous storyline, equal) relationship with the mother facilitated the father's early involvement in terms of nurturing and hands-on care, in contrast to the transition narrative in which gendered parental contradictions inhibited the father's involvement. Again, on reflection, a more representative title for the storyline would have included the notion of a warm and satisfying couple relationship, as this would have brought out the positive connotation of the storyline more clearly. The essence of the narrative was, however, revealed in its last storyline, nurture and care giving, which emphasized the father's inner urge to nurture and care for his child, i.e. the father's parental practices were not the outcome of outside pressure. The storyline highlighted male nurturing as a default, i.e. nurturing and early care as a self-evident part of fatherhood just as it is of motherhood and, also, fully appropriate for a man.

To conclude, the narratives that emerged from the data can be seen as narrative alternatives that are enabled by present-day culture in which different views of fatherhood co-exist. Although responsible fatherhood was constructed with diverse storylines and with varying emphases in the narratives, all of them in their own way highlighted engagement in caring and involved fatherhood

from very onset of parenthood. Whereas the postmodern narrative most obviously reflected the concept of the new father, the ideas of fathers as nurturing parents were also present in the two other narratives. This was especially evident in the transition narrative, which hovered between old and new cultural expectations of male parenting, but also in the modern narrative, in which fathers' psychological presence and investment in family life were underlined as key features of responsible fatherhood. In all three narratives, the changed nature of and differences between past and present-day fatherhood were also revealed, as the emphasis in present-day fatherhood was on greater involvement, along with hands-on practices, in all the narratives. Thus, based on these narratives of responsible fatherhood, it seems that nurturing, shared caring and the psychological presence of the father have attained culturally significant status in the early stages of parenthood.

#### **4.2 Article II: Nurturing, breadwinning and upbringing as paternal responsibilities**

Whereas the first article of the thesis emphasized how the fathers' narratives comprehensively engaged with the notion of responsible fatherhood, in the second article I sought to capture and analyze their narration of paternal responsibility in more detail. The article was based on Data 1 and 2, i.e. both interviews with the fathers. Thus, at the time of the first interviews the fathers were in the initial stages of their parenthood, whereas at the time of the second interview their first-borns were from 2, 5 to 4 years. Also, most of them (13 of 16) had fathered more children. In this article, the analysis was carried out somewhat differently than in the other two articles. That is, the aim was not to explore the narratives as wholes, but rather, to locate the narrative spheres through which paternal responsibilities were understood. Thus, the narrative analysis was carried out by applying a more general data-based qualitative analysis. According to the analysis, the framework for paternal responsibility in the men's narratives was constituted through the three narrative spheres of 1) nurturing, 2) breadwinning and 3) upbringing. The narrative spheres were informed by the levels of everyday duties and comprehensive commitments, which in turn highlighted the multidimensional understanding of paternal responsibilities in the narratives. Data excerpts illustrating the three narrative spheres can be found in the original article.

In the men's accounts, the narrative sphere of *nurturing*, highlighting the psychological and emotional presence and care of the father from the very beginning, was emphasized as the essence of paternal responsibility. In addition to the high amount of reflexivity that it received in the interviews, i.e. in their narratives the fathers reflected on this sphere notably more often than on the other spheres, being a responsible father was most profoundly tied to comprehensive involvement with care work from the very beginning of parenthood.

Thus, the men's accounts highlighted not only their share in daily hands-on nurturing practices from feeding and clothing to cuddling and getting child to sleep, along with their efforts to cut down on their own activities and spend as much time at home with the child as possible, but also their higher-level ponderings and concerns on the well-being and health of the child. In addition the taking of short-term leave of three weeks immediately after childbirth was narrated as self-evident. In the accounts of those fathers who had taken extended leaves, sharing leaves with their spouses was described as an obvious decision, made by both parents together, and one which was also actively desired by the father. In the narratives, the fathers' involvement in nurturing practices was closely related to their sense of responsibility and psychological engagement with the child, and no marked distinctions between male and female responsibilities were made.

The same issue also arose in the sphere of *breadwinning*, which was broadly present in the interview accounts. It was considered as a duty that promoted the well-being of both the child and family, and one that corresponded in importance with the other parental responsibilities, but which was not seen as solely connected with the demands of responsible fatherhood. Instead, in light of the widespread cultural understanding of paternal responsibilities, breadwinning was perceived in the men's accounts rather as a shared parental than male-specific paternal responsibility. This perception, which was one of my most interesting findings in the thesis, offers novel insights on the gendered character of parental responsibilities. Specifically, while the extension of fatherhood to include care work has been widely discussed in research, the field of social politics and the media during the last few decades, mothers' responsibilities as breadwinners have rarely been on view. However, it should be noted that the gender-neutral approach to breadwinning, in particular, was primarily embedded at the level of principle in their narration of parental responsibilities. That is, although in the fathers' narratives cultural understanding of the role of breadwinning had changed, when it came to their actual practices the fathers seemed to do most of the breadwinning (only 1 out of 16 fathers had taken more family leaves than his spouse). This was also the case when breadwinning was narrated as the equal responsibility of both parents. However, possibly in an effort to dissolve this contradiction, the fathers' discussed and emphasized the importance of achieving work/family balance rather broadly in their accounts.

The third sphere, *upbringing*, was also emphasized by the fathers from the very beginning, although the extent of this sphere increased with the growth of the child. That is, upbringing was first considered with a future orientation (i.e. how one would like to raise his child), and during the child's growth, from a more practical perspective (e.g. how to act to be good educator and role model). While practical duties such as helping the child and teaching the child manners and how to behave were also described, the focus was clearly on a moral upbringing, indicating that this was seen rather as higher-level educational task than as a practical duty. In addition, the sphere contained clearer features of a

gendered understanding of responsibility, than either nurturing or breadwinning. Despite the considerable variation in views, and while a gendered narration of upbringing did not appear in all the fathers' narratives, it was nevertheless perceived largely in the narratives of protection and role modeling. Since these features have been understood as characteristics of a "traditional" and gender-based paternal role, this finding confirms how gendered aspects continue to retain a foothold in the fathers' accounts of parental responsibilities.

The men's multifaceted and multi-level narration of their paternal responsibilities was conceptualized on the levels of everyday duties and comprehensive responsibilities that appeared in all three spheres. Everyday duties emphasized responsibilities as set of caring practices, such as feeding and clothing the child, that the fathers interpreted as "responsible". On this level, the narrative theme of nurturing received special emphasis. At the level of comprehensive commitments, paternal responsibilities were perceived as profound, psychological engagement with the child and promoting the child's development. These commitments, which highlighted the emotional and affective side of paternal responsibility, were also future-oriented, e.g. to ensure the children were given "a good start in life". Comprehensive commitments were narrated especially in relation to upbringing and breadwinning. Although these levels were wavering and by no means clearly defined, they implied male parental responsibilities in which there is a similar commitment to both hands-on paternal practices and "higher-level" care work.

Although comparable classifications of multilevel paternal responsibilities have been presented previously, most of these have drawn on Anglo-American data. The narrative spheres that emerged in the present accounts offered much in the way of new content. This was evident, for example, in the men's widespread narration of nurture and the changed character of breadwinning. The narrative sphere analysis also highlighted the reflexive character of contemporary fatherhood, particularly in relation to the roles, duties and especially "higher-level" commitments behind actual parental practices. While the men's narration of spheres and levels was not unambiguous, as the differences observed in their contents, described in the first article (I), show, the results suggest that they should be understood as the cultural domains of responsible and good fatherhood that the men were expected to follow in their narratives. It should also be noticed that the spheres emphasize paternal responsibilities in early fatherhood. A somewhat similar conceptualization of responsibility has been found among first-time fathers (Mykkänen & Eerola 2013). However, as the children grow, changes in these spheres and their contents will probably occur.

### 4.3 Article III: The decent, the equal and the masculine: Dominant and counter narratives of paternal masculinities

While the narratives and narrative spheres analyzed in the first two articles of this thesis emphasized how shared parenting and nurturing as a paternal duty have obtained cultural approval and were broadly referred to in the men's accounts, they also implied some endorsement of a gendered understanding of parental responsibilities, especially in certain narrative types and spheres (e.g. the modern and transition narratives in article I; sphere of upbringing in article II). Arising from these observations, the third article of the thesis focuses on issues of gender in men's narratives. In the third article, I sought to extend understanding of the culturally dominant paternal gender roles in early fatherhood by examining narratives of paternal masculinities, i.e., the social and cultural constructions of gendered practices and conventions produced by men in relation to their roles as male parents. For the article, Data 1 and 3, containing interviews with 44 first-time fathers, were analyzed. This was the sole article in this thesis in which Data 3, which differed in its demographics from Data 1 and 2, was analyzed (see section 3.2 Interview data). The study identified three narratives of paternal masculinity: a dominant narrative ("Decent") and two counter narratives ("Equal" and "Masculine"). For the constructed narratives and authentic interview samples, see the original article.

The dominant narrative of paternal *masculinity* identified by the analysis was labeled *the narrative of the decent father*, as it referred to what was regarded as culturally decent and appropriate male parenting. At the same time, the narrative was characterized by both a detectable divergence in parental gender roles but also a strong emphasis on paternal nurturance. In this narrative, which describes fathers as significantly family orientated men, the father's share in nurture and child and household care is not questioned but rather emphasized as practices that are fully appropriate for men and that inhere in male parenting. Especially, fathers' share of hands-on parenting and the ability to perform "mother-like" nurturing was underlined. However, differences remained at different levels of parental responsibility, as the narrative emphasized how the mother was still mainly in charge of many daily duties and everyday decisions, and thus, held a kind of "final" responsibility for the care of the child. In turn, although breadwinning was not narrated as the exclusive duty of the male parent, there was nevertheless an emphasis on the father's primary responsibility for it during early parenthood. This division of labor was narrated as "natural" and something that both parents agreed with. In the accounts of some fathers producing decent narratives, fatherhood as a normative stage in the man's lifespan, and discourses such as "from a boy to a man", were emphasized. The dominance of this narrative was twofold: first, quantitatively, as the narrative was produced substantially more often than the other narratives; and second, qualitatively in the cultural dominance of the narrative, describing customary and culturally suitable practices of contemporary male parenting. The narrative,

however, should not be understood as an unambiguous and clearly defined story, but rather as a flexible framework, directing and assessing the boundaries for a culturally appropriate narrative of paternal masculinity in early fatherhood.

Dominant narratives, however, do not receive unambiguous support; they are always confronted by counter narratives, which diverge from the dominant ones. In the present research, the first of the two counter-narratives identified in the data was labeled *the narrative of the equal father*. This narrative, in which a gender-neutral and equal approach to male parenting was emphasized, challenged the decent narrative as insufficient to produce non-gendered parental behavior. For example, the mother and father were narrated as similar and equal parents in terms of their share of parental practices from the very onset of parenthood. According to the narrative, the father's comprehensive part in care work was based on his inner need to nurture and own will to stabilize his role as a parent from the very beginning. Also, men's share in household tasks was constructed as self-evident and free of gendered restrictions. The equal narrative also rejected men's role as primarily that of a breadwinner and highlighted stay-at-home fathering as an essential, suitable and economically viable choice. It was also characterized by "mother-like" speech as the father's narration represented conventions that might culturally be interpreted as maternal or feminine.

The second counter-narrative, which recognized the decent father narrative as a cultural ideal that might suit some men but which is not for everyone, was labeled *the narrative of the masculine father*, as it draws on culturally hegemonic concepts about masculinity. In relation to the dominant one, this narrative highlighted the father's parenting in particular through his male gender and its masculine character. The narrative was characterized by definite parental gender differences, as it emphasized the father as a self-evidently different parent than the mother on account of his gender. That is, breadwinning and outside-the-home working were narrated as integral part of male parenting, though participation and assisting the mother in care work were also emphasized. While this division was not questioned, but rather taken for granted, the narrative emphasized a male-specific nurturance, e.g. "doing things with the kids", and highlighted a strong child-orientation, perceived in the father's aspiration to establish a strong emotional bond with his child and as concern over his child's wellbeing. In the narrative, the father's homosocial bonding and heterosexual striving, but also drinking habits and pondering on violence, were present, aspects which were not discussed in the other narratives.

To conclude, the identification of a single dominant narrative in the analyzed narratives of paternal masculinities emphasizes indicates the strength and normative character of socially constructed masculinities and how these cultural conceptions appear in men's narratives. As it is possible, or even probable, that the institutional stigma that is often attached to research interviews on sensitive topics might have biased respondents to produce culturally decent and appropriate narratives, this would only confirm the interpretation of the decent



father as the dominant cultural narrative. The counter narratives, which are by no means the only counter narratives circulating amongst Finnish fathers, identified here demonstrated, however, that the culturally dominant narrative does not pass unquestioned, which indicates how dominant narratives, like counter narratives, are subject to prospective shifts and transformations.

In terms of paternal responsibility, the dominant narrative highlighted men's parental duties, especially in nurture and care, somewhat in line with time-use studies and parental leave statistics, by showing how men definitely have a notable share in daily child care, but not to the same extent as mothers. The counter narratives, instead, emphasized how parental responsibilities were thoroughly shared (equal narrative) or strongly gendered in character (masculine narrative). Thus, with the exception of the masculine narrative, the fathers' accounts did not stress gender as a central factor directing parental responsibilities. Also, without waiving the provider role, both the dominant and its counter narratives emphasize a shift towards more "hands-on" and nurturing practices of male parenting, as the importance of the father's role as caregiver was accentuated even in the masculine narrative that otherwise leaned towards more traditional understandings of fatherhood and masculinity. It seems that as fatherhood has been extensively on view in recent Finnish media and specialist discourses, and as an effort has been made via family policies to promote fathers' participation in the everyday life of the family, this has probably informed men's understanding of what constitutes a suitable male parental role and what kind of a man a good father is.

Lastly, I briefly sum up the narratives and narrative spheres discussed by Finnish fathers and discovered by the analysis. As described, all the narratives of fathering that the men produced (I) were somewhat in line with the concept of the new father. The new father ideology runs also through the "decent" narrative (III) in which paternal nurture and the father's share in daily hands-on care were present. In the "decent" narrative, the narrative spheres of nurturing, breadwinning and upbringing (II) were also evident. That is, although father had an apparent role as nurturer, he was also the one whose task was to carry out the main burden of breadwinning. The narrative of the "masculine" and the "equal" father (III), then, can be understood as at the poles of the modern and postmodern narratives of fathering (I). However, even though the "masculine" was emphasized by breadwinning duties and the "equal" by nurturing responsibilities, both spheres (II) were evident both narratives. In many ways, upbringing also emerged as a sphere that appeared in all the narratives to a largely equivalent degree.



## 5 DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Conclusions on responsible fatherhood

The aim of this study was to contribute a more profound understanding of responsible fatherhood from fathers' points of view and from a cultural perspective. As presented in the previous chapter, the aim was approached in the original articles on the basis of various premises. Next, in presenting the original results, I shall address the two main research aims stated in the Introduction. These were:

1. In what terms is responsible fatherhood conceptualized in men's narratives?
2. What gendering of responsibility do men's narratives reveal?

#### 5.1.1 Conceptualization of responsible fatherhood

The first research question of the thesis was to find out how responsible fatherhood is conceptualized in men's narratives. In particular, this question was dealt with in the second article (II), but was also discussed in the other two articles. In addition to the men's narratives and the narrative spheres and their levels, which have already been presented, I highlight three novel aspects of responsible fatherhood that run through their narratives.

First, and probably their most striking feature, the narratives emphasized the broad extension of paternal responsibilities to child nurture and care work. While this was at its most obvious in the postmodern (I) and equal (III) narratives, it was also clearly apparent in all the narratives; even in the modern (I) and masculine (III) narratives, in which fatherhood was most closely related to the concept of the "traditional" father, nurturing and care giving were self-evidently attached to male parenthood. Thus in all the narratives, men were seen as taking a notable share in the nurture and care work and male care was emphasized as self-evident in character. In addition, the narratives highlighted the father's initiative in nurture and care, instead of giving in to external pres-

sure. Also, all the narratives implied that engagement in nurturing and hands-on care-giving were, from the outset, associated with responsible fatherhood, as opposed to the more traditional understanding with its emphasis on the primacy of the mother in early infancy and the gradual extension of the father's share as the child grows.

Second, despite the strong emphasis on nurture and care, features relating to more traditional understandings of responsible fatherhood were also inscribed in the men's conceptualizations. The narratives also highlighted responsibilities such as breadwinning, upbringing and providing security, although these were primarily narrated as subordinate to nurturing responsibilities, and were understood within the context of nurture and care. Thus, the fathers did not underestimate the importance of providing for the family and its economic wellbeing, but this was seen as linked entirely to the well-being of the child/children and family. That is, breadwinning, a traditional paternal responsibility, was narrated as an intrinsic form of care for the family. The absence of breadwinning as an absolute value in the men's accounts also supports the view that nurturing responsibilities are the cultural focus of contemporary paternal responsibilities.

Third, the men's conceptualizations emphasized the novel idea that sharing responsibility was based on reciprocity between the parents. As the narratives suggested, the men's conceptualization of responsible fatherhood contained features that have hitherto been understood as maternal. Moreover, as in families the roles of mother and father are strongly tied together, the narratives not only highlighted the importance of fathers doing the same things as mothers and the extension of men's involvement in nurture, but also men's portrayals of "traditional" paternal responsibilities, such as breadwinning, as shared duties, and their expectations of mothers participating in these activities. Although Finland has never been a society characterized by stay-at-home motherhood and where men have been the sole providers, to this day in families with small children men's primacy in breadwinning has tended to be the rule. However, while statistics show that this remains the case in the great majority of families, the present narratives demonstrate that men have started to question the notion of breadwinning as solely a paternal duty, as was also evident in their expectations and wishes that the mothers also take an active share in providing for the family. This emerged in all the narratives, both those in which family leave was negotiated and those in which the mother's stay-at-home period was taken for granted. To conclude, men's conceptualizations of responsible fatherhood highly resembled, if not paralleled, the cultural portrayals of responsible motherhood (Sevón 2009; Kelh  2009; Miller 2005; Hays 1996; Jokinen 1997), as essential differences were not observed in the men's narratives. While descriptions such as nurturing, caring and loving are, and have for a long time been, self-evidently attached to motherhood, contemporary fathers' also seem also to be increasingly associating them with good and responsible fatherhood.

### 5.1.2 Gendering of responsibility

The second research question concerned what areas of responsibility for child care would be revealed as gendered, and to what extent, in the men's narratives. This issue was treated in all the articles, but especially in the third article (III). In this article, the men's narratives of paternal masculinity were studied in order to understand men's narratives from a gender perspective.

As the results to the first research question strongly indicated, the men's conceptualization of their paternal responsibilities was described by a broad range of duties, with particular focus on their nurturing responsibilities. As the narratives implied, without pressure from the mothers' side, fathers took a share in the daily caring routines from changing nappies and soothing the child to sleep to washing and feeding the child. This does not, however, mean that gendered features were wholly absent in the narratives. For example, although the men's narratives emphasized hands-on care work and breadwinning as shared duties, they also highlighted how this was not always realized in practice. For example, according to the narratives, fathers seemed to carry the main economic responsibility in the early infancy of their child, as their spouses were on family leave. Thus while in principle the parental responsibilities described in the narratives were relatively non-gendered, in practice the parent's gender seemed to play a greater role.

Another issue concerns the coverage of responsibility. According to the narratives, the mothers' seemed to perform the major part of child care. This prompts the question, which of the two parents has final or full parental responsibility for child care? Although the fathers quite extensively participated in all the same parental activities and practices as the mothers, most of the narratives implied that the mothers seemed to bear the upper-level responsibility, while also taking care of most of the daily decisions relating to the child. The same phenomenon was observed in the men's narratives on the take-up of family leaves. While family leaves and stay-at-home periods were mainly narrated as suitable for both parents and men's leaves were mostly seen in a positive light, the narratives indicated that they were not expected to take full advantage of them, except for the three weeks together with the mother after child-birth. However, as the fathers' were aware of the prevailing cultural emphasis on men's child nurturing and their undertaking a comprehensive share of parenting duties, the choice not to take parental leaves was widely reflected on and justified by reference to the economic situation of the family or to the mother's wish to take all the available leaves, rather than seen as an exception to a norm of gender equality.

The question behind the gendered character of parental responsibilities in the men's accounts concerns their relationship with their narratives of masculinity, and especially the narrative reconciliation of masculinity and nurture. This issue was hardly visible in the present narratives, which implied that the father's nurturing practices were not in direct contradiction to his male identity. Rather, the narratives presented nurturing as self-evident for responsible male

parenting, although to a perceptibly varying extent. It was only in a few accounts not representative of the narrative mainstream that the father's own conceptions of masculinity seemed to operate as gatekeepers to a broader share of nurture. These observations suggest that concepts of cultural masculinity have adopted or absorbed the idea of a nurturing fatherhood. This can be viewed as a noteworthy change in men's conceptions of male parenting, as a corresponding narrative would have been most unlikely in the paternal narratives of the past.

Thus, not only the narratives of fatherhood, but also the narratives of masculinity, have changed. While this was present in all the narratives in terms of a nurturing fatherhood as a built-in component of male parenting, it had particular salience in the transition narrative (I), which described not only the transition to fatherhood, but also highlighted the men's efforts to negotiate their sense of being a male person on the general level. This observation indicates how the changes and transitions that emerged in these narratives go somewhat hand in hand. It is more difficult to deduce whether the men's narratives of a nurturing fatherhood have been enabled by the changes in their narratives of masculinity, or whether the changes in their fatherhood narratives have also directed their narratives of masculinity in a softer and more open-ended direction. As phenomena like this are always bound to the broader societal environment, we can assume that as part of a wider societal development both the cultural narratives of fatherhood and masculinities have undergone simultaneous transformation, each affecting the other.

## 5.2 Narrative readings on contemporary Finnish fatherhood

As I have emphasized in presenting the results in the original articles, and in the previous section, the most overarching feature in the studied narratives was the wide-ranging and manifold narration of paternal responsibility. In many ways, the accounts of responsible fatherhood given by the interviewed fathers were somewhat uniform. To conclude my analysis and to connect it with previous research, I shall first consider the unifying features, along with the fault-lines and diversity, observed in the narratives. I shall then turn to the question of the changed nature of Finnish fatherhood narratives.

### 5.2.1 Narrative unity

It has been stated that as family forms have become increasingly diverse and life-styles increasingly individualized, contemporary fatherhood has also become pluralized and socially diverse (Dermott 2008; Brandth & Kvande 1998). In many ways, this observation is probably a valid one and it also serves to describe the general tendencies in Finnish fatherhood. For example, more and more fathers are not living with their children, or are lone parents (Hakovirta & Broberg 2014; Tuovinen 2014). However, on the cultural level, the claim regard-

ing the existence of pluralism needs to be questioned, as in many respects the present narratives manifested uniformity with respect to the characteristics of a culturally desirable or acceptable fatherhood. Although the fathers produced varied and heterogeneous narratives on fatherhood and fathering practices, all three narratives – modern, transition and postmodern – presented in the first article (I) engaged more or less with the “new” narratives and concepts of fatherhood by emphasizing nurture, hands-on care and active fathering as an essential part or duty of male parenting. This was verified in the second article (II), in which nurturing and hands-on care work were accorded hegemony in the men’s conceptualizations of responsible fatherhood. Unity was also present in the fathers’ accounts of breadwinning, which was also narrated as paternal duty, though not in the male-specific sense, but rather in accordance with the dual-earner model. Interestingly, as highlighted in the third article (III), the narratives were most unified in their descriptions of paternal masculinity. Although it has been stated that contemporary Finland has undergone a polarization between “new and flexible” and “traditional and firm” masculinities (Nieminen 2013), this polarization was not evident on a large scale in the men’s accounts of responsible fatherhood.

Above all, the unity of the narratives is shown in the identification of relatively few distinct narratives and the strong cultural conceptions on what constitutes responsible fatherhood and fathers’ acute awareness of these. This hegemony of nurturing and caring narratives probably derives from several sources, such as family policies, gender equality ideals and the role of women as a focal part of the Finnish labor force. Family and gender-equality policies have probably contributed to men’s growing share in care work in the family during recent decades, and hence to their narratives on paternal responsibility. Expert discourses on the importance of fatherhood for child and family wellbeing have also been broadly disseminated in the popular media. The media have also taken a relatively positive attitude towards caring fatherhood, and the cultural atmosphere of Finland has also been portrayed as familistic or family friendly (Jallinoja 2006). While it has been suspected that a familistic atmosphere might also promote a motherhood ideology that gives less space to caring fatherhood and parenting equality (Aalto 2012), it seems that it has nevertheless contributed positively not only to men’s narratives, but also to their fathering practices (Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012; Paajanen 2006).

When drawing conclusions on the general level about the strong cohesiveness of the present narratives on the issue of responsible fatherhood, the role of the present interview data needs to be taken into account. As inspection of the interviewed fathers’ backgrounds indicates, they would appear to be a relatively homogenous group. Although men from diverse backgrounds and life situations were also interviewed for the study, the majority of them can broadly be described as middle class in lifestyle and background. These city-dwelling fathers, with above-average education (especially Data 1 and 2), shared native-Finnish ethnicity and were all in a heteronormative couple relationship with the mother of their children. With the exception of one unem-

ployed father in Data 3, all the interviewees were either working, studying or in a stay-at-home period. According to the fathers' accounts, in most cases their spouses also had an academic education (Data 1; 2), or were studying at a university. Thus, narrating fatherhood in accordance with the ideas of nurturing and caring fatherhood has caught on, in particular, among city-dwelling hetero fathers with a middle-class life-style during their early fatherhood. This, however, also supports the view of the cultural hegemony of nurturing and caregiving fatherhood on a more general level. As emphasized in both the classic and contemporary sociological theories (Simmel 2005; Bourdieu 1984; Kahma 2011), despite increased social individualization, changes in societal tastes, practices and phenomena have a tendency to be manifested first among the highly-educated, city-dwelling cultural middle-class, and thereafter to spread to the other population groups. Thus the narratives identified here can be seen as indicative of the future beliefs and practices of broader groups of fathers in the general population.

Although the unity found between the narratives seems to have a strong foundation, it is not the whole picture. That is, despite the high level of reflection evident in the narratives of responsibility, the men's accounts also revealed that responsible fatherhood was seen and constructed in different ways. As a closer look at the data indicates, while responsibility was something that was talked about in all the narratives, and something that all the fathers desired to be perceived as connected with, it was variously manifested, understood and justified. While nurturing, breadwinning and upbringing were narrated by all the fathers, the weight attributed to individual features varied across the narratives. For example, all three features were present in both the counter-narratives discussed in the third article (III), but the "equal father" laid notably more emphasis on nurturing than the "masculine father", for whom special emphasis was reserved for breadwinning. Also on the more general level, these counter-narratives can be understood as faultlines that indicate the diversity and range exhibited by the cultural concepts of responsible fatherhood.

An aspect in which narrative diversity was interestingly present concerned the reasoning given for practicing a nurturing and caring fatherhood. In the equal (III) and postmodern (I) narratives, nurturing fatherhood was closely related with gender equality, as these accounts were closely associated with the decent (III) and modern (I) narratives, where caring fatherhood and stay-at-home periods were justified on more practical grounds. Similar findings have also been reported by social scientists, such as Johanna Närvi (2014) and Jani Kolehmainen (2004). According to them, the ideology present in men's paths to caring fatherhood and stay-at-home parenting can vary from a gender-equal "new father" ideology to practical discovery of the joys of caring fatherhood that has been facilitated by the changes underlying the concept of masculinity. This also shows that, on the more general level, a nurturing and caring fatherhood is by no means a uniform phenomenon. Rather, it seemed to have achieved an upper-level cultural status within which room remains for a variety of readings and narrative alternatives.



### 5.2.2 New reflexive narratives?

The change both in men's fathering practices and in their narratives on fatherhood has also been studied earlier. Kekäle (2007) has suggested that the Finnish cultural narratives of fatherhood have shifted more and more towards the idea of fathers and mothers as alike and equal in terms of their responsibilities and capabilities as parents. When considering the present narratives on responsible fatherhood as a timeline, some major changes are clearly evident. To go no further back than the 1990s, gendered labor in child care was being narrated as a cultural norm in the accounts of Finnish fathers (see Korhonen 1999; Perälä-Littunen 2007; Aalto 2012; Tigerstedt 1994), whereas present-day narratives appear to stress responsibilities in a notably different manner by accentuating equality between fathers and mothers in their capability and obligation to perform care work. It also seems that the previously wide gap that prevailed between the cultural demands pertaining to good motherhood and to good fatherhood respectively (see Sevón 2009; Malinen et al. 2010; Wall & Arnold 2007; Pleck 2004) has narrowed, as it now appears that the demands made on fathers, especially regarding their share in child care, have become stricter. In many respects, narrating good fatherhood seems to be almost as normative as narrating good motherhood, as the characteristics of responsible fatherhood have started to resemble those of responsible motherhood. Although there is probably more variation in the ways and narratives of being a responsible father than mother, these narratives could further converge in the future. However, this is not likely to happen if the cultural demands and narratives pertaining to responsible motherhood do not allow for more multifaceted ways of being a good mother.

An interesting issue highlighted by the results of this thesis is the reflexive quality of present-day fatherhood. It is stated that reflexivity, and particularly reflexivity on gender, has increased in society in general (Giddens 1991; Jokinen 2004), but especially in middle-class lives (Skeggs 2004). New mothers' narratives have already been found to have a reflexive character (Miller 2005), a tendency that is also perceptible in the fatherhood narratives studied here. Although the participating fathers were interested in principle in telling about their fatherhood, and had probably a high tendency to reflexivity, the manner in which they reflected on their own experiences and stories, drawing on existing cultural models, reveals new possibilities, and perhaps even cultural obligations, for men to reflect on their fatherhood. The reflexivity of the narratives also highlights how fatherhood today is by no means self-evident or stable; rather, it is invariably negotiated and pondered (see also Eerola 2014). In addition to the strong cultural narratives and conceptions regarding responsible fatherhood, one reason for the men's high reflexivity may also be that enhanced expert discourses on fatherhood and its visibility in the media have given fathers conceptual tools with which to contemplate their fatherhood in a new manner. It is difficult to see that a corresponding level of reflexivity would have emerged in similar interview situations just a couple of decades ago.



To conclude, the narratives portray a picture according to which nurturing and caregiving fathering has become cultural mainstream among present-day Finnish fathers. This form of fatherhood has been taken up, in particular, by young, highly educated city dwelling men, who reflect on their fatherhood and who stress nurture-based fathering as a suitable form of male parenthood. As it seems that, for fathers themselves, at least in the present narratives, nurture and care have overtaken breadwinning in importance as the most focal paternal responsibilities, variation remained in the extent to which male nurture and care was undertaken in practice. However, as the narratives suggest, the cultural mainstream in fathers' child-care responsibilities seems to center somewhere in between giving assistance and comprehensive care. That is, while both the father as mother's assistant and secondary parent, and the father as an equally caring parent are situated within this cultural framework of what is deemed appropriate and understandable, the default narrative for male parenting nevertheless seems to be one in which while the father has a notable share in child care, the mother continues to occupy primary parental status in the nurture and care domain. This interpretation comes close to Miller's (2011a) description of "modified carers", who do the same things as mothers but without the sort of 24/7 taking-care-of-everything thinking. Considered as a timeline, it can be stated that a clear turn in paternal responsibilities has occurred within the last two decades. That is, as the importance of breadwinning has faded, although still a daily routine for the majority of fathers, care and nurture-based responsibilities have powerfully established themselves in its stead as key responsibilities for men living their early fatherhood. If one wishes to draw conclusions on the future direction of men's conceptualizations of responsible fatherhood, then a comparison of the present narratives with previous ones (Korhonen 1999; Kokkonen 2003; Perälä-Littunen 2007; Aalto 2012; Tigerstedt 1994) shows positive signs in terms of the extension of fathers' caregiving responsibilities.

The above observation is in line with time use studies that have underlined the increased share of fathers in child care practices (Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012). It also reflects the family leave statistics, according to which fathers' share of leaves has increased, but very slowly, and as yet nowhere near approaching the share taken by mothers. This demonstrates the paradox noted by Dermott (2008) that although the cultural images of good and desirable fatherhood have changed towards shared caring and "new" fatherhood, they have not yet been fully realized in everyday practice. Nevertheless, the narratives show how the hegemonic conceptions of good and responsible fatherhood and motherhood have converged (cp. Korhonen 1999; Perälä-Littunen 2007; Aalto 2012; Tigerstedt 1994), and how fathers have moved closer towards the intimate and emotional core of the family simultaneously with the extension of their role as a nurturer and care giver. According to the narratives, it also seems that fatherhood has become a life domain in which men are allowed and actually required to show their emotions and act in many respects differently from what is commonly understood as masculine. These observations are promising for men's greater parental involvement in the future. However, much work also needs to

be done, if these ideals of equality in child care work and comprehensively shared parenting are to become an unquestioned part of everyday life and parenting.

### 5.3 Practical implications

On the basis of the results, several implications for practice can be made. During the 2000s, men's share in child care has expanded to a relatively high level (Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012). However, as the results suggest, it seems that the cultural atmosphere is ready for expanding men's role in early care even further. The men's accounts emphasized their engagement in their children's everyday lives in a variety of ways and how breadwinning alone was nowhere near the heart of their descriptions of good and proper fatherhood. The narratives were also in line with previous scholarship emphasizing the desire of fathers to spend time with their children, and to be equally involved in hands-on responsibilities with the mother (Paajanen 2006). Thus, cultural and practical gender boundaries should be further dismantled, to support and encourage fathers, mothers and society as a whole to accept that men can handle child care just like women, without any restrictions. Expanding the father's role in early care would lead to significant benefits for fathers, mothers, children and society in general, especially in relation to the well-being of the family and to gender equality in work and family life. Clearly, to actualize fathers' potential to perform nurture in its entirety rests with the individual father himself and his own efforts. However, more support from mothers, women and other men would make it substantially easier. Next, I offer suggestions for family policies, work life and maternity and child welfare clinics that would promote the further enhancement of men's nurturing, caring and comprehensive fathering.

On the level of family policies, direct action towards more equally shared infant care should be taken. As the statistics indicate, men are, broadly, taking up the leaves that are statutorily available to them. Thus, extending fathers' paid leaves would most probably induce rapid growth in men's uptake of leaves, as it has done in Norway and Iceland. It could be done by applying the so called 6+6+6 model sketched by family policy researchers Minna Salmi and Johanna Lammi-Taskula at the National Institute for Health and Welfare, which is grounded on the premise that both parents participate in early care with a stay-at-home period. Their model is based on three six-month periods of which one is for the mother, one is for the father and one can be arranged as the parents wish. However, while highly recommendable in terms of father involvement and child and family wellbeing, this model might prove too costly to implement in the current economic climate. Nevertheless, as a first step towards an equal share in family leaves, the proposed model could be applied using shorter time periods. For example, three periods of four months each, while this would radically increase neither the total duration nor costs of paid leaves, it would mean making a significant effort to advance men's opportunities to in-

vest in early care. With periods of five months, Finland would be promoted to the well-thought-of Nordic level of shared family leaves. While this would crucially extend fathers' leave entitlement, it would even increase the leave available for the mother if she were to take the whole period of shared leave and the father none.

In working life, attention should be paid to perceptions of the balance of work and family, men's family leaves and other family-based absences. Despite the probable fact that during the past few years working life has become more family friendly, in too many workplaces family leaves continue to be thought of as targeted only towards women, so that men who take leave are easily perceived as lazy and unengaged workers. Although caring fathers have been on view in media and public discourses for a good while, there is an obvious lack of positive role models and encouraging examples, especially in working life, that would induce a positive influence on the notion of shared parenting, and encourage men to take up the opportunity for stay-at-home periods and to share parenting equally. One possible effective way to further fathers' work and family balance, and to promote care sharing in families, would be for labor organizations, employers and family and child organizations such as the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare and Finnish Parents' League to develop joint initiatives to promote father friendliness in working life. These initiatives should be planned to encourage fathers to take family leaves, to invest in family life and not to take on extra hours. Such projects would help to bring into view the issues of men's leaves and work and family balance, as well as to enhance men's awareness of their entitlements, which have been expressly designed to help them balance work and family. This would also promote a father- and family-friendly working culture by sending the message that no father is irreplaceable at work, but would be very much needed at home. A positive organizational attitude towards men's family leaves and other possibilities to balance work and family would benefit employers in the form of more satisfied and engaged workers. Such employers could be also given official recognition, such as a certificate for operating a "father-friendly work place", which in turn would contribute to a positive public perception of the organization. Investing in a father-friendly working culture would also advance the position of women in the labor market and thus their parental responsibility in the breadwinning domain. In the long term, this would also promote equal pay between the sexes.

Men's further involvement in the family would also be facilitated if fathers' attendance at maternity and child welfare clinics were to be loudly and clearly called for from the very first visit. A prospective father's presence in such clinics should be taken as the default situation, and the descriptive name maternity clinic should be changed to family clinic. In visits to prenatal family clinic, men should be educated and activated towards shared parenting and encouraged to prioritize their families above other activities, gain independent nurturing experience and trust their abilities as care givers. In turn, mothers should be advised to share parenting with the father. For example, parents should be encouraged to discuss their child-care and stay-at-home arrangements beforehand

and to make agreements which enable early care on the part of both parents. As in Finland maternity and child welfare clinics are probably the most respected mediator of information on child care, acknowledgement by family clinics of the importance of fathers playing an active and equal role in parenting would be one of the easiest and most effective ways to engage fathers as well as mothers in shared parenting.

#### 5.4 Reflections on the research process

This thesis is the outcome of a longstanding and multiphase process which has involved numerous decisions and choices. I have worked on it since summer 2009, including family leaves totaling two and a half years. During these leaves, I have worked on the thesis part-time when possible, e.g. revised the articles and gathered interview data. In the interests of transparency and reliability, I shall now reflect on the most important choices and decisions that I have made during the process.

To begin with the main concept and name of the thesis, the use of the phrase responsible fatherhood highlights the process-like nature of this thesis, but also, on the general level, points to its reliance on qualitative research. When I started this project, I had already written my BA and MA theses on young men's experiences of first-time fatherhood, and hence my aim was to continue to doctoral level with a more elaborated narrative approach to this already familiar topic. Thus, in my first research plan and in drafting the first article (I), fathers' narration of responsibility was seen as one topic among others in men's narratives on early fatherhood in general; as a fully-fledged concept, it was not yet the focus of the analysis. However, it had become focal by the time of writing the second and third articles. There were several reasons for this. First, it was a concept to which men referred broadly in their accounts. This was also the case in the first interviews, although it was not among the pre-set interview topics. Second, it emerged as one of the key concepts characterizing the men's narratives in the first article (I). Third, the concept was also interesting theoretically, as it had previously been applied with many different meanings (see section 2.3. Gendered parental responsibilities). I only made the final decision on setting responsible fatherhood as the key concept for the whole thesis when all the articles had already been published (I) or were under submission (II; III).

When the study was in the planning stage, my aim was to gather versatile data from Finnish first-time fathers from various demographic backgrounds. However, most of the fathers willing to participate, and who were included in Data 1 and 2, were university students, recent graduates or were working in a white collar occupation, and thus relatively highly educated, were living a stable and well-balanced life and had a family-oriented life-style. This became clear at the very onset of the interviewee recruiting process, as first-time fathers across a wide range of life-styles and from widely diverse backgrounds were

difficult to find. This is a common problem in family studies, as individuals with lower education and a less stable situation in life are more difficult to reach and motivate to participate in research. Nevertheless, it would be too much of a simplification to see the narratives solely as the reflections of solidly middle-class fathers, especially if middle-class is understood in terms of income. For example, according to the fathers' accounts, many of them were also living on a below-average income, while only 5 out of the 16 fathers had a permanent position, a traditional marker of middle-classness. However, the fathers can be considered as a part of the cultural middle-class, membership of which is quite often understood through level of education and lifestyle. For example, in addition to their own education, most of them had their children with a highly educated woman (university graduate or student). This is a factor that has also probably influenced their propensity to narrate a view of parenthood as shared and gender-equal, also in everyday practice, as educated women have been shown to be more open-minded about and ready to share child care (Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012).

To expand the perspective and to analyze first-time fatherhood with broader and more varied data, I received an opportunity to examine 26 interviews with first-time fathers conducted by my colleague Johanna Mykkänen (Data 3), along with the Data 1, as the empirical basis for the third article of the thesis (III). Although this data, gathered in 2003, had relatively similar features in terms of life style, family situation and labor-market position as the data that I had already gathered, it contained fathers across a broader age and educational range. However, as they, too, participated on their own initiative, they probably shared the same tendency to reflexivity and willingness to narrate about their fatherhood as the fathers interviewed by myself. As the data were gathered over a decade ago, caution is needed when analyzing these as narratives of present-day fatherhood. Although the data could be regarded as somewhat old in provenance, transformations in cultural conceptions and models tend to be slow, and thus, the data can reasonably still be seen as a valid source of knowledge on Finnish fatherhood today.

The interviews (Data 1 and 2) were conducted successfully, as all the men were cooperative in terms of producing broad and complex narratives on their fatherhood, and were also willing to participate in a second interview. However, some critical observations are in order here. In reflecting on my role as an interviewer, I am concerned by the thought that I might on occasion have been "too kind" an interviewer, and not dared to ask a question that might have been regarded by the interviewee as particularly intimate or that might have hurt the interviewee's feelings. While the interviews were premised on ensuring that the interviewees would feel free to narrate things that they found important and meaningful for them, and as broadly or as narrowly as they felt was comfortable for them, by steering and controlling the interviews more through additional and close questioning might in some cases have produced richer and more detailed data.



The fact that the interviews (Data 1 and 2) were conducted by a male interviewer similar in age to the interviewees and those in Data 3 by a female interviewer raises the interesting issue of the possible role of gender in the data collection process. Although the interviewer's gender is clearly not the only, or most important, component influencing the interview situation, interviews do not take place in gender vacuum either (Pini & Pease 2013). In terms of generating a sense of togetherness and a confidential atmosphere in interview, however, the effect of gender is not self-evident. For example, if a male interviewer is interviewing a male informant, he can be considered as an insider (Dasgupta 2013; Bridges 2013), who shares something focal (in this case a gender category) with the informant, and which thus might be manifested e.g. as shared meanings between two male persons. This reading would position a female interviewer as an outsider (Pini & Pease 2013), and consequently as who might be given information on some issues from a different point of view, or given information in more or less detail. On the other hand, it has been argued that other features, such as age and socioeconomic status, can build togetherness and a confidential atmosphere to the same extent in the interview situation as gender. Also, at least for some men, it might be a question of what issues can more easily be shared between men, while others might feel more comfortable sharing intimate and personal issues with a female interviewer, owing to the emotional expectations set on female gender. In the present instances, however, my understanding would be that the interviewer's gender did not play a notable role in the interviews. Instead, another issue, parenthood, was shared by both the interviewees and interviewers, as both of the latter were also the parents of small children. While this might have affected the interviews in some other ways, it probably diminished the possible role of gender.

When reflecting on the interviews conducted by myself, although I did not initiate the topic of my own fatherhood, most of the interviewees asked if I was a father, and the affirmative response might have affected the men's talk. As stated above in the context of gender, the issue is twofold: on the one hand, this knowledge might have enhanced the feeling of togetherness, as the interviewee was now aware that the interviewer was in a relatively similar situation in life. On the other hand, the interviewees might have also felt that in talking to a male interviewer of around the same age, and who was also a father, they were under an obligation to produce a narrative showing them to be good and responsible fathers, and males, in accordance with the dominant cultural, and the interviewer's, expectations. On my reading, however, the informants probably felt quite comfortable in the interviews, as all of them were willing to participate in the second-round interviews and several of them said afterwards that the interviews had been a truly meaningful and emotional experience for them.

That fact that I, too, am a father will also have affected this research process outside the interview context. Most importantly, I would probably not have contemplated conducting research on fatherhood without having experienced being a father. Consequently, through the experience of living as a father of an infant in Finnish society, I have been an "insider" in the Finnish early fa-

therhood culture, which has given me insights and understanding on the kinds of situations that male parents confront in their everyday lives. But then, since no research can ever be entirely objective and detached from the researcher's own social context and personal values, my own fatherhood raises a problematic issue with respect to this research. For instance, a non-father researcher might have interpreted some of what was said or implied differently, or brought something new to the research situation. Thus, as researcher who is a father, I had to be self-conscious, critical and mindful not to interpret the fathers' narratives through my own experiences, but rather, to take the advantage of my insider role in posing questions and making the fathers feel comfortable in the interviews. I suspect, however, that similar results would probably have emerged had the research process been carried out by another person with a similar knowledge and understanding of Finnish society and parenting.

All the analyses carried out in the articles can be described as data-based, and were carried out with respect to narrative methodology. However, differences existed in their analytical focuses, as in first article (I) and third article (III) I was interested more in the narrative unities and "big picture" that men formed in their accounts, whereas in the second article (II) I focused on single elements of their paternal responsibilities. Consequently, in strictly narrative terms, the knowledge produced by these analyses is not fully consistent. In the analyses carried out in the first and third articles, the narratives are perceived as wholes, which in many cases are constructed in a somewhat unbroken manner. This leads to epistemological imbalance, as the analysis performed for the second article (II) focuses on the features shared by all the narratives, and so neglects the narrative unities that they are part of. In terms of responsible fatherhood and its gendered bases, however, these divergent analytical focuses enabled a thorough and complex understanding of the phenomenon, as the men's accounts were interpreted from diverse viewpoints. As with the analyses, the concepts that were applied also differed between the articles. As an analytical concept, responsibility was the focus, especially in the second, but also in the third article (III). Although not analyzed in the same sense in the first article (I), the latter nevertheless highlighted the concept of responsibility as essential both for understanding fatherhood in the accounts of the interviewed fathers and as a general level concept that gives us important insights into present-day fatherhood. In all the analyses, however, more attention should have been paid to the temporal dimension of the narratives. Temporality is one of the key characteristics of narratives; the fact that two rounds of interviews were implemented would have clearly enabled closer investigation of temporality and so increased understanding of the evolving processes of paternal responsibilities and added further value to the results. Moreover, the social dimension of narration could have been dealt more explicitly in the articles, although some reflections on the theme are made in this chapter.

Responsible fatherhood has been used in this thesis, and also in part in the original articles, as a summarizing concept to discuss male parenting. As described earlier, much the same issue of men's parental duties has been studied



with concepts such as father involvement, the “new father” and the caring father (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov & Levine 1987; LaRossa 1997; Johansson & Klinth 2008). While all of these concepts have their advantages, the concept of responsibility probably helps us to gain the clearest insight into fathers’ own understanding of their duties as male parents. The concept gives a possibility to understand both fathers’ domestic and extra-domestic parental duties as complementary to each other. Examination of the contents of responsible fatherhood emphasized in the narratives also foregrounds some new aspects of paternal responsibility that are not revealed by application of the earlier conceptualizations. One of these is the non-gendered character of responsible fatherhood shown in the emphasis on parental responsibilities as somewhat similar for fathers as for mothers. This finding suggests that in most cases it might be more fruitful to operate with the concept of responsible parenthood, as it acquires different meanings in different people’s narratives. Another important aspect yielded by using the concept of responsible fatherhood was the greater importance of the role of nurturing than previously found with the earlier conceptualizations.

Looking back over the research process, I also made some conceptual choices that merit reconsideration. One of these is the use of the concept postmodern to describe the narrative highlighting caring and nurturing as essential components of fathering practices in the first article (I). This might better have been discussed as a late, or reflexive, modern narrative of fatherhood. Whereas in the narrative sense postmodernism indicates the fragmented character of contemporary narratives and narrative alternatives, the concept late modern would have more clearly emphasized the narratives as part of the evolving cultural history of fatherhood narratives and models (see Fornäs 1995; Ritzer 2008). This became clear especially in the second and third articles of the thesis (II; III), which highlighted how, despite their individual features, present-day narratives of being a male parent are by no means fragmented or distant from each other, but rather share common ground in many respects. Also, instead of drawing on the concepts of modernization, giving the narratives more content-based names would also have been good option, as the theory of modernization does not play a major role in this thesis overall. However, it does foreground the changing nature of fatherhood narratives, and their relation to past narratives, in ways that render the transformation of the cultural fatherhood narratives more understandable. Also, the names of some of the storylines presented in the first article (I) could have been named more representationally. For example, in the postmodern or rather late modern narrative, the characteristics of the storylines “father’s notable participation in family planning and preparing for fatherhood” and “satisfying couple relationship” would be more representationally captured under the headings “father’s equal share in family planning and active preparation for fatherhood” and “warm and equal couple relationship”. There were also some other concepts, such as metanarrative and storyline (I) and paternal masculinity (III), that played important part in one article or another, but which were not utilized in this thesis. This is not because the con-

cepts are inadequate, but because the aim of thesis was to link together the different concepts and methods used in the articles, and so present an overall picture of the narratives on responsible fatherhood. The concepts used in the articles could nevertheless have been more consistent.

The aim of this thesis was to sketch the outlines of what constitutes responsible fatherhood and in what ways it is gendered on the basis of narratives produced by a sample of men in the early stages of fatherhood. Thus, the results of this study do not give answers to such questions as “What are Finnish first-time fathers like?” or “How responsible are men are in their early fatherhood”? Also, the results cannot be generalized to all fathers. Instead, they are best understood as telling us something about what’s currently going on in the Finnish family and fatherhood cultures, and what the characteristics of responsible fatherhood are thought to be on the part of fathers. For example, although statistics have indicated that a gendered division of labor in early child care and a significant gender gap in the up-take of parental leaves continue to exist in families, of greater importance is that fathers’ share, especially in child care but also in family leaves, is growing at an even rate. The results of this study also support this trend, as they highlight men’s growing awareness of their own caring abilities and opportunities to play an active role in child care from the very onset of fatherhood. In time, with the support of family policies, employers, mothers, and also other women and men who are not themselves parent, this could lead to Finnish men having a share in child care and parental leaves on the same level as their counterparts in the other Nordic countries, and even more optimistically, someday to a level comparable to that of mothers.

## 5.5 Ethical considerations

The study was carried out in compliance with the ethical guidelines for the responsible conduct of research issued by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity. According to these guidelines, the research process must be conducted throughout following the generally accepted principles of academic scholarship such as honesty, meticulousness and openness (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity). In qualitative research, most ethical considerations relate to the transparency of the research process. I have sought to take transparency into account by clearly stating the choices made, actions taken and methods used in all the articles within the limits of the space allowed and in more detail whenever needed in this thesis. Applying, conducting and analyzing empirical interview data in particular brings its own specific challenges that need to be addressed carefully. Below, when reflecting on the ethical issues of the data gathering, I am referring solely to Data 1 and 2, which were gathered by the present author. The ethical considerations pertaining to Data 3 are discussed by Johanna Mykkänen in her thesis (2010). When dealing with the analysis, I am referring to all the analyses presented in the articles.

All the interviewed men enrolled themselves for the study, and thus participation was obviously completely voluntary. When the interview appointments were arranged, they were informed that the interviews would be conducted solely for research purposes. Before the interviews commenced, they signed background information consent forms that included information about themselves, their families, and their work and education, and which can be taken as formal willingness to participate. It was also made clear to them that they can tell as much or as little as feels comfortable to them, and that especial attention will be paid to the anonymization of the interviews. The fact that all the interviewees also participated in the second-round interviews can be taken as a substantial expression of trust originating from the first interviews.

The interviews were carried out in a calm environment, such as a coffee shop or public library, chosen by the interviewee. My instruction to them was to choose a place that they felt comfortable in and in which they could narrate as freely as they liked. Although a few interviews were conducted at the interviewee's homes, most chose to have the interview somewhere else. The interviews were based on the free narration of the participants around relatively broad themes, which left the interviewee free to choose what he would like to tell or not to tell. However, I also asked more precise questions, tried to encourage the fathers to narrate from their own point of view, and asked them to tell me if they found any of my questions irrelevant. In the first few interviews, in particular, some of the interviewees were more reserved and found the production of free narration around the themes difficult. This had the result that my role as an interviewer was emphasized. However, as my interviewees were fully reasonable adults, I also had to trust them to tell me if the questions were too personal or intimate, or if there was something that they would rather not talk about.

As the interviews were confidential and dealt with issues that can be considered intimate and private, especial attention was paid to the anonymization of the interviews. In practice, this means making sure that the interviewees cannot be identified from the interview extracts or narrative constructions presented in the articles. As, at most, one verbatim extract from an interview with the same individual was included in each article, it was not difficult to give the interviewees pseudonyms and make sure that no information that could be used to identify them was included in any of the extracts. All the interviewees were also given new pseudonyms in each article to make it as difficult as possible to track an informant from one article to another. All three narrative constructions presented in the first article (I) and the construction of the "Decent father" in the third article (III) were constructed from the speech of several interviewees; this this can be considered a useful technique for protecting the identities of individuals in interview reports. The two narratives presented in the third article (III) ("The Equal" and "The Masculine") were, however, ethically more problematic from the standpoint of informant anonymity. As these narratives were condensed from the interview speech of individual interviewees, they required extra care to prevent identification of these informants. This issue

was resolved, in addition to standard anonymization, by changing all the information that could be used to identify the father, such as his age, place of residence and occupation, and the age of the children. In the condensed narratives all the information that could provide clues for identification was removed.

The narrative constructions (I; III), while unproblematic in terms of anonymity, raised other ethical considerations. The most challenging issue was to make sure that the narrative constructions, when based on the talk of several interviewees, did not, knowingly or unknowingly distort their meanings. This problem was overcome by constructing the narratives carefully, basing them strictly on the analysis and confirming all the readings of the narrative constructions with the co-authors. Also, as it was not possible to illustrate the process of constructing the narratives step by step within the space allowed for the articles, this has been done in chapter 3.3 of this thesis.

## 5.6 Suggestions for the future research

Finally, I offer two suggestions for consideration in future research on Finnish fatherhood. First, this study only concerns narratives of early fatherhood. However, it would be at least equally valuable to study narratives during the later phases of fatherhood, as life situations and forms of fatherhood often become more diverse and complex over time. Also, as children grow up, new challenges, possibilities and demands on the father invariably emerge. To track these transitions within fatherhood would be possible by continuing this study with follow-up interviews with the same informants. However, it would also be of fundamental importance to study first-time fathers from more heterogeneous background and life situations through completely new and more multifaceted data. If a more comprehensive and accurate account of fatherhood is desired, it is not enough to study fathers and their narratives solely in the middle-class hetero nuclear family context. Rather, it would be important to broaden the understanding of fatherhood by also including the narratives of single fathers, remote fathers, stepfathers and fathers living in multifaceted LGBT families, to mention a few.

Second, a large proportion of the research conducted on Nordic fatherhood over the past decade has dealt for the most part with men's family leaves or with their cultural conceptions, discourses or narratives on fatherhood. Consequently, it would appear that the importance of studying the everyday life practices of fathers, both in the early and later stages of fatherhood, has been somewhat neglected in recent research. This ignorance of fathers' real life practices is not only a limitation of Nordic and Finnish research per se, but is also in light of the fact that while globally Nordic fathers have been acknowledged as forerunners of the "new" fatherhood, little data have been gathered on their fathering practices. Thus, more attention in Nordic research should be paid to such questions as "What are fathers really doing in the family?", "In what parental practices do men with infants actually participate?" and "How and to

what extent do fathers become involved with their infant children?" By posing questions like these, we could gather information which would enable a more comprehensive understanding of early fatherhood.

## TIIVISTELMÄ

### Vastuullinen isyys: Kerronnallinen lähestymistapa

Isyyden muutoksesta hoivaavammaksi on puhuttu 1980-luvulta alkaen. Tämän päivän suomalaista vanhemmuuskulttuuria voidaan kuvailla isäystävälliseksi jaettua vanhemmuutta ja hoivaavaa isyyttä korostavien puhetaiposten ollessa vahvoja. Isät myös hoitavat lapsiaan huomattavasti enemmän 2010-luvulla kuin aikaisemmin. Vaikka vanhemmuuden sukupuolittuneisuus ei ole tämän myötä kadonnut, elättäjyyteen pohjautuvat etäiset isyyden mallit ovat tehneet yhä enemmän tilaa aiempaa tunnepitoisemmalle ja lapsen hoivaamiseen sitoutuneelle isyydelle. Tämä kehityskulku vaikuttaa siihen, miten miehet kertovat isyydestä ja isälle kuuluvista vanhemmuuden vastuualueista.

Tämän väitöstutkimuksen aiheena ovat suomalaisten pienten lasten isien käsitykset ja kertomukset vastuullisesta isyydestä. Tutkimuksen tavoite on kaksiosainen. Ensin tarkastelen, *kuinka miehet käsitteellistävät vastuullista isyyttä*. Tämän jälkeen kysyn, *millaisia sukupuolittuneita käsityksiä paljastuu ja kuinka vanhemmuus sukupuolittuu miesten kertomuksissa*. Tutkimukseni sijoittuu perhettä ja sukupuolta tarkastelemaan kasvatustieteen ja sosiologian kenttään. Se jatkaa Jyväskylän yliopiston Kasvatustieteen laitoksella muodostunutta perhe-elämää, vanhemmuutta ja kasvatusta tarkastelevaa perhetutkimusperinnettä. Se ottaa myös osaa globaaliin sosiologiseen tutkimussuuntaukseen, jossa henkilökohtaisia kokemuksia ja perhe-elämää tarkastellaan sukupuolen kautta.

Tutkimukseni pohjautuu kerronnalliseen metodologiaan, jonka mukaan kertomukset rakentavat, välittävät ja uusintavat sekä henkilökohtaisia merkityksiä että kulttuurisia käsityksiä todellisuudesta. Kerronnallisuuden lähtökohdaksi on, että kertominen on ihmiselle luontainen tapa tuottaa merkityksiä ja havainnoida ympäröivää todellisuutta. Sosiaali- ja kasvatustieteissä kerronnallisia menetelmiä on käytetty 1980-luvulta lähtien tarkasteltaessa perhe-elämää ja elämänmuutoksiin liittyviä henkilökohtaisia ja intiimejä kysymyksiä. Tässä tutkimuksessa yksilöllisten kokemusten ja kulttuuristen merkitysten yhteenkietoutumista tarkastellaan analysoimalla isien haastatteluja omakohtaisina kertomuksina, jotka ovat kerrottu suhteessa kulttuuriseen todellisuuteen. Näin henkilökohtaisista isyyserkeryksistä voidaan löytää laajempia kulttuurisia merkityksiä.

Tutkimuksen empiirinen aineisto muodostuu kolmesta haastatteluaineistosta kattaen yhteensä 60 haastattelua 44 isältä. Aineistoista ensimmäinen (Data 1) koostuu kuudentoista (16) ensikertaa isäksi tulleen miehen haastattelusta. Haastatteluhetkellä 23–29-vuotiaat isät haastateltiin heidän esikoistensa ollessa 6kk – 2v vanhoja. Miehet asuivat yhdessä lapsensa ja lapsen äidin kanssa. Opiskelun ja työelämän välistä käännekohtaa elävillä miehillä oli hieman keskimääräistä korkeampi koulutus, ja heitä voidaan kuvata keskiluokkaisiksi. Haastattelut keskittyivät miesten kokemuksiin isäksi tulemisesta ja pienen lapsen isänä olemisesta. Toinen aineisto (Data 2) sisältää ensimmäiseen aineistoon haastattujen miesten uusintahaastattelut (16). Ne toteutettiin noin kaksi vuotta ensimmäisen

mäisten haastattelujen jälkeen. Tänä aikana monet haastateltavat olivat siirtyneet opinnoista työelämään ja saaneet lisää lapsia. Haastateltavista yksi oli eronnut ja muuttanut pois lapsensa ja puolisonsa luota. Kaksi ensimmäistä haastatteluaineistoa keräsin itse. Kolmas aineisto (Data 3) muodostuu Johanna Mykkäsen väitöskirjaansa (Mykkänen 2010) keräämistä kahdenkymmenen kahdeksan (28) esikoisisän haastattelusta. Mykkäsen haastattelemat isät olivat haastatteluhetkellä 21–44-vuotiaita, ja heidän esikoisensa 6kk – 3v6kk ikäisiä. Miesten koulutustausta vaihteli peruskoulusta yliopistolliseen jatkotutkintoon. Mykkäsen keräämät haastattelut täydentävät kahta ensimmäistä haastatteluaineistoa siten, että haastateltavien ikähaitari on laajempi ja koulutustausta monimuotoisempi.

Väitöskirjan artikkeleista ensimmäinen (Data 1) tarkastelee miesten kuvauksia isäksi tulemisesta ja pienen lapsen isänä olemisesta. Erittelemällä tarinalinjoja miesten kuvauksista havaitsin kolme erilaista isyyden kertomusta: sukupuolittunut moderni kertomus, uudenlaisia isänä olon tapoja etsivä siirtymäkertomus sekä isyyden ja äitiyden rinnastava myöhäismoderni kertomus. Vaikka miesvanhemmuus näyttäytyy jokaisessa kertomuksissa erilaisena, jokaiseen niistä sisältyy kuvaus läsnä olevasta ja perhekeskeisestä isyydestä. Tutkimuksen artikkeleista toinen (Datat 1 ja 2) kuvaa miesten käsityksiä isän vastuualueista vanhempana. Artikkelissa esitetyt tulokset kuvaavat kuinka pienten lasten isät korostavat rinnakkain sekä lastenhoidon käytäntöön osallistumista että perheen elättämistä keskeisinä isän tehtävinä. Myös kasvatustehtävään panostaminen koettiin keskeiseksi vastuullista isyyttä määritteleväksi tekijäksi. Kolmannessa artikkelissa (Datat 1 ja 3) miesten isyykertomuksia tarkastellaan sukupuolen ja maskuliinisuuden näkökulmasta. Hallitseva kerrontatapa kuvaa vanhempien välisiä sukupuolieroja, mutta isät näyttäytyvät kuitenkin läsnäolevina ja äidin kanssa hoivatyötä jakavina vanhempina. Vaihtoehtoisina isämiehisyydestä kertomisen tapoina olivat sekä perinteiseksi tulkittua maskuliinisuutta korostava että sukupuolieron kokonaan häivyttävä kerrontatapa.

Tämän väitöskirjan tutkimustuloksissa korostuu, että pienten lasten isät kokevat lastenhoitotyön tekemisen lapsen syntymästä alkaen keskeisimmäksi vastuullista isyyttä kuvaavaksi tekijäksi. Miesten kertomuksissa hoivaaminen ja konkreettinen hoitotyö näyttäytyvät itsestänselvyyksinä, jotka pohjaavat isän omaan aloitteellisuuteen ja vastuuntuntoon. Isyys saa kertomuksissa monin paikoin aiemmin pikemminkin äitiyteen liitettyjä piirteitä. Samalla kun isien vanhempainvastuu on laajentunut, miesten kuvauksissa aiemmin pääasiassa isän tehtäväksi nähty taloudellinen vastuu tulkittiin vanhempien yhteisenä jaetuna vastuualueena. Lasten ollessa pieniä käytäntö ja ideaalit eivät kuitenkaan aina kohdanneet; tasa-arvoisesta puheesta huolimatta haastateltavien puoliset pitivät muun muassa valtaosan perhevapaista miesten huolehtiessa perheiden taloudellisesta hyvinvoinnista.

Miesten kertomukset kuvaavat, että vanhemmuuden sukupuolittuneisuutta kyseenalaistetaan entistä laaja-alaisemmin. Miehisyyksäsitukset eivät rajoita isien monimuotoista osallistumista lastenhoitoon; hoivaavuus näyttää pikemminkin sisältyvän yhä enemmän käsityksiin kunnollisesta miehisyydestä.



Toisaalta kertomusten mukanaan viimekäden 24/7-vastuu lapsen arkihoidosta ja hyvinvoinnista on usein yhä äidin tehtävä. Myöskään pitkän vanhempain- tai hoitovapaan pitämiseen ei liittynyt miehillä vastaavanlaista kulttuurista oletusta kuin äideillä. Iseillä on edelleen äitejä suurempi valta määrittellä oman hoivan ja vastuun ehdot ja rajat.

Väitöstutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että vivahde-eroista huolimatta miesten käsitykset vastuullisesta isyydestä ovat varsin yhtenäisiä. Isän hoito- ja hoivavastuu näyttäytyy kulttuurisena ideaalina, jonka nykyisät tunnistavat keskeiseksi vastuullista isyyttä kuvaavaksi tekijäksi. Isyys näyttää myös muodostuneen aiempaan refleksiivisemmäksi erityisesti nuorehkojen ja koulutettujen kaupunkilaismiesten pohtiessa laajasti rooliaan ja vastuutaan isänä. Muuttuneiden ideaalien lisäksi kertomukset kuvaavat isien roolimutosta perheissä. Näyttää sitä, että isät ovat päässeet entistä paremmin mukaan perheen tunne- maailmaan ja emotionaaliseen keskiöön samalla kun isyydestä on tullut elämä- nänalue, jolla miehet saavat näyttää tunteitaan ja toimia toisin kuin mikä on perinteisesti ymmärretty miehekkääksi. Vaikka isien hoivaroolit perheissä vaihtelevat paljon äidin apulaisen ja täysivaltaisen vanhemman välillä, lapsiaan hoi- tava ja lapsiperheen arjessa läsnä oleva isä edustaa 2010-luvun kulttuurista val- tavirtaa.

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## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW TOPICS

### 1st interviews (Data 1)

- *“Tell me how did you became a father and how you consider yourself as a father?”*
- Time before the child
- Pregnancy
- Childbirth
- Growth of the child
- Everyday fatherhood
- Being a young father
- Couple relationship
- *“What are you expecting of your fatherhood in the future?”*

### 2nd interviews (Data 2)

- *“It has been 2 years since we last met. At the time, your first-born was (X years/months) old, you were living in (place/apartment), and you were (working fulltime/studying/at stay-at home period etc.). Now, in your own words, tell me what has happened in your life since then, and what’s happening at the moment?”*
- Fathering infant
- Becoming a father for a 2<sup>nd</sup> time (if relevant)
- Everyday fatherhood
- Practices of involvement
- Responsible fatherhood
- Gendered parenting practices
- Couple relationship
- *“What are you expecting of your fatherhood in the future?”*



## APPENDIX 2: THE FATHERS

Fathers interviewed for the Data 1 and 2 are introduced in the table below (Table 5). All names are anonymized, as also are occupations in cases where revealing the actual occupation could risk the anonymity of the interviewee. Ages of the children are rounded to the nearest half-year. For the fathers interviewed for the Data 3, see Mykkänen (2010, 50-51, 161).

TABLE 5 Interviewed fathers (Data 1 and 2)

Name	Age (1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> interviews)	Children (2 <sup>nd</sup> interviews)	Education and occupation	Extended family leaves (2 <sup>nd</sup> interviews)	Additional info
Juha	27/28 years	2 (3 years/6 months)	MA, researcher, PhD candidate	6 months	
Joonas	27/29 years	2 (3,5 years/1 year)	MA, stay-at-home-father (1 <sup>st</sup> int.), self-employed (2 <sup>nd</sup> int.)	2 years	
Marko	27/28 years	2 (3 years/1 year)	MA, researcher, psychologist	4 months	
Pekka	27/28 years	1 (2,5 years)	MA student, software designer	-	
Esa	27/28 years	2 (3 years/1,5 years)	BBA, financial advisor	1,5 years	
Timo	29/31 years	3 (3 years/2 years/6 months)	BSc, engineer	-	
Ismo	27/29 years	2 (2,5 years/1 year)	High-school graduate (1 <sup>st</sup> int.), MA student (2 <sup>nd</sup> int.)	5 months	
Pertti	28/29 years	2 (3 years/1year)	BSc, MSc student, programmer	1 year	
Jarkko	28/30 years	2 (4 years/2 years)	MSc, IT specialist	-	
Ville	24/26 years	2 (2,5 years/6 months)	MSc student, project engineer	-	
Iiro	26/27 years	1 (2,5 years)	MA student	-	Stepfather of 2 children from spouse's previous relationship

Antti	26/28 years	2 (3,5 years/2 years)	MSc student (1 <sup>st</sup> int.), MSc, engineer (2 <sup>nd</sup> int.)	-	
Teemu	27/29 years	2 (3,5 years/2 years)	MSc student, economy analyst	-	
Ilari	24/26 years	1 (2,5 years)	BBA, self-employed	-	
Kössi	29/31 years	2 (3,5 years/1,5 years)	High-school graduate, blue-collar worker	-	Divorced at time of 2nd interview
Kauko	23/25 years	2 (2,5 years, 1 year)	MSc student, part-time research assistant	4 months	

**ORIGINAL ARTICLES**

**I**

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

by

Petteri Eerola & Jouko Huttunen, 2011

Fathering 9 (3), 211-231

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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 metanarrative 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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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 caregiving 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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## II

### **NURTURING, BREADWINNING AND UPBRINGING: PATERNAL RESPONSIBILITIES BY FINNISH MEN IN EARLY FATHERHOOD**

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## **Nurturing, breadwinning, and upbringing: paternal responsibilities by Finnish men in early fatherhood**

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In the Nordic countries, including Finland, gender-balanced distribution of childcare is both the goal of family policies and nowadays also a cultural norm of parenting. Thus, in most families, the father, along with the mother, plays a considerable role in hands-on care. This study captures and analyzes paternal responsibilities as narrated by Finnish fathers. It draws on 32 interviews with 16 fathers conducted during the first 3 years of their fatherhood, and applies the method of narrative inquiry, in which narratives are understood as constructors of knowledge. The analysis yielded nurturing, breadwinning, and upbringing, framed by the levels of everyday duties and comprehensive commitments, as the constituents of paternal responsibility. Probably as an outcome of the Finnish gender-equal and familistic societal atmosphere, nurturing played the focal role in the men's accounts. On the conceptual level, the results support the view that the dimension of responsibility is wholly embedded in fathering practices.

**Keywords:** fatherhood; parental responsibility; Finland; narrative inquiry; masculine care; gendered parenting

Dans les pays du Nord, y compris la Finlande, la répartition équilibrée des rôles par sexe en ce qui concerne la garde des enfants est à la fois un objectif des stratégies familiales et, de nos jours aussi, une norme culturelle de parentage. Ainsi, dans la plupart des familles, le père, ainsi que la mère, joue un rôle considérable dans les tâches pratiques de prise en charge des enfants. Cette étude montre et analyse les responsabilités parentales telles qu'elles sont racontées par des parents finlandais. Elle est basée sur 32 entretiens avec 16 parents qui ont eu lieu lors de leurs trois premières années de paternité. Cette étude utilise l'investigation narrative à travers laquelle les récits sont considérés comme des constructeurs de savoir. L'analyse montre qu'élever les enfants, subvenir aux besoins de la famille, et éduquer les enfants—déterminés par l'importance des tâches quotidiennes et des engagements fermes à tous les niveaux—sont des éléments constitutifs de la responsabilité paternelle. Sans doute, élever les enfants, qui est le résultat de l'atmosphère sociétale de la répartition égale des rôles par sexe et de la vie de famille des finlandais, est un rôle essentiel chez les hommes. Sur le plan conceptuel, les résultats confirment le point de vue selon lequel la dimension de la responsabilité est entièrement intégrée aux pratiques de paternité.

**Mots-clés:** L'engagement paternel; Finlande; Narrativité; Responsabilité paternel; Partage des responsabilités parentales

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## Introduction

Across the Western societies, starting from around the 1980s, significant changes in men's parenting have become increasingly evident (e.g. Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Forste, Bartkowski, & Jackson, 2009; Morgan, 1996, p. 101; Smart, 2011, p. 43). Involved and participative fatherhood has, at least to some extent, become more widespread and also culturally more acceptable – even demanded – as the norm of male parenthood (e.g. Doucet, 2006; Miller, 2011). For instance, it seems clear that the traditional tasks of fathering – begetting, protecting, and providing (see Benson, 1968; Coltrane, 2011, p. 171; Parsons, 1955) – do not meet the expectations of contemporary fathering, as more sensitive and 'hands-on' ways of involvement have become the dominant cultural conceptions of 'good fatherhood' (e.g. Eerola & Huttunen, 2011). These shifts in cultural expectations have likely involved novel moral duties that have affected men's sense of their parental responsibilities.

The increased public interest in male parenting has been accompanied by a notable expansion of research interest (Doucet, 2013), especially in the social sciences. Whereas psychologically oriented studies of father involvement and paternal engagement in early fatherhood and during the child's growth have accumulated over several decades (see Lamb, 2010; Mikelson, 2008; Pleck, 2010), it is only recently that greater sociological research interest has been directed toward male parenting (e.g. Dermott, 2008; Doucet, 2006; Miller 2011). Lately, interest has also been shown in such questions as how fathers balance earning and caring (McDonald & Jeanes, 2012) and the connections between fatherhood and work in general (e.g. Brandth, 2012; Miller, 2011). In addition, there has been a substantial amount of research on men's share of family leaves, especially in the Nordic countries (Almqvist, 2008; Lammi-Taskula, 2008; O'Brien & Moss, 2010). However, studies on *paternal responsibilities* from the viewpoint of fathers have remained scarce (see Doucet, 2012).

In this study, conducted in the multidimensional field of qualitative research (see LaRossa, 2012), my overall aim is to capture, analyze, and conceptualize the paternal responsibilities narrated by Finnish fathers during their early fatherhood. Here, paternal responsibilities refer to the responsibilities narrated by fathers themselves, as either wholly their own or shared with their spouses. The aim relates to the social and cultural context of Finland, one of the Nordic countries and the European Union (EU) member state (for fatherhood in the EU, see Sigle-Rushton, Goisis, & Keizer, 2013), in which men become and act as parents. The Nordic countries, commonly perceived as pioneers in gender-equal family policies (Coltrane & Behnke, 2013, p. 421), are characterized by extended father-care leave with high income replacement (O'Brien, 2009) and a strongly held societal principle of gender equality (Forsberg, 2005). These countries, in which a gender-balanced distribution of care work is both the goal of the equality politics and nowadays also a cultural norm of parenting, constitute globally rare exceptions where men can reduce their working hours or opt for parental leave after childbirth (see Smart, 2011, p. 43). Methodologically, the study applies *narrative inquiry*, which has attained a high profile in qualitative social research during recent decades. Thus, the subject of the study is men's narration of what they perceive to be their paternal responsibilities, not their actual practices. The specific research question is as follows: What duties and practices do Finnish fathers narrate as paternal responsibilities in their early fatherhood?

## Theoretical background

### *Sketching paternal responsibility*

The morally loaded concept of parental responsibility is simultaneously both culturally defined and connected to people's identities as moral beings (e.g. Beck-Gernsheim, 2000, p. 130; Doucet, 2006, p. 209). Practically speaking, all over the world, parental responsibility is commonly perceived as clustering around such tasks as taking care of a child's everyday needs, providing for the child, and socializing the child into society. A more theoretical way to contemplate parental responsibilities is to make a distinction between caring for and caring about (Morgan, 1996, pp. 97–98). Whereas the former concept refers to actual care work and practices, the latter inscribes emotional meanings and other 'higher level' care-related content. This approach can be applied to parental responsibility, i.e. parental responsibilities both as practices and as the profound emotional engagement behind them. Nevertheless, parental responsibilities are culturally gendered in character (see Morgan, 2011, p. 45). Although gender inequality on a more general level has narrowed across the Western world during recent decades, a gap between which parental duties and responsibilities are perceived culturally as 'paternal' and which are viewed as 'maternal' continues to prevail. This is especially true in the case of young infants, where 'hands-on' parenthood and taking care of infants needs are even today more closely identified with motherhood (e.g. Morgan, 2011, p. 45) and breadwinning with fatherhood (Perälä-Littunen, 2007).

In studies on male parental responsibilities, particular attention has been paid to the concept of father involvement. The concept, showcased by Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1987) and Pleck, Lamb, and Levine (1985), represents the father's involvement in his child and parenthood through the components of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. According to Lamb et al. (1987), Pleck et al. (1985), and Pleck (2010, p. 59) engagement refers to the father's participation in hands-on care work and physical and psychological presence, accessibility refers to being readily available for direct interaction with the child, and responsibility refers to ensuring that the child is taken care of and providing for resources for the child. Several studies have highlighted how both men's practices and accounts of involvement are shaped by a number of intersectional factors, such as social class, education, sexual orientation, and marital status, and contextual factors, such as cultural atmosphere and social policies (e.g. Doherty et al., 1998; Shows & Gerstel, 2009; Townsend, 2002; Yoshida, 2012). Thus, the meaning of responsible fatherhood for the Finnish stay-at-home dad, Australian single father, or US breadwinner father might be different.

Recently, contributions to the concepts of responsibility and involvement have been made by, among others, Townsend (2002) and Doucet (2006). Townsend (2002) has portrayed 'four facets of fatherhood' (in the US context) as emotional closeness, provision, protection, and endowment. Doucet (2009, p. 84) has challenged Lamb's concept by taking up interaction and accessibility as dimensions of responsibility, suggesting that paternal responsibility should be considered a pervasive feature, rather than an individual component, of paternal involvement. In other words, responsibility cannot be separated from other aspects of fathering, or parenting, in general. To conceptualize responsibility in more detail, Doucet (2006, 2009) has expanded the current readings of paternal responsibility by drawing on Ruddick's (1995) definition of maternal demands – preservation, growth, and social acceptability. She has adapted Ruddick's maternal demands to those of the father in the domestic sphere under the headings of emotional, community, and moral responsibility. By emotional responsibility, she refers to

the preservative and protective care that, culturally, is generally attached to motherhood. According to Doucet, contemporary fathers commonly perform this kind of care (at least in Western societies), as a large body of studies has attested to fathers' engagement in nurture and care work (e.g. Dienhart, 1998; Doucet, 2009). Community responsibility she interprets as community-based and inter-institutional responsibilities, i.e. facilitating children's growth outside the domestic sphere (Doucet, 2006). Finally, moral responsibility refers to cultural conceptions of paternal responsibilities, i.e. what it means to be a good father (Doucet, 2006).

Although fathers have taken a greater share in family practices, especially in child care, and also in other household duties (e.g. Doucet, 2006; Miller, 2011), this has not yet overtaken their extra-domestic responsibilities, i.e. breadwinning (Parsons, 1955). Breadwinning as a 'male duty' continues to occupy a major role both culturally and in practice (see Craig & Mullan, 2010; Lammi-Taskula, 2008; Miller, 2011; Shows & Gerstel, 2009), as in the majority of families, final, or primary, responsibility, both at home and in nurturing, remains the task of mothers. Several studies (e.g. Doucet, 2006; Miller, 2011) have reported that reflection on and dealing with economic issues has a focal part in the lives of most fathers, as providing can be understood as psychological involvement with both the child and family (Dienhart, 1998). For example, Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) underline how providing should be considered as a form of involvement that strengthens the emotional bond between father and child. However, as it seems that providing is not, alone, enough for responsible paternity (e.g. Eerola & Mykkänen, 2013; Yoshida, 2012), achieving a proper balance between work and family is likely to become an increasingly important aspect of responsible fatherhood.

#### ***Gendered parental responsibilities in the 'early years'***

Throughout Western societies, men's expressed desire to become more involved and 'hands-on' with their children has increased during the past few decades (see Smart, 2011, p. 43; Yoshida, 2012). Nevertheless, men's actual practices have not changed as much as this might suggest. Consequently, parental practices and responsibilities in the early years of parenthood have retained their highly gendered character (Doucet, 2009; Miller, 2011). Owing to its biological basis (mainly the physical facts of pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding), early parenthood is not a gender-equal phenomena; on the contrary, according to Fox (2009, p. 6), parenthood in itself creates and reproduces gender more thoroughly than any other experience in most people's lives. This highlights the family as a gendered institution in which relationships and practices are profoundly gendered in multiple ways (e.g. Morgan, 1996).

Fox (2009, p. 293 and p. 297) reports that, in early parenthood, both Canadian men and women describe their parental responsibilities in similar ways. However, quite soon after becoming parents, couples who earlier shared domestic duties become more conventional with respect to who does what, i.e. women take on the greater proportion of child and household care while men concentrate on the provider role, becoming the mother's assistant, and the baby's playmate (Fox, 2009, p. 293). Parental responsibilities have a relational character, however, and mothering practices shape fathering practices in families, and vice versa (Dermott, 2008, p. 77; Doucet, 2013, p. 298). Fox (2009, p. 306) found that among first-time parents this led quite often to a situation, where the mother 'protected' her spouse from the disruptions of infant life, restricting the father's hands-on involvement with the child and narrowing his possibilities to achieve parental skills. The

issue has been termed maternal gatekeeping, i.e. the mother's (usually unintentional) attitudes and practices, based on a cultural understanding of good motherhood that inhibits men's growth toward and equal learning of parental caring skills (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Gatekeeping can also be considered as institutional, in that society, through maternity and child welfare clinics and parental policies, charges mothers with profound parental responsibilities, while for fathers parental responsibility is usually seen as a private choice within the family. According to Coltrane (2011, p. 186), however, 'maternal thinking' (see Ruddick, 1995) and the ability to respond to the infant's needs can be achieved just as sensitively by the father as the mother, providing the father has the same degree of investment in hands-on parenthood from the very beginning.

### ***Finnish context***

In Finland and the other Nordic countries, which are commonly cited as models of gender-equal parenting and shared parenthood, the discourses of shared caring are strong (e.g. Lundqvist, 2012, p. 35). For example, fatherhood is a favorite topic of parental experts and family specialists, and active and caring fathers have become mainstream in television, advertising media, weekly magazines, and lately, in social media. Shared caring is also supported by parental policies, as paid paternal leave is 9 weeks, maternal leave 18 weeks, and negotiable parental leave 26 weeks, after which a home care allowance is paid for up to 3 years to the parent who stays home to take care of the child(ren) (see Salmi, 2012). In addition, services and support for fathers are significant goals of institutional policies. Thus, on the ideological level, hands-on caregiving is bound to good and responsible fathering in Finnish society.

Nevertheless, everyday practices depart from expressed ideals. Finnish fathers, like their Nordic colleagues, continue to be at greater liberty to decide the terms of their engagement and participation (Miller, 2011, p. 1096), take less parental leave (Brandth, 2012; Forsberg, 2005; Haataja, 2009; Lammi-Taskula, 2006), and work significantly more hours outside the home than mothers (Miettinen & Rotkirch, 2012, p. 34), all of which tend to stress the mother's primary role in infant nurturing and caregiving, with the father as economic provider and assistant caregiver. Despite contradictions between paternal ideologies and practices, in global comparison, Finnish men can be considered to be relatively more involved in child care practices than fathers in many other countries. For example, over 80% of all fathers, and virtually all those living with their children, take at least a couple of weeks of paternal leave after a child is born (Haataja, 2009), and engage to a significant extent in hands-on parenthood thereafter, with over 40% of all the childcare in families with small children being done by fathers (Miettinen & Rotkirch, 2012). In addition, although sharing child care equally does not necessarily mean equality in other domestic domains (e.g. Gatrell, 2007), statistics indicate that men's share of housework in Finnish families with children up to age 6 is approximately on the same level as their contribution to child care (slightly over 40% of all housework was done by fathers) (Miettinen & Rotkirch, 2012).

## **Method**

### ***Methodological background***

This qualitative study draws on narrative epistemology, applying the method of narrative inquiry, in which narratives are understood as constructors, mediators, and reproducers of

personal meanings and cultural conceptions. Since the ‘narrative turn’ in qualitative research in the late 1980s, the method has received increasing attention in social and human research (e.g. Hänninen, 2004; Loseke, 2007; Riessman, 2003; Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008, p. 1). The basic premise of narrativity is that telling stories is an innate and familiar way for people to produce meanings and indicate their perceptions of the world. Moreover, since personal experiences and stories interact with cultural narratives, narrative inquiry is interested in how people narrate their lives and how their narratives are connected to the wider social context (Plummer, 2001, p. 186; Somers, 1994).

Hatch and Wisniewski (1995, pp. 116–118) describe the characteristics of narrative inquiry as focusing on the individual, being personal in research nature, adopting a practical orientation, and emphasizing subjectivity. In comparison to qualitative methods in general, narrative inquiry has the advantage that it draws attention to personal experiences and at the same time enables narratives to be understood as ‘social acts’ (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 197) that are timely and situationally produced and interpreted in a particular social context. The method sees narratives as constructions that enable individuals to gain a sense of ‘reality,’ and to understand, expound, and construe phenomena from the perspective of socially constructed reality (Bruner, 1986, p. 122; Chase, 2005, p. 656; Josselson, 1995, p. 33). Through narratives, individuals construct their lifespan as a continuum (Frank, 2002), normalizing and ‘naturalizing’ the experiences and events in their lives (Abbott, 2009, p. 40) and creating coherence by linking sporadic events into meaningful wholes (Loseke, 2007, p. 672; Polkinghorne, 1991). Thus, among the topics studied using a narrative approach, intimate issues, such as life stories and life changes, have been especially popular (e.g. Hänninen, 2004; Riessman, 2003). Studying life changes through narratives enables us to capture the meanings people give to the most sensitive experiences in their lives (Hänninen, 2004, p. 76). While there is no unambiguous answer to the question ‘What is a sensitive topic?’ (Hyden, 2008, p. 134), early fatherhood can be considered such an intimate topic for the vast majority of men.

In this study narrative analysis was conducted to investigate Finnish fathers’ experiences of paternal responsibility in relation to prevailing cultural models. As a tool to consolidate and systematize the analysis of the narratives of paternal responsibility, I utilized the coding methods – open, axial, and selective coding – used in Straussian grounded theory (GT) approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; see Kelle, 2007). I applied them as tools both to capture and analyze key narrative themes and dimensions of paternal responsibility and to increase the reliability of the narrative analysis. Although this might invite criticism due to differences in epistemological basis of narrative research and GT, GT is regarded as one of the most systematic qualitative research methods, and has several advantages that could fruitfully be applied more broadly within qualitative research including narrative analysis. Corresponding approaches have been also adopted by others (e.g. Roy, 2006).

### ***Data***

The empirical data of the study comprise in-depth interviews with 16 fathers, conducted by the author during 2008–2011. All the fathers were interviewed twice during the first 3 years of their fatherhood, and hence the total number of interviews was 32. The first round of interviews was conducted when fathers’ first-borns were from 6 months to



2 years of age. At the time, all the interviewed fathers were living in a heterosexual relationship (marital or cohabitation) with the mother of their child, which is the usual way in which men become first-time fathers in Finland and the other Nordic countries today, while other forms of fatherhood may exist at later stages of men's lives. Prior to pregnancy, the men's couple relationship with the mother of their child were from 6 months to 5 years. The second round of interviews was conducted approximately 2 years later. At that time, the fathers were aged from 25 to 31 years, 13 of them had fathered more children, and 1 had divorced and was living apart from his children although keeping regularly in touch with them. The interviewed men represented various professional fields, such as engineers, health-care specialists, students, security guards, and private entrepreneurs. During the second round of interviews, 11 of the men were working full-time, 3 were full-time students, and 2 were stay-at-home fathers. Ten of them held a BA- or MA-level degree (or equivalent). Overall, the men can broadly be described as middle class, though with slightly above-average education. Seven men had experience of being a stay-at-home father (from 4 months to 2 years). The interviewees were recruited through e-mailing lists of students with families, various general and family-themed internet discussion forums, and snowball sampling. As participation was voluntary, it can be assumed that only fathers who were engaged and interested in the topic participated, thereby limiting the generalizability of findings. The interviews took place, for example, in coffee shops, homes, public libraries, and other convenient places chosen by the interviewee, and lasted for 90 minutes on average. The total data comprised over 48 hours of interview speech.

I conducted the in-depth interviews by applying the methods of the narrative and thematic interview. Whereas the first round of interviews focused on first-time fatherhood, the second round of interviews dealt with issues of everyday family life and parental practices in the post-babyhood stage. In the second interview, I encouraged the fathers to talk freely about the issues that they found personally meaningful and important, but also set some precise questions, such as 'In your own words, tell me what factors make for a responsible father?'; 'How do you personally fit the picture of responsible fatherhood that you have just described?'; and 'What, if any, do you think are the key differences between paternal and maternal responsibility?'. As the interviews were informal in most of them the men produced broad narratives that went beyond the immediate issue of parenting. For example, they spoke about their couple relationship, the division of housework, working life, and their lives in general. As the purpose of the study was not to describe the temporal process of engaging in responsibility, but rather to build a comprehensive picture of how fathers see their fatherhood during the 'early years,' my analysis, although drawing on the first interview data, focused mainly on the second interviews. Men's narratives at the onset of their fatherhood have been analyzed and reported earlier as part of the project of which this study forms part (see Eerola & Huttunen, 2011; Eerola & Mykkänen, 2013).

### *Analysis*

I implemented analysis by reading and coding the interviews with the aim of finding similarities and dissimilarities between fathers' narratives. When reading the interviews, I paid special attention to the language used by the men in describing their relations with their child and their child-rearing practices, their role in the family (especially engagement in child care and household duties), and to the gendering of parental



responsibilities. In this phase, I systematically coded narrative fragments and expressions that indicated divergent perspectives on paternal responsibility (open coding); thus, the narrative themes of *nurturing*, *breadwinning*, and *upbringing* began to emerge. Next, I examined the interviews in light of the emergent themes and the interrelations between these in detail (axial coding). Finally, I interpreted the fathers' narratives according to the extent and character of responsibility (selective coding). This yielded two conceptual levels – *everyday duties* and *comprehensive commitments* – of paternal responsibility. As the interviews were conducted in Finnish, the narrative samples presented in this article have been translated into English with an aim of extracting the general sense and meanings of the narratives rather than a literal word for word translation (see Nikander, 2008).

## Results

In this section, I present the three narrative themes of paternal responsibility – nurturing, breadwinning, and upbringing – that emerged from the analysis, along with examples from the empirical data. In conclusion, I discuss the two levels of paternal responsibility – everyday duties and comprehensive commitments – that were present in all the themes.

### *Nurturing*

The narrative theme of nurturing refers to the psychological and emotional presence and caregiving of the father, and was narrated as 'the basis' of paternal responsibility. Being a responsible father was profoundly tied to caregiving activities and 'being there,' emphasizing a hands-on approach to responsibility, but also its intimate character. Fathers reflected on this theme more often than on other themes.

The fathers invariably narrated their striving to be present in the child's life as comprehensively as possible. This issue has previously been described as 'being there' (e.g. Miller, 2011; Palkovitz, 2002). In accord with earlier studies, expansion of the father's role in parenting practices during the child's growth (see Lamb, 1997), interviewees stressed the importance of the father's early involvement, probably influenced by both the formal family policies in place in Finland and a father-friendly cultural atmosphere. Also, their narratives emphasized involvement as an intentional choice, underpinned by a sense of responsibility and the welfare of the child and family. For example, in Mikko's words:

I definitely try to spend as much with them as possible, as ... I think it's really important for them, definitely, 'cos ... I kinda think that it gives them better possibilities to get on in their lives. (29 years, 2 children, engineer MSc)

The fathers did not perceive 'being there' solely as a question of physical presence, but rather as emotional and psychological closeness, grounded in their engagement in nurturing and care work. The fathers described their roles as active parents with hands-on involvement in child care. With newborns, this applied extensively to nurturing and everyday caring practices. Several fathers also mentioned certain activities, such as changing diapers and bathing the infant, as 'their duties,' the mother in turn taking care of feeding the child. In the fathers' narratives, their role in taking care of the child's physical activities, such as indoor and outdoor play, became increasingly foregrounded, although

tasks such as dealing with the child's regular visits to the welfare clinic were also reported. Being together with the child as an everyday practice can be seen in Paavo's narrative:

At the moment, while they're all so young, you really can't leave them even for a sec ... Thus, while I'm at home I spend most of my time just being and playing with them ... Going out to the park, taking them with me to shop for groceries, you know, nothing special, just the regular daily stuff. (31 years, 3 children, account manager)

In narrating their engagement in everyday caring practices such as feeding or clothing the child, fathers did not make a marked distinction between paternal and maternal responsibilities. While some of them saw themselves as more 'sensible' and 'maternal' than the 'average father,' only a few fathers stressed that the overriding responsibility to ensure that everything was under control was the mother's. In these cases, the father saw himself as the mother's 'assistant,' a role also commonly found among fathers in earlier studies especially in the US context (e.g. Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). These exceptions aside, the fathers saw their relatively active engagement in care work as advantageous to the child, and also as an expression of their willingness to share the duties of child care with the mother. Thus, it seems that the discourses of parenting experts on the importance of the father's early involvement have also influenced the men's understanding of their parental duties.

The importance of 'family time' spent together with mother and child was commonly present in the fathers' narratives. More profound involvement emerged in the emphasis placed by a few fathers on the importance of private time with the child, without the mother present, on the grounds that this strengthens the father-child relationship and contributes to the ability to bear full responsibility for child care. In these accounts, the fathers' caregiving responsibilities were seen as equal with those of the mother, unconstrained by gender. This also indicates the fathers' strong desire to be comprehensively involved with their child, as illustrated in the following extract:

I think it (the stay-at-home period of over 2 years) has had a great effect on my relation with him (the first-born), we really have a close and special relationship, and, now I can really say that I know him, and how to get on with him, and ... Without those years and months, I'm sure that the bond we now have wouldn't have developed, so it really means a lot to me. (Antti, 29 years, 2 children, entrepreneur)

In line with national statistics, all the men took paternal leave of from 2 to 3 weeks immediately after childbirth. Seven of them acted also as a stay-at-home father (from 4 months to 2 years) at some point during infancy; this proportion, however, is well above the average (see e.g. Haataja, 2009). These men attached the taking of extended parental leave to responsible fatherhood, and emphasized the importance of taking parental leave to ensure the child experienced the care of both parents, to consolidate the father-child relationship, a nongendered duty, and, in addition, to support the mothers option of returning to working life. Although they all highlighted that the wish to take extended parental leave was their own, it was clear that their spouses also supported the idea of shared leave. Nevertheless, it seems that the father needed to negotiate with the mother, and gain her approval, if he wished to take extended parental leave. This suggests that, while on the policy level, parental leave is the legal right of both parents, in the prevailing cultural atmosphere the mother is regarded as having the prerogative to decide who will take parental leave. According to Ismo:

Yeah, sure, we discussed it together, and, she (spouse) didn't have any problem with that at all ... And it was really important for me, 'cos I just felt that it was the only right thing to do, and you know, without it I wouldn't have given my best shot as a father. (28 years, 2 children, software developer)

### ***Breadwinning***

Despite the narrative emphasis on the extension of paternal responsibilities into a domain traditionally perceived as maternal, the traditional understanding of breadwinning as an extra-domestic paternal responsibility (see Parsons, 1955) was also inscribed in the narratives, though with new content. In Finland, it seems that despite the spread of nurturing practices among fathers, providing for the family continues to be perceived as a common paternal responsibility (e.g. Doucet, 2013; Miller, 2011; Palkovitz, 2002), even in cases where it might be in conflict with the father's expanding role as a caregiver (Miller, 2011, p. 10).

According to the analysis, paid work and breadwinning were both seen as an important part of paternal responsibility. Providing was considered a duty that promotes the well-being of both child and family, and one that corresponds in importance to other parental duties. This is in line with the view that breadwinning is also perceived by fathers as creating an emotional bond between father and child (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). Probably affected by the familistic cultural atmosphere of Finland (Jallinoja, 2006) that stresses the importance of 'being there,' other possible accounts of work were less obvious (e.g. a career-orientated approach to work was highlighted by only two fathers), suggesting a strong understanding of the role of work in securing the family's welfare. This is visible in the following extract from the interview with Pentti:

Well, I think it's a really responsible duty that I had, you know, providing for them (the family). Now she's at home with the kids, so, that my duty for sure ... And I'm really proud of it, actually. (28 years, 2 children, nurse)

However, the analysis points to new content in relation to the key question of breadwinning, which was no longer seen primarily as a paternal parental responsibility, even if still commonly undertaken by the father in infant families. Although at the time, with their partners on extended family leave, most of the fathers had main charge of the family's economic situation, they did not perceive this breadwinning role as father-specific, but rather as a gender-neutral duty for both parents. According to the fathers, all the families had planned that when the youngest child has reached from 18 months to 3 years of age, both parents would be working. This points to the strength of the Nordic dual-earner model:

Yeah, it's the traditional division that the father takes care of the bread and the mother the home. But for me, now when the kids are young, it really doesn't matter which of us does it (breadwinning), it's a shared duty. (Jukka, 29 years, 2 children, MA student and stay-at-home father)

At the interface of care work and breadwinning, the important issue of striking a proper balance between work and family arose (e.g. Brandth, 2012). Most of the fathers felt that they had managed the situation quite well, while some found it more difficult to achieve. For example, fathers who had only worked outside the home found it more often difficult than those who had taken extended parental leave. After coming back to work, men who

had personal experiences of stay-at-home fatherhood did not report significant difficulties in work–family balance. Nevertheless, as the results suggest, breadwinning retains an important position among the various Finnish paternal responsibilities, although clearly not enough to fully meet the demands of ‘responsible fatherhood’; rather, it was duty to be shouldered alongside nurturing and care work. In Seppo’s words:

You know, this idea that a father should just feed his family... I really can’t agree with it, as I don’t see it as responsible at all. For me, making money doesn’t have anything to do with good fatherhood, rather, being and living with them (the family), that’s what’s important. (28 years, 2 children, researcher)

### *Upbringing*

The preceding sections have described the father’s responsibilities in the domestic and extra-domestic contexts. However, a third theme – which I term ‘upbringing’ – was present in both of these. Unlike nurturing and breadwinning, which were topical issues from the beginning of parenthood, ‘upbringing’ appeared to be a responsibility that increased in importance with the growth of the child. Fathers stressed the importance of upbringing, especially in the moral sense. Although upbringing was not explicitly brought up by the interviewer, it featured in many interviews. Hints of a gendered understanding of responsibility for ‘upbringing,’ even if more discreetly expressed than either nurturing or breadwinning, were present in talk on this theme.

Probably due to the relatively young age of their children, instead of teaching concrete skills, the focus of the fathers’ narratives was on giving their children a moral upbringing, with an eye to the future. For example, they emphasized their duty to ‘teach them (*children*) the difference between right and wrong’ (Ilkka, 30 years, 2 children, security guard, divorced) and to ‘raise them to be proper and reliable tax-payers’ (Jouni, 28 years, 2 children, civil engineer). In several cases, this was attached to the idea of giving children an appropriate adult or male role model. According to Simo, for example:

As a father, it’s my responsibility to teach him, to raise him, you know ... To try to raise him to be as good a citizen as possible, and to teach him all the good values, that are important. And the only way to do that, it’s to act that way myself. (26 years, 1 child, entrepreneur)

The fathers’ narratives differed as to whether upbringing, especially in the moral sense, had a male-specific character or not. Since the fathers’ narratives dealt mainly with ‘traditional paternal duties,’ such as setting boundaries, socializing, and security (see Coltrane, 2011), these were not spoken of as father-specific issues. Instead, they were negotiated and implemented together with the mother, suggesting a strong understanding of joint responsibility, as also emphasized in the themes of nurturing and breadwinning. However, in a few men’s accounts, a gendered narration was evident. For example, according to Mika:

For me, it’s really important to set and make them (*children*) learn that there are certain boundaries that should not be over-stepped. And that’s my job ... Just like security issues are essential, definitely ... I’m a rather protective kind of guy, and, I’ve been thinking about those things a lot. (29 years, 2 children, full-time student)

Table 1. Paternal responsibilities in early fatherhood as everyday duties and as comprehensive commitments.

Paternal responsibilities in early fatherhood	Nurturing	Breadwinning	Upbringing
Everyday duties	Everyday caring practices, spending time together, playing	Providing for everyday needs	Setting boundaries, decision-making
Comprehensive commitments	Supporting the child's development, strengthening the father-child relationship	Ensuring welfare of child and family	Acting as role model, socializer and providing security

### *Responsibilities as everyday duties and comprehensive commitments*

I conclude this analysis by examining the two narrative levels of responsibilities – the level of everyday duties (e.g. feeding, clothing) and the level of comprehensive commitments (e.g. being a role model, family welfare) – which appeared in the fathers' narratives. All three narrative themes were identified on both levels, although with some differences of emphasis, as shown in Table 1.

The levels indicate the multidimensional character of paternal responsibilities. Everyday duties emphasize responsibilities as set of caring practices, conceptualized also as 'caring for' by Morgan (1996). These duties illustrate hands-on tasks and practices that fathers interpreted as 'responsible.' On this level, the narrative theme of nurturing received special emphasis. At the level of comprehensive commitments, closely related to Morgan's concept of 'caring about,' paternal responsibilities were perceived as profound, psychological engagement with the child and promoting the child's development. These commitments, which highlighted the emotional and affective side of paternal responsibility, were also future oriented, e.g. to make sure the children were given 'a good start in life.' Comprehensive commitments were narrated especially in relation to upbringing and breadwinning.

### **Discussion**

This study has presented an analysis of paternal responsibilities arising from the narratives of a small sample of Finnish men in their early years of first-time fatherhood. The analysis yielded three themes of paternal responsibility within a framework of everyday duties and comprehensive commitments. Although comparable classifications have been presented previously (e.g. Townsend, 2002), in these Finnish narratives, they were filled with new content. On the conceptual level, the results support Doucet (2006), who argues that responsibility is deeply embedded in fathering practices, as it is involved in everything that one does and does not do as a father. Thus, responsibility should be perceived as a built-in dimension of father involvement rather than as a subordinate concept. This can be applied to parental responsibilities more generally, and outside the Finnish context.

Previous studies have highlighted the gender-specific nature of paternal responsibilities, while also recognizing that, at least in Western societies, men's engagement in care work has become more widespread (e.g. Doucet, 2006; Miller, 2011). In this Finnish study, a gendered undertone was mainly absent from the narratives; instead, men's

understanding of paternal duties and practices was based on gender-neutral parental responsibilities carried out together with the mother. To look no further back than the 1990s, gendered labor in childcare was evident in the accounts of Finnish fathers (see Korhonen, 1999), whereas in the present study the narratives stressed responsibilities in gender-neutral manner, without essentializing 'paternal' and 'maternal' duties (with a few exceptions such as breastfeeding, maternal primacy in leave decisions, and paternal moral authority in a few narratives). This can be seen, for example, in the narratives of nurturing and breadwinning, which have traditionally been highly gendered. In addition to the probable greater paternal engagement of these Finnish men compared to the national average, it is likely that the public fatherhood, parental leave, and gender-equality discourses, along with the familistic atmosphere, that emerged in Finnish society in the early 2000s, have promoted the idea of nurturing and breadwinning as shared and nongendered responsibilities for both parents (see Jallinoja, 2006, 2008; Sipilä, Repo, Rissanen, & Viitasalo, 2010). It is also interesting that whereas, according to national statistics, Finnish fathers contribute broadly to domestic work (see 'Finnish context' section), and the interviewees also saw themselves as sharing in the housework, such as washing the dishes and doing the laundry, they did not see these tasks as among their paternal responsibilities; instead, they viewed them on a more general level as household duties 'that just have to be done.' This suggests that men's understanding of paternal responsibilities is strongly embedded in the idea of the presence and direct caregiving of the father.

In addition, the analysis illustrates something of the reflective character of contemporary Finnish fatherhood, as it highlighted the significant extent to which these fathers had reflected on their roles, duties, and commitments as parents. This especially emerged in the broad narration of comprehensive commitments, i.e. 'higher-level' responsibilities, behind actual practices. This suggests that fatherhood is not something that can be considered as self-evident and stable, but instead something that men need and want to ponder. This highlights the intentional, intimate, and emotional character of fatherhood, and perhaps also points to the active discussion of fatherhood in the Finnish media, and in expert discourses perhaps providing men with words and concepts, and a cultural obligation, to reflect upon their role as fathers.

The present narrative inquiry was conducted by applying the GT coding method as a tool to consolidate and systematize the analysis. Thus in this study the two qualitative methods – narrative analysis and GT – supplemented each other, the coding method enabling a systematic interpretation of both the detailed narration – the three narrative themes – and the 'bigger picture' – the two narrative levels – of paternal responsibility. While there is, of course, no such thing as 'pure' narrative research, discovering new ways to use the method can nevertheless advance it and produce new narrative takes on the subject. Thus, new approaches to narrative inquiry should be encouraged in the future, including in the field of family studies, as such methods can yield novel insights into parenting and daily family life.

The small study sample consisted of broadly middle-class city-dwelling men, with a slightly above-average education, so that the results apply to paternal responsibilities in a Finnish middle-class context. The question remains, whether, and to what extent, the results can be generalized to other socioeconomic groups. While engaged and nurturing fatherhood has been criticized as a phenomenon pertaining to relatively highly educated and middle-class men (Dermott, 2008; LaRossa, 1988), recent Finnish studies (Eerola & Mykkänen, 2013; Mykkänen & Eerola, 2013) suggest that nurturing fatherhood with



hands-on responsibilities is widely prevalent in the accounts of first-time fathers. On the basis of the fatherhood discourses that emerged in these studies, it is conceivable that these aspects of fatherhood exist more generally, irrespective of socioeconomic status, during the first years of paternity. It is, however, likely that the fathers included in this study, because their participation was voluntary, were more engaged with their children than average Finnish fathers, and this may well introduce some bias into the results. From a more global perspective, given the cultural similarities between the Nordic societies, it is reasonable to assume that the narratives produced by the present sample of Finnish men are likely to be found among their Nordic counterparts. Corresponding discourses and narratives might be also found outside the Nordic context, but from where and to what extent, remains unclear.

The narratives that have been analyzed above are not literal portrayals of men's real-life practices. Thus it is important to remember that while the men's narratives on fatherhood might be fairly uniform, men's actual parenting practices are likely to display more variation. Also, gendered features continue to be present in Finnish parenting, as not all Finnish fathers (or their spouses) share parenting equally. However, in light of the high volume of studies on the positive effect of active and involved fatherhood on the child's development and well-being of the whole family (see Allen & Daly, 2007), the results are promising. As the narratives demonstrate, cultural atmosphere and social policies have an effect on men's understanding of their paternal responsibilities, and thus, offer opportunities for change in their actual practices. Consequently, investment in a father-friendly culture and policies pays off, not only in more involved narratives, but, most importantly, in more involved fathers.

#### Notes on contributor

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### **III**

## **PATERNAL MASCULINITIES IN EARLY FATHERHOOD: DOMINANT AND COUNTER NARRATIVES BY FINNISH FIRST-TIME FATHERS**

by

Petteri Eerola & Johanna Mykkänen, 2013

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# Paternal Masculinities in Early Fatherhood: Dominant and Counter Narratives by Finnish First-Time Fathers

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## Abstract

In this article, we seek to extend understanding of the role of gender in early fatherhood by examining narratives of paternal masculinities, that is, the social and cultural constructions of gendered practices and conventions produced by men on their roles as male parents. The data comprised interviews with 44 Finnish first-time fathers (aged 20–42 years) living in a heterosexual relationship. The narrative of the “decent father,” was identified as the dominant narrative of paternal masculinity in early fatherhood. Although the narrative was characterized by some important gendered differences, it was also in line with the well-known concept of the “new father.” Two counter narratives, labeled the “equal father” and “masculine father,” in which gendered parenthood was rejected in the former and essentialized in the latter, were also identified. The results indicate the normative quality of narratives on paternal masculinity.

## Keywords

early fatherhood, paternal masculinity, gender and family, parent–child relations, work and family, narrative inquiry, qualitative, Finland

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## Introduction

Well, I do change diapers, I do feed and clothe her. The practical duties, you know. But the overall care of our family business, I think it's hers (wife).

—Pekka (27 years)

Above, Pekka, a first-time father, is describing contemporary Finnish male parenthood and emphasizing his participation in parental practices. Simultaneously, his words imply that parental gender differences exist in the contemporary family and that different responsibilities are attached to male and female parenting. This contradiction prompts the question of the role of socially constructed masculinities in male parenting and gendered parental responsibilities in general.

As parenthood is a highly gendered area, male parental roles and men's role in their families are bound up with the practices and cultural conceptions of masculinity. Over the past two decades, and especially during the last couple of years, both gender and family research has seen a considerable growth in studies integrating the current changes in the idea of fatherhood with social constructions of masculinity (see, e.g., Doucet, 2006; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005; Miller, 2011a). Recently, questions of gender in male parenting have been raised by, among others, Miller (2011a), Yarwood (2011), Finn and Henwood (2009), and Dermott (2008) in the context of contemporary U.K. fathers. At the same time, along with the broad international interest in Nordic parental policies, scholars have highlighted gendered practices on the taking of family leave in the Nordic countries (Almqvist, 2008; Lammi-Taskula, 2008; O'Brien & Moss, 2010). Increasing interest has also been shown recently in how fathers balance "earning and caring" (McDonald & Jeanes, 2012) and the connections between fatherhood and work in general (e.g., Brandth, 2012; Miller, 2010, 2011a).

In this study, we examined gendered male parenting in the Nordic context through the narratives of Finnish first-time fathers. Although the Nordic countries are occasionally showcased as models of gender-equal parenting and shared parenthood on account of their progressive and father-friendly parental leave policies, in Finland and Sweden, for example, men's share of all the parental leave taken amounts to only 6% and 20%, respectively (Haataja, 2009). These figures imply that a huge gap and clear gendered differences in parental responsibilities during the initial stages of parenthood continue to prevail in the Nordic societies. However, a father's take-up of parental leave seems to correlate with his educational and professional status (Takala, 2005). According to a Finnish study, higher education and working in a health care occupation or doing professional work correlate with

the taking of more and longer paternal leaves, whereas lower education and self-employment in an industrial context were linked with a lower rate of leave taking (Takala, 2005). How such differences appear on the narrative level remains unclear. Nevertheless, the fact that issues of parental leave and men's role in early childcare have been foregrounded in public and media discourses and in professional and scientific debate in Finland throughout the 2000s, means that these issues have likely had some impact on men's narration regarding what constitutes culturally suitable male parenting.

In this article,<sup>1</sup> we seek to extend understanding of culturally dominant paternal gender roles by examining the narratives of Finnish first-time fathers. Our data were interviews with 44 first-time fathers. The fathers were from a relatively middle-class background, which probably affects their narrative content and style. The concept we operationalize in this article is paternal masculinities, that is, the social and cultural constructions and practices of male parenting that inform men's descriptions of their role as male parents and that the men themselves adopt and follow. Our aim is to identify the culturally dominant content of the paternal masculinities that men narrate, and to understand the role this plays in male parenthood. The specific research question is as follows: What are the dominant and possible counter narratives of paternal masculinity that Finnish first-time fathers narrate regarding their early fatherhood?

### **Conceptualizing Paternal Masculinities**

Scholarship focusing on masculinity, and men as explicitly gendered individuals, has its origins in American psychology and social sciences of the mid-1970s (Coltrane, 1994). Since then, from the 1980s onward in Western societies, social constructions of masculinity have frequently been examined within the social sciences and, in particular, gender studies. Masculinities have been defined as, for instance, the ideas and characteristics attached to men in social interaction (Connell, 2005), the cultural conventions appropriate for men (Pease, 1999) and men's practices<sup>2</sup> (Hearn, 1996). Although the concept has been used in a variety of ways (Hearn, 1996), and has been criticized for its lack of specificity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), for example, "How do individual men relate to socially constructed masculinities?" (Hearn & Collinson, 1994, pp. 103-105), it has gained established status in contemporary discourses in the social sciences as a tool for perceiving the socially constructed dimension of maleness.

However, the social and cultural constructions of masculinity exist predominantly as ideals, and hence their relations to "real life" are unclear. This invites rhetorical questions such as "Why do individual men act diversely, if

what decides how they act is a cultural construction?” or “Why does the same man act differently in different situations?” This particular issue can be explored through Coles’s (2009) theory of the fields of masculinity. Coles, who combines Connell’s (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity with Bourdieu’s (1993) theory of fields, draws a distinction between hegemonic and dominant masculinities. According to Connell (2005), at any given time there is one form of masculinity, that is, hegemonic masculinity, that is culturally exalted and which has hegemonic position in relation to the other masculinities. Thus, hegemonic masculinity illustrates cultural ideals, regards, and configurations of gendered practices rather than answering the question “How do men really act,” and its contents are to be sifted according to the social and historical situation. Whereas hegemonic masculinity describes culturally constructed ideals of a male in general that are regarded as the most powerful compared with other possible ideals, dominant masculinity emphasizes the ideal construction of a male in a particular field. In his study, Coles sketches the field of masculinity in which the appropriate conventions and ideals of masculinity are negotiated. The field of masculinity divides into numerous subfields, such as gay masculinity, labor masculinity, academic masculinity and Black masculinity, to mention just a few. Each subfield has its own dominant masculinity, which might not overlap with the hegemonic construction of masculinity, along with other masculinities that diverge from the dominant one. In this study, in the terms used by Coles, we focus on the field of paternal masculinity—a subfield of masculinity that appears in particular in men’s family relations.

Since the late 1980s, cultural images of fatherhood, including analyses of masculinity, have been considered by, among others: Furstenberg (1988), Marsiglio (1993), LaRossa (1997), and Marks and Palkovitz (2004). As pointed out by these authors (see Marsiglio, 1993), whereas breadwinning has been firmly attached to cultural conceptions of male parenting throughout the 20th century and since (in the United States, but also more broadly in Western societies), it has been increasingly complemented with a diversity of social roles from gender role model to care-giver. To cite Roy and Dyson (2010), the increasing trend toward combining both provider and care-giving roles in the ideals of contemporary fatherhood is opening up possibilities for new ways of expressing masculinity.

This is reflected in recent research, for example, in reports on the narrated masculinities of stay-at-home fathers (Doucet, 2004, 2006), gendered parenting of first-time fathers (Miller, 2011a), and masculine care of stay-at-home fathers (Brandth & Kvande, 1998). It has been shown that becoming a father reasserts a man’s masculine identity, giving novel content to being a man (Brandth, 2012; Daly, Ashbourne, & Brown, 2013), while some studies have

even proposed that fatherhood should be understood as a cultural norm in adult masculinity (e.g., Dermott, 2008). A central finding of all these studies is that fathers distinguish between paternal and maternal care. In their study of Norwegian stay-at-home fathers, Brandth and Kvande (1998) discuss masculine care, in particular father-child “being and doing together,” whereas in Doucet (2006) the emphasis is on the father’s need to differentiate masculine care from maternal care and femininity, in order to attest to their masculine identity. According to Yarwood (2011), breadwinning continues to be perceived as the contemporary dominant male parenting role. The perception of breadwinning as a paternal duty is also highlighted by Palkovitz (2002), and is thus to be seen as a culturally important aspect of paternal care. In her studies of U.K. first-time fathers, Miller (e.g., 2011b) found that men took a relatively active role in caring practices in the first weeks of their parenting, but subsequently fell back into normative gendered behavior. However, research findings suggest that although care giving can be interpreted culturally as a feminine duty (Doucet, 2004; Miller, 2011b), masculine care seems to play an important part in paternal masculinities.

### **Early Fatherhood: The Gender Perspective**

In the scholarship on paternity, much interest has been shown in the transition to fatherhood and early fatherhood (e.g., Miller, 2011a; Palkovitz, 2002; Palkovitz & Palm, 2009). As men become fathers in cultural and social contexts that intersect with gender relation systems (Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005), a gender-receptive approach is necessary. For example, according to Fox (2009), “parenthood creates gender more thoroughly than any other experience in most people’s lives” (p. 6). For the past couple of decades, attention has been paid in particular to the concept of the “new father.” This concept, which has gained focal cultural status in the Nordic countries, indicates that traditional gendered parental roles have fundamentally changed (Eerola & Huttunen, 2011). That is, the “new father” is assumed, for instance, to be capable culturally of “mother-like” nurture, participating in early care and taking comprehensive responsibility for the child, unrestricted by gender. According to the results of a Finnish questionnaire (see Haataja, 2005), virtually all the men respondents believed that fathers are just as capable of and suited to child care as mothers. Male parenthood fundamentally in accordance with this notion, however, still seems to be scarce, even in the Nordic countries. Although the discourse of shared caring in Nordic countries is strong (e.g., Lundqvist, 2012), fathers continue to be at greater liberty to decide the terms of their engagement and participation (Miller, 2011b), take parental leave less often (Brandth, 2012; Haataja, 2009; Lammi-Taskula,

2006) and work significantly more hours outside the home than mothers (Miettinen & Rotkirch, 2012), all of which tend to stress the mother as infant nurturer and care giver and the father as economic provider. However, despite such contradictions between paternal ideologies and practices, we can consider Finnish men as relatively involved and engaged fathers from early childhood on, since, for example, more than 80%<sup>3</sup> of them take paternal leave after the child is born (Haataja, 2009) and participate significantly<sup>4</sup> in hands-on parenthood thereafter (Miettinen & Rotkirch, 2012).

Nevertheless, previous studies show that in Western societies, gendered parental differences and responsibilities appear from the very onset of parenthood. Although men's childbearing behavior is a relatively unexplored area (Lappegård, Rønsen, & Skrede, 2011), it seems that mothers are 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). In addition, the early care of a child and comprehensive commitment to nurture work has been interpreted mainly as maternal responsibility, as the changes in men's lives are less dramatic. However, several studies on the transition to fatherhood have underlined first-time fatherhood as a focal transition in a man's life (e.g., Mykkänen, 2010; Palkovitz, 2002). According to Palkovitz (2002), for instance, first-time fatherhood might have a central role in promoting a man's growth and adult development.

Although the previous research on early fatherhood and paternal involvement has highlighted the importance of early care and involvement for future involvement (Allen & Daly, 2007), societal support remains noticeably broader for new mothers than for fathers in the Nordic countries, if not elsewhere. For instance, institutional services (such as prenatal clinics, etc.) continue to be directed mainly at mothers, and mothers' nonsharable quota of parental leave is commonly larger than that of fathers. In Finland, for example, paid paternal leave is 9 weeks, whereas maternal leave is nearly 18 weeks and negotiable parental leave 26 weeks (see Salmi, 2012). As elsewhere in the Nordic region, leave legislation in Finland is based on the principle of gender equality and shared parental care and responsibilities, and thus the majority of paid parental leaves are available to both parents. However, in cases where leave is not father-or-mother-specific, it is primarily taken by mothers (Lammi-Taskula, 2012). Although Nordic parental policies have been reviewed regularly to enhance men's early participation, and now specifically include paid paternal leave (O'Brien & Moss, 2010), these measures have not succeeded as expected. Although it is true that Nordic fathers are increasingly taking child care leave, its duration is relatively short compared with that taken by mothers, and its long-term effects on, for example, the later

father–child relationship, fathers’ continuing engagement in child care, and the distribution of domestic labor, remain unclear.

## **Narrative Method and Data**

The method applied in the study is narrative inquiry,<sup>5</sup> in which narratives are understood as constructors of knowledge. Since the “narrative turn”<sup>6</sup> of the late 1980s, the method has gained increasing attention in social and human research (e.g., Loseke, 2007; Riessman, 2003; Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2008, p. 1). The basic premise of narrativity is that telling stories is an innate and familiar way for people to produce meanings and to perceive the world. Moreover, since personal experiences and stories interact with cultural narratives, narrative inquiry is interested in how people narrate their lives and how their narratives are connected to the wider social context (Plummer, 2001; Somers, 1994).

Hatch and Wisniewski (1995, pp. 116-118) describe the characteristics of narrative inquiry as follows: (a) focus on the individual, (b) personal nature of the research project, (c) practical orientation, and (d) emphasis on subjectivity. In comparison with qualitative methods in general, narrative inquiry has the advantage that it draws attention to personal experiences and at the same time enables narratives to be understood as “social acts” (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 197) that are timely and situationally produced and interpreted in a particular social context. The method sees narratives as constructions that enable individuals to gain a sense of “reality,” and to understand, expound, and construe phenomena from the perspective of socially constructed reality (Bruner, 1996, p. 122; Chase, 2005, p. 656; Josselson, 1995, p. 33). Through narratives, individuals construct their lifespan as a continuum (Frank, 2002), normalizing and “naturalizing” experiences and events in their life (Abbott, 2002, p. 40) and creating coherence by linking sporadic events into meaningful wholes (Loseke, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1991). Thus, among the topics studied using a narrative approach, intimate topics such as life stories and life changes have been especially popular (e.g., Hänninen, 2004; Riessman, 2003). For instance, studying life changes as narratives enables us to capture the meanings people give to the most sensitive experiences in their lives (Hänninen, 2004). Although there is no unambiguous answer to the question “What is a sensitive topic?” (Hyden, 2008, p. 134), first-time fatherhood can be considered such a topic for the vast majority of men.

As stories are socially organized phenomena (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 206), and as social and cultural norms and habits affect the narratives that people produce, narration does not occur in a vacuum. Diverse narrative alternatives that

are culturally available for telling (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, p. 212) contribute to the “cultural stock of stories” (e.g., Hänninen, 2004). Within these narratives, however, some narratives are more culturally established than the others, and have hegemonic or dominant status (e.g., Ewick & Silbey, 1995; Somers, 1994). These dominant narratives might be “common knowledge” or they might be local and occupy a hegemonic position for a few people only. Narratives that diverge from the culturally hegemonic narratives are termed *counter narratives*. Like dominant narratives, counter narratives are not static, but rather evolve over space and time, and make sense only in relation to dominant narratives (Andrews, 2004; Bamberg & Andrews, 2004).

To obtain empirical data, we interviewed 44 first-time fathers<sup>7</sup> aged 20 to 42 years, as the average age of first fatherhood in Finland is approximately 30 years (Statistics Finland, 2004). The interviewed men represented various professional fields and disciplines, such as engineers, health-care specialists, students, policemen, and private entrepreneurs. Overall, the men can broadly be described as middle class. Nine men had experience of being a stay-at-home father (3 months-2 years).

We conducted<sup>8</sup> the interviews<sup>9</sup> by applying the methods of the narrative and thematic interview. The topics discussed in the interviews encompassed, for instance, the time before the birth of the child, becoming a father, everyday fatherhood, work and family, the significance of being a father and the couple relationship. We implemented the narrative analysis by reading the interviews with the aim of finding congruencies and similarities between the different stories and answers. First, we asked what the most essential content in each story was. During this phase, three divergent narratives of paternal masculinities began to emerge. After that, to illuminate the relations between the narratives, we looked at the interrelationships between the stories. In this phase, we identified one dominant narrative and two counter narratives of paternal masculinity. Furthermore, as our analysis advanced, areas such as gender differences, responsibility, nurture, and family orientation had a focal role in supplementing the classification of the men’s narratives. To further illuminate the narratives, we constructed a composite narrative of the dominant and condensed narratives of the counter narratives from authentic interview extracts. Although such first-person composites and condensed narratives have rarely been used in narrative studies (see, e.g., Wertz, Nosek, McNiesh, & Marlow, 2011), they provide an opportunity to understand the men’s narration as a meaningful whole on both personal and societal level. Additionally, direct and authentic extracts from the interviews are given (names and occupations changed to protect participant anonymity).



**Table 1.** Juxtaposition of the Dominant and the Counter Narratives of Paternal Masculinity in Early Fatherhood.

	Gender differences	Responsibility	Nurture	Family orientation
The dominant narrative: Decent father	Divergent parental gender roles	Participatory responsibility	Participatory male nurturance	Significant family orientation
Counter Narrative 1: Equal father	Equal parental gender roles	Comprehensive responsibility	Unquestionable male nurturance	Essential family orientation
Counter Narrative 2: Masculine father	Essential parental gender roles	Provider responsibility	Male-specific nurturance	Significant child orientation

## Narratives of Paternal Masculinities in Early Fatherhood

The dominant narrative of paternal masculinity in early fatherhood we identified in our analysis was labeled the narrative of the decent father. In addition, two counter narratives—the narrative of the equal father and the narrative of the masculine father—were identified. We present the main features of these narratives in Table 1 under the headings gender differences, responsibility, nurture, and family orientation.

### *The Dominant Narrative: The Decent Father*

We have named the dominant narrative the decent father, as it emphasizes culturally decent male parenting in early fatherhood. It is characterized by divergent parental gender roles, participatory paternal responsibilities, participatory male nurturance, and a significant family orientation. The dominance of the narrative is twofold: First, quantitatively, as the narrative was produced substantially more often than the other narratives<sup>10</sup>; and second, qualitatively in the cultural dominance of the narrative, describing customary and culturally suitable practices of contemporary male parenting. The narrative, however, should not be understood as an unambiguous and clearly defined story, but rather as a flexible framework, directing and assessing the boundaries for a culturally appropriate narrative of paternal masculinity in early fatherhood. The narrative is presented as a composite constructed from the discourse of several fathers:

Well, you know . . . We were married, we had an apartment, I had a permanent job, all that . . . Then, she just started to talk about it (getting a baby), and . . . Quite soon I was like, yeah, why not . . . And, then she just came to me one day and showed me the test which was positive (laughing). And the time when she was pregnant, it was quite a nice time. . . . I sometimes went to the maternity clinic with her, and

we bought a baby seat, carriers, all that stuff we would need, you know. . . . I also read some discussion forums and magazines for newbie parents, but I think these were mainly directed at the mothers. But when he was born, it was. . . . It was just amazing. I was in a kind of like positive shock (laughing). And when we come home with the little one, I took my three-week paternal leave, no question about that. . . . And there we were, practicing family life together. . . . She fed the baby naturally, but certainly I tried to participate in everything else. The first months also went quickly, things went well, and. . . Well, yeah, I have to admit that it was sometimes a bit hard for me to give up of your own time and hobbies, and suchlike. . . . I sometimes have time to meet my friends, but only a few of my friends actually have children, and I think that we don't talk that much about the kid and family stuff. . . . At least not like I guess that the mothers do, though I think it would be nice sometimes, actually. However, everything has gone just fine, and actually I have really thought that, if it was just possible, it would be nice to spend few weeks or months at home with him. . . . But, the questions of living, work, and suchlike should be solved first, so. . . I don't know, we'll see, at least maybe with the next one (laughing). (Constructed from the discourse of several interviewees)

In our analysis of the narratives on paternal masculinity, we paid attention to talk about parental gender differences in order to highlight the discrepancies and similarities in the narrated paternal and maternal roles. In the dominant narrative, parental gender differences were mentioned, although the differences appeared somewhat blurred. Our data show that parental roles began to be gendered from the time before the pregnancy, as in most cases family planning and pregnancy were narrated mainly in relation to the mother, the father being "with her." For example, only few of the men narrated an equivalent role in family planning, as in the majority of the cases the mother was the more determined party. For example, Erkki's narration implies maternal primacy in family planning, also indicating the mother's primacy in contemporary Nordic family life in general:

Yeah, sure, there was some pressure from her (wife), but. . . I had always thought that I would like to have kids, so, it was quite ok for me, too. (Erkki, 32 years, daughter 14 months, researcher)

The discourses on the "new father" and shared parenting emphasize the changed character of gendered parental roles (e.g., Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Marks & Palkovitz, 2004). Similarly, the dominant narrative highlights the father's participation in child and household care as an important part of the paternal role, in accordance with the previously presented results on Finnish family practices. For example, the narrative underlines the father's participation in household tasks such as vacuuming, making dinner, doing the

laundry, and so on. According to our data, however, the main responsibility remains with the mother, an issue also noted by Johansson and Klinth (2008). The mother's primacy in child care and housekeeping and the father's in wage work were narrated as conventions that both parents agree with, in parallel with Finnish parental leave statistics. This can be seen, for example, in Mikko's narration of the possibility of staying at home with the child:

Well, I don't know . . . I just somehow think that it's not for me, I might lose my cool a bit too often (laughing) . . . And, because it's ok to her (wife) to be here (at home), so . . . I prefer working. (Mikko, 27 years, son 9 months, student)

Several studies have emphasized that many men perceive providing as a paternal care role (e.g., Palkovitz, 2002). The decent father narrative is different from the exclusively paternal provider role as it conforms with the Nordic dual-earner household model (e.g., Ellingsaeter & Leira, 2006; Kuronen, 2001). However, the main responsibility for economic issues was narrated as belonging to the father, which is in line with the fact that in most Nordic families the father's role as a breadwinner is pronounced. Although some fathers narrated experiences of or the wish to be a stay-at-home father, the main storyline in the narrative highlighted the men's role as providers. An extract from Kalle's interview illustrates how the role of provider, paternal responsibility, and male identity are interwoven in the men's narration:

Financial situation, it's a . . . I think it's like the responsibility that I have as a man, you know, to take care of living, and . . . (Kalle, 37 years, son 3 years, electrician)

The decent father narrative emphasizes gendered differences in parental responsibility. According to our data, the responsibilities that emerged as appropriate to paternal masculinity, and thus set the boundaries for good and responsible male parenting, were economic responsibility and assisting in caregiving. In most cases the mother took the final responsibility for the everyday decisions and actions of the family and the children. Although the men narrated maternal primacy in family planning, the narration of responsibility began from the very beginning. From the men's point of view, having a family was related to the questions of having a permanent job, an adequate income, and a good couple relationship, as was also stressed by Timo:

Well, the situation was quite stable, our couple relationship was good, I had a job, and . . . Things just click into place, like, now's the time, I'm ready (for a child). (Timo, 26 years, son 2 years, nurse)

According to Pringle (1995), one of the masculine characteristics that promote well-being in the family is men's nurturing ability. In this narrative, male participation in nurturance is highlighted. For instance, fathers reported assisting mothers in parental duties such as feeding, clothing, carrying the baby, and getting the baby to sleep, all of which emphasized the father's involvement in early care. The previous discourses on paternal masculinity have located nurture and caregiving in the feminine sphere (Doucet, 2006). Here, however, participation in nurturing was narrated as focal in all the interviews, in accordance with the decent father narrative, reflecting to both Nordic family ideals and practices. Recently, Brandth (2012, p. 116) has suggested that men's increased orientation toward child nurturing can be understood in terms of "a new child-oriented masculinity." For instance, Aki, employed as psychologist, emphasized the importance of "being there" as an essential paternal practice:

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 (Aki, 27 years, son 21 months, psychologist)

The decent father narrative implies a family-oriented approach to being a man. Most of the interviewed men had always thought that they would like to have a family, and the family was mentioned as the central content in their life. In addition to their emotional narration about the family, the men narrated their family orientation by reference to paid work. Paid work was justified, for example, by its contribution to the welfare of the family and through showing economic responsibility. The men also pondered the possible contradictions between work and family, for example, how their possible taking of family leave would be regarded in the workplace or what consequences a family orientation would have on their career development. Notable differences in narrating their family orientation between men in different professions were not highly evident, although the men working in, for example, health care, social services, and education seemed to produce a more multifaceted and sensitive narration on nurturing. The finding reflects the statistics (Takala, 2005) according to which men from these professions more frequently take parental leave. According, for example, to Olli, a social worker,

Although I take care of the living . . . I don't want it to be only that, I certainly do want to participate in the care work, too. . . . I want to spend time with him as much as possible, and so on . . . (Olli, 29 years, daughter 15 months, social worker)

In some interviews, fatherhood as a part of the continuum of being a man was brought up. For example, "we had this traditional way, that first we got

engaged, and then got married, and well, here we are” (Sampo, 26 years, son 15 months, student). In addition, progressions of “from boy to a man” occurred, as being a father was narrated as a more adult male person, or as bestowing extra status, for example, “for me, getting a child was just like an extra feather in my cap” (Valteri, 30 years, daughter 2 years, student).<sup>11</sup> Discourse that occurred in several interviews, but not in all, was the importance of, and lack of, homosocial (e.g., Connell, 2005) support. Intimate discussions on family issues were absent in men’s homosocial relationships, even though men narrated their needs and wishes to discuss particular family-related topics.

To summarize, the dominant narrative emphasizes a broader conception of male parenting and values men’s participation in childcare, in accordance with the concept of the “new father” (e.g., Marks & Palkovitz, 2004). With some variation in details, the framework of the narrative was constructed around parental gender differences, participatory paternal responsibilities, participatory male nurturance, and a strong family orientation, all of which appeared in all the narratives.

### *Counter Narrative 1: The Equal Father*

We named the first of the two counter narratives identified from the data as the narrative of the equal father, as it emphasizes a gender-equal approach to male parenting. The narrative challenges the decent father as insufficient to produce gender-equal paternal behavior. It is characterized by equal parental gender roles, comprehensive responsibility, unquestioned male nurturance, and the centrality of a family orientation. The explicit evidence for this narrative was found in six interviews, where it also partially overlapped with the dominant narrative. As this particular narrative was rarely produced in its entirety, the following condensed narrative and extracts illustrating the narrative are drawn from the interview with Niilo, a 27-year-old stay-at-home father from metropolitan area of Helsinki, the capital of Finland (with an MA degree in mathematics). This particular interview exhibits the salient features of the equal narrative:

Well, I think we started to think about it seriously right after we found this (apartment) . . . And, quite soon we found out here we go (laughing) . . . You could say, I didn’t have any idea what was coming. . . . I think that my kind of father-identity started to shape up during the pregnancy, when we, you know, went to the prenatal clinic, read books, and . . . The first days after he was born, those were really nice . . . As she (spouse) was sleeping and recovering from childbirth, I was taking care of him, and . . . I think it was crucial to take an active approach right from the beginning, as the breastfeeding ties them (mother and child) together so closely, I think . . . After the

first two months, I was working for couple of months, but . . . As I had already graduated and she (wife) was still studying, we decided that it would be the best for the whole family if she could continue her studies and do some part-time job and I could stay at home, even if it has brought our income level down. To date, I've been here (at home) for a year now, and I think that it has been really . . . I have grown a lot as father, and, you know . . . Of course there were some challenges in the beginning, but . . . When I truly realized how much I enjoyed taking care of him, and stuff like that, it was . . . I just felt that, yeah, this is it . . . (Narrative condensed from a single interview with Niilo, 27 years, son 23 months, stay-at-home father)

In the equal father narrative, the mother and father are narrated as similar and equal parents, with an emphasis on differentiating this kind of parenting from the gendered division of labor associated with “traditional” parenthood. The narrative is linked with the issue of the gender-equal man and father that arose in the 1970s in the Nordic societies (Johansson & Klinth, 2008; Lundqvist, 2012).

In contrast to the decent narrative, the equal narrative rejects men's role as primarily that of a breadwinner and highlights stay-at-home fathering as a suitable and economically viable choice. For instance, the father's choice to stay at home with his few-months-old infant was foregrounded, even though it meant temporary exit from the labor market and downward adjustment of his family's financial situation. It is noteworthy, however, that this father does not underestimate the importance of financial security and paid employment—stay-at-home parenting is something that suits him and is the equal right and duty of both parents. To cite Doucet (2006, p. 224), “the heavy burden of social expectations and moral assumptions” of breadwinning is absent.

While some studies have shown that men's parental role is minor at the outset of parenthood and increases along with the child's development, as in the dominant narrative, the equal father narrative found here lays emphasis on parenthood as essentially shared and gender-equal from the very beginning. Niilo discusses the issue in the following extract, refuting the mother's commonly understood role as the father's guide in child care:

Well, it was just like that, we practiced together, wondered together, for example, how to change a diaper (laughing). . . . We had quite equal roles as parents, like, the mother was not telling me how everything should be done.

Whereas the decent narrative spoke of the importance of the father having a family orientation, the equal narrative went beyond this, to the extent that the narrative can be described as living for the family. This appears as a focal intention to make family-centered decisions. It is noteworthy that the father's decisions, for example, to stay at home with the child instead of remaining in paid employment,

were not questioned or compared with those of other men or with the dominant male culture. In contrast to the parental gender differences in the dominant narrative, the equal narrative is mainly gender-neutral, yet partially characterized by “mother-like” speech, that is, the father’s narration represented conventions that might culturally be interpreted as maternal or feminine. This suggests that the father identifies with feminized parental language to narrate himself as a caregiver parent, while simultaneously he questions the culturally dominant narrative on how men should talk about parenthood and expands the narrative repertoire of male caregiving. This is illustrated in the following fragment:

I . . . I don’t now . . . I just don’t find it interesting, how men talk about it (pregnancy and having a baby). Mostly it’s just about that how they have bought a new and bigger car and other stuff like that.

A nongendered division of labor can also be perceived in the narration. Whereas the men narrating in accordance with the decent father narrative usually participated in household chores at least on some level, in the equal narrative, men’s participation in household tasks is seen as self-evident, free of gendered restrictions. For instance, the following narrative fragment describes how the narrative combines taking care of household chores with stay-at-home fatherhood:

As I’m at home, I have more time to wash, to do laundry and Hoover and all that stuff. I think it’s not that big a deal, since I’ve been at home more, it’s been quite natural that I’ve done most of it.

Whereas the decent narrative emphasized participatory paternal responsibilities, the equal father highlights comprehensive parental responsibility. For instance, the father narrates his view on the question of family planning, and his preparation for his fatherhood. For example, the equal father took an active role in early nurture and care of the child to stabilize his role as a parent in the early childhood context. This narrative conforms with Doucet’s (2006) portrayal of emotional responsibility, and highlights the intentional character of fatherhood. This can also be perceived in the following extract, in which Niilo narrates his own growth along with his fatherhood:

Yeah, I’ve actually grown up a lot, and . . . I think my values have changed, become more family oriented, and, I’ve found a gentler and more sensitive side of myself.

The narrative constructs masculinity from outside the core of the dominant cultural images of contemporary male parenthood, and it can be seen as a novel expression of paternal masculinity. For example, whereas the decent



father narrative accords with the concept of the “new father,” that of the equal father transcends it, by challenging its adequacy to produce gender-equal parenting. Although the decent father narrative included shared parenting as part of the paternal role, it can be clearly distinguished from the all-embracing nurture and intuitive sense of gender-equal parenting, in which there are no gendered parental roles, as is foregrounded in the equal father narrative.

### *Counter Narrative 2: The Masculine Father*

We named the second counter narrative the narrative of the masculine father, as it draws on the culturally hegemonic ideas of “true” masculinity<sup>12</sup> (see Connell, 2005, p. 45). It recognizes the decent father narrative as a cultural ideal that might fit some men, but which is not for everyone. It is characterized by strict parental gender roles, in which the paternal responsibilities are bread-winning, male-specific nurturance, and a strong child orientation. Although strong evidence of the narrative was found in five interviews, in most of these the narrative was only partially present and overlapped with the dominant narrative. As the narrative was rarely produced in its entirety, the presented condensed narrative and the interview samples illustrating the narrative are drawn from the interview with Esko, a 31-year-old, high school graduate employed as security specialist, living in a medium-sized city in Central Finland. In Esko’s interview, the salient features of the narrative clearly emerge.

I’ve always liked to go out on a date, and meet a lot of women, you know, a bachelor’s life . . . But, one day, without any plans, I just realized that, damn it, I’m in love (laughing)! But, quite soon after we started to date, contraception failed, and, you know the rest . . . I had a job and living was secure, so I was like “yeah, of course we’ll keep it,” but . . . Truly speaking, the first months were like a rollercoaster, ups and downs all the way . . . Then again, I quite soon kind of adapted to the idea of fatherhood, like that it’s going to be my kid as well, and, after that it has been obvious to me that I take care of the child, whatever happens . . . Right after she was born, I spent two weeks at home, and then got back to work. In the evenings, sure, of course I assisted her (wife) with all that stuff, you know, changing diapers, playing . . . But now that I’ve been working, I haven’t had that much time to help her. On weekdays, I work for 10 hours, and on weekends I’ve had to take on some extra shifts, too, so . . . On the other hand, two weeks would be the max that I could stay at home, definitely, otherwise I’m sure my head would explode (laughing). But this is only what I think, I know that someone else would think differently, sure. . . . As a father, I sometimes might be quite strict, ‘coz I think there are certain rules that are not made to be broken, you know. . . . However, I’ve never had to yell at her (daughter) or pull her hair, hit her. Never . . . To sum it all up, I think I have a pretty good situation, as I have great job, marvellous kid,

pretty good wife, and . . . although it certainly would be nice to have more sex, I think that life's sitting quite pretty at the moment, really, what else would a man need . . . ? (Narrative condensed from an interview with Esko, 31 years, son 3 years, security specialist)

The masculine father narrative diverged notably from the other narratives found in this study. Instead of family and parenting issues, the themes of work and being a man were strongly present in the interview. In addition, clear parental gender differences were mentioned. The narrative emphasized the discourses of homosociality, heterosexuality, and violence that have assumed a central role in scholarship on masculinities (e.g., Connell, 2005) but were largely absent in the other narratives. Moreover, for example, the father's drinking habits were discussed, a topic that was absent from the other interviews.

Although parental gender differences were identified in the dominant father narrative, the masculine father narrative portrays the father as a clearly different parent from the mother. The narrative refers to the idea of the "essential father" (see, Pleck, 2010), which emphasizes the uniqueness of male parenting. Although the primary responsibility for the early care of the child was the mother's, the father as a role-model and socializer was assumed to gain in importance along with the child's growth. In accordance with the "traditional" images of male parenting (see the "Early Fatherhood: The Gender Perspective" section), breadwinning was narrated as an integral part of the paternal role—the father's role as the breadwinner and the spouse's role as a stay-at-home mother were not questioned at all—adhering to a view of masculinity in which men act as public agents outside the family. Whereas the mother took on the primary everyday parental nurture and care work, paternal nurture mainly comprised occasional "assisting her (wife)" and "doing things with the kid," in contrast to the content of nurture and care in the other narratives. In addition, whereas in the decent father narrative issues of work were mainly dismissed, they played an essential role in the masculine father narrative, through emphasis on the domain of paid employment as a focal part in the father's life. However, although work seemed to occupy a significant role in the father's life per se, the narration also emphasized the welfare of the family as an important objective of work.

Perhaps the most interesting finding in this counter narrative was the emergence of three topics that were rarely discussed in the decent narrative: the focal role of homosociality, an emphasis on heterosexuality, and the discourse of violence. For example, the father was working in a male-dominated area, where "you have to be a tough guy," that is, one who has done military service<sup>13</sup> ("you've been in the army"), have several children ("maybe with

several different women”), and “perhaps gone through a divorce.” However, the father narrated himself as slightly outside this description, highlighting the expansion in his experience of his masculine status after becoming a father, an issue also noted by Daly et al. (2013):

I actually felt like a junior, “cos they’ve had kids and women much earlier, whereas I was 28, wet behind the ears (laughing)” . . . “After getting the child, I really felt that I was a part of the club, for the first time.”

Whereas the decent narrative was characterized by the absence of homosociality, the masculine narrative emphasizes male peers as an essential support in parenthood and family life. For example, the family and children were frequently discussed in the men’s everyday conversations, emphasizing the father’s need and willingness to share parenthood with other men. In addition, the narrative drew on a strong narration of heterosexuality, which was absent from the other narratives found in the study. For instance, the narrative emphasized a male heterosexuality, as also emerged from Esko’s talk:

Yeah, this is where we quite often collide. Every time that I’d be ready, she’s not, and I’m ready 90 percent of the time.

The masculine father narrative subsumes masculinity and violence, and was the only narrative in our data in which violence was mentioned. Although the relations between violence and different masculinities remain unclear, culturally, violence generally attaches to male individuals. In Esko’s narration, violence was partly present because he had to confront it as a part of his job (security specialist), but the narration of potential violence also extended to his family sphere. He underlined how “I’m not really a violent person,” and how he would never, for example, hit the child, but nevertheless:

I’m sometimes really scared, that, if it happened . . . If the impulse came, and I just lashed out. I’m really scared of that . . . ‘Cause it’s wrong, and . . . But if it was just to happen, it’s something that I’m really scared to death of.

Although this narrative differs in many respects from the decent father narrative, it emphasizes the father’s involvement with the children as a natural part of male parenting—at least on some level. For example, the father spoke of his “call” to take care of his children in the future as well as in the present, and of his aspiration to establish an emotional bond with his daughter as self-evident. In addition, keeping the family together until the children are older is important in this narrative. If the decent father narrative was characterized

by a strong family orientation, as Esko's narrative implies, the masculine father narrative was characterized rather by a strong child-orientation:

I'll be satisfied, if we're together (with the wife) for the first eight years . . . Then they (the children) will have a strong relationship with their father, and, they'll know who their father is, if she has a new man. . . . They know that sometimes their father gets angry, sometimes their father hands out a punishment, but he's still good guy who cares for them.

## Conclusion

This study describes the dominant narrative and two counter narratives on paternal masculinity in early fatherhood produced by a sample of Finnish first-time fathers. Without waiving the provider role earlier interpreted as significant in cultural concepts of male parenting (see "The Dominant Narrative: The Decent Father" section), the decent father narrative shows a shift in focus toward more "hands-on" and nurture-enabling practices in male parenting. In doing so, it confirms and extends recent scholarship on first-time fatherhood (e.g., Brandth, 2012; Doucet, 2006; Miller, 2011b), indicating notable changes in not only Nordic but also global discourses on male parenting.

An intriguing question is what makes this particular narrative, which accords with the concept of the "new father," culturally dominant rather than any of the other possible narratives? It is very likely that the efforts made in Finland and the other Nordic countries through their family policies to promote the participation of fathers in the family, as well as a sense of gender equality in society in general, has probably informed men's understanding of what constitutes a suitable male parental role. In other words, it seems that the dominant narrative is in many important respects in line with contemporary Nordic family and fatherhood ideals. It is also likely that as cultural conceptions of parenthood and men's role in the family have changed, this too has affected men's narratives. This can be seen, for example, in the relative narrowness and vagueness of expression of the masculine narrative. It is also possible that the institutional stigma attached to the research interview might bias respondents to produce narratives deemed by society at large to be culturally decent and appropriate. However, that would only serve to confirm our interpretation of the decent father as the dominant narrative.

To revert to the theory of fields of masculinity presented by Coles (2009), it seems clear that the field of paternal masculinity exists, at least on the narrative level. However, as narratives are necessarily related to the surrounding society, we can assume that the narratives identified here also have their

counterparts in “real life.” In the Finnish and Nordic context, for instance, male parenting is perceived as involving extensive caring practices and wide-ranging parental responsibilities (see “The Dominant Narrative: The Decent Father” section).

Although Coles’s theory stresses the idea of dominance, the identification of a saliently dominant narrative was nevertheless surprising, as it indicated how relatively confined the paternal masculinities as narratives were in this study. First, this emphasizes the strength and normative character of socially constructed masculinities, and how cultural conceptions and metanarratives appear in men’s narratives. That is, particular constructions guide men toward the production of a culturally appropriate narrative. Similar results were obtained in the recent study by Miller (2011b), who found that even though a transition from a single model of unified masculinities had taken place along with evidence of a more emotional narration of fatherhood, the narratives of first-time fathers were relatively consistent and closely related to the dominant constructions of masculinity. Second, this raises a problem that is widely encountered in inquiries into fatherhood: Fathers with culturally appropriate narratives are more likely than others to participate. However, it is clear that the decent father narrative has established a central position in Finnish narratives on paternal masculinity in early fatherhood. In addition to being culturally dominant, the decent father narrative was also quantitatively dominant, as three out of every four interviewees<sup>14</sup> produced narratives that drew on it. Despite differences in detail, the primary content of the decent father narrative was identified in these interviews. However, since the boundaries of the dominant narrative were not self-evident, some of the men combined and swapped elements from different narratives, for example, the narrative element of male providing was occasionally included in the decent as well as masculine narratives, and the element of an essential family orientation in the decent as well as equal narratives.

Because in this study the participants were largely middle-class Finnish men, who can be described as responsible and involved fathers, the question of the generalizability of the findings arises, that is, among what social groups is the decent father narrative dominant? As our analysis indicates, significant differences between men from different professional backgrounds were not found, indicating the broad distribution of the narrative across middle-class Finnish men. However, if Swedish or Canadian first-time fathers from a middle-class background or Finnish substance-abusing fathers were to be studied, would the result be the same? Given the cultural similarities between the Nordic societies, we assume that the themes addressed in the decent father narrative by the present sample of Finnish men are also likely to be found among their Nordic middle-class counterparts. As masculinities have gone

global (Connell, 1998) and cultural transformations of fatherhood have been widely attested (e.g., Doucet, 2006; Miller, 2011a), we can assume that similar findings would also appear more broadly in the middle-class Western context. However, if fathers from significantly divergent social and cultural backgrounds were to be studied, the results might look different.

The present counter narratives were identified according to how they were positioned in relation to the dominant narrative. Whereas the equal narrative transcends the dominant narrative in terms of gender equality and paternal nurture, the masculine narrative rejects the dominant narrative as unmanly, and emphasizes that it is not suited to all men. In addition, whereas the masculine narrative refers to essential gender differences in parenthood, the equal narrative distances itself from gendered practices. Occasionally, however, the counter narratives also overlapped with the dominant narrative, for instance, all the narratives included a clear narration of paternal responsibilities, even if very divergent in content. It should also be noted that the counter narratives identified here are probably not all the counter narratives that exist; if the voices of a representative sample of all Finnish first-time fathers were to be heard, several other counter narratives would probably also be found.

Despite the fact that the study sample consisted of broadly middle-class men and that the results cannot be generalized statistically, some light was shed on the relation between socioeconomic status (SES) and the narratives. Although the decent father narrative was produced irrespective of the men's SES, the interviewees with slightly lower SES flirted more often with the masculine father narrative than those with slightly higher SES who, in turn, more often combined the equal and the decent father narratives. As these results remain tentative only, and do not allow strong conclusions to be drawn, we can ask whether, more generally, there is a middle-class tendency toward adoption of the dominant narratives in society.

The age of the men in our sample was in the range of 20 to 42 years; however, the decent father remained the dominant narrative irrespective of the age of first fatherhood. This result can be interpreted as indicating that, more than age or generation, societal and cultural standing affect first-time fathers' narratives of male parenthood, thus demonstrating the cultural boundedness of paternal masculinity narratives. However, as the counter narratives demonstrate, the culturally dominant narrative does not go unquestioned, meaning that the dominant narrative is subject to prospective shifts and transformations. If paternal masculinities supporting comprehensively involved male parenting and gender equality in parenthood are to be encouraged, then attention in future research should be paid to the interfaces, borders, and transitions between the decent and the equal father narratives.

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**Notes**

1. This article forms part of a larger longitudinal study examining narratives by Finnish first-time fathers in the early years of their fatherhood. The recent publications drawing on these data concern narratives of becoming a father (Mykkänen, 2010) and the transition to fatherhood (Eerola & Huttunen, 2011). The study is being conducted in the Department of Education of the University of Jyväskylä.
2. According to Hearn (1996, p. 214), instead of talking about masculinities, it would be preferable to just talk about “what men do or think or feel.”
3. The statistics are from 2007; currently, the proportion is probably nearly 90%. If the focus is shifted to fathers living with the mother and the child, virtually all these men take paternity leave after the child is born.
4. According to a Finnish time use study in 2010, men were doing over 40 % of overall childcare work in families with children from 0 to 6 years (Miettinen & Rotkirch 2012, 77).
5. According to Polkinghorne (1995), 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 whereby the researcher, by applying narrative analytic procedures, produces explanatory stories from data comprising events and happenings (Polkinghorne, 1995). In other words, whereas paradigmatic narrative inquiry examines stories as data, the purpose of narrative-style narrative inquiry is to produce stories as outcomes, for example, “How did this all happen.” In this study, both types are applied. As the data were gathered by narrative-seeking questions, the stories men produced are also analyzed as narratives.
6. The concept “narrative turn” refers to the large body of studies advocating a narrative analytical approach as well as to the increasing recognition of narratives as constructors, mediators, and reproducers of personal meanings and cultural conceptions that began in the 1980s in several branches of the social and human sciences (e.g., Hänninen, 2004; Loseke, 2007; Riessman, 2003).
7. The interviews were conducted when the men’s firstborns were from 6 months to 3.5 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 way in which men become fathers 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 few months to 13 years. The educational background of the interviewed men was as follows: 25 had a tertiary-level degree, 10 were still completing their tertiary-level studies, 33 were working full-time at the time of the interview, 9 were full-time students, and 2 were at home taking care of the home and child.

8. As the interviews were conducted by the authors of this article, a male and a female, the question arises whether the gender of the interviewer affected the narrative of the interviewee. According to De Fina (2011), as an insider (in this study, a man interviewing a man) it is possible to share meanings, and as an outsider (a woman interviewing a man) it is possible to see things differently. According to our analysis, however, it seems that paternal masculinities were narrated relatively similarly despite the gender of the interviewer, although some features of gender-sensitive speech were perceived. For example, the male interviewer was occasionally approached with father- and man-talk ("well, as a father you might know, that . . ." or "I guess we guys are . . ."), whereas the female interviewer encountered some speech with a gender-inclusive tone ("Yeah, of course I came [to the interview], always ready for an evening out with a different woman [laughing]"). However, these gender-related features in the interviewees' discourse were rare.
9. The interviewees were recruited through (a) various e-mail posting lists of students with families, (b) various general and family-themed Internet discussion forums, (c) the municipal day-care system, and (d) snowball sampling. The interviews took place, for example, in coffee shops, homes, public libraries, and other convenient places chosen by the interviewee, and lasted for 90 minutes on average. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewee and transcribed before the narrative analysis. The recordings and transcriptions of the interviews are stored at the (name of the department) in the (name of the university).
10. In total, 33 of the 44 fathers produced a decent father narrative.
11. An issue that is also discussed in by Daly et al. (2013).
12. By true masculinity, Connell (2005, p. 45) refers to the understanding that men's habits and practices are products of the male body and biology, and consequently, are unchangeable and "natural."
13. In Finland, all male Finnish citizens in their 20s have to carry out either compulsory military service (6 months-1 year) or civilian service (12 months). In 2013, approximately two thirds of the current age-class are doing military service, while the rest are doing civilian service, have been exempted for medical or mental reasons, or are in detention (6-month sentence) for refusing to participate.
14. In 44 interviews, 33 fathers produced the decent, 6 the equal, and 5 the masculine narrative. As the narratives were partially overlapping, they were classified by their salient features. That is, elements of the equal and masculine narratives were found in some of the decent narratives, and vice versa.

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