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Caring Fathers in Germany – where are the “new“ Fathers?

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1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHANGE IN THE FATHER’S ROLE IN GERMANY

This article addresses the parental commitment of men in Germany. In this regard the aim is to portray central theses of sociological research on fathers and to ask what empirical relevance will be accorded to those “new” men, who are being so widely discussed in the mass media.

In Germany the classical breadwinner-model continues to have its effect, which is attributed to the man having the role of the full time employed single earner where the woman fulfils the housewife and mother role without having her own career. This model was promoted in West Germany right up until very recently, owing to the institutional framework conditions (see for example: Mühling 2005; Mühling et al. 2006: 76-79) and corresponds to the traditional concept of the family and perception of the mother’s role, which is still very widespread in Germany as compared with other European countries. This thesis regarding a change in gender roles presupposes that younger cohorts, in view of changed living conditions, increasingly question such traditional role ideas and are developing their own new concepts of masculinity and femininity, respectively of fatherhood and motherhood (see for example Zollinger Giele/Holst 2004).

In the course of expanded education and increased employment of women in recent decades, the differences between men and women, as far as being equipped with economic and social resources are concerned, have quite clearly decreased. On the basis of theories that

use relative *earning potential* as an explanation for the task distribution within the family, an increasing similarity of gender roles must of course be expected¹.

The sociological changes in the woman's role, which are a result of, among other things, the higher education levels now, lead to younger cohorts finding a long term leave from their careers after becoming mothers much less attractive than before. The new regulations on parental leave for both parents and the planned expansion of child care places in Germany make it easier for mothers to combine their family tasks with a part time job, so that a modified breadwinner model is likely to continue increasing among young families, where the mother functions in tandem with the male chief provider as co-earner in a marriage. In this model it is characteristic that the woman follows a double orientation, on the one hand her input in the employment market and on the other hand her tasks within household and family. This is what leads to the much deplored, so-called "double burden", when the man's role does not include such a change at the same time.

The modernisation of the male role is developing much more slowly than that of the female one. Although fathers welcome an egalitarian division of tasks in the family when asked in modern surveys, these changes in attitude have so far had hardly any effect on the behavioural level. Indeed, with regard to the use of parental leave and part time working any equalisation of the father's role to that of the mother is still out of the question. New empirical longitudinal research shows that couples, following their transformation to parenthood, give up their previously more equal role distribution to go back to the more traditional forms of work sharing (Fthenakis et al. 2002; Grunow 2006; Schulz/Blossfeld 2006). Although younger cohorts of mothers reduce their periods of leave (Engstler/Menning 2003: 108-109; Grunow 2006), the share of housework unequally switches to the woman, i.e. is "traditionalised". Research based on the Bamberg married couples panel shows that fathers in fact show less inclination than childless men to help with housework, thereby giving their wives some relief (Schulz/Blossfeld 2006).

So the traditional arrangements in respect of housework and childcare sharing still dominate, in spite of higher activity rates of women. This, as is described in approaches explaining the daily behaviour of couples with regard to their sharing of housework and childcare as being the social construction of "gender" and *norms*², is attributable to social and structural conditions, from which comes a high level of resistance against new gender-specific patterns and identities. The subsequent article, among other things, deals with these institutional and social barriers.

Besides the partnership level discussed so far, in the attempted analysis of change in the father's role in the subsequent article, it is the father-child-relationship itself that is the focus of interest. In the traditional breadwinner model the man, as the father, chiefly plays the role

¹ For these theories see especially Gary S. Becker's economic model of the family (Becker 1998) and household bargaining models (Manser/Brown 1980; Ott 1989a; 1989b; Lundberg/Pollak 1993), but also theories of social exchange (Blau 1964).

² Here the Doing Gender-approach (West/Zimmermann 1987; Fenstermaker et al. 1991) and the microsociological identity theory (Bielby/Bielby 1989) are to be named.

of the mainly absent provider. However, due to the shift toward the societal ideal of the "new" father, a highly involved, coequal parent, there is evidence of the increasing engagement of fathers in the lives of their children. "*Positive fatherhood*" is today, tied in with behavioural requirements that generate a greater degree of emotional proximity between father and child, for example, regular game play and daily rituals (Ballnik et al. 2005).

In the course of the "*professionalisation of parenthood*" taking place over the last couple of decades (Meyer 2002), pedagogical and intellectual investment in the framework of child raising have gained in importance and the significance of child raising has experienced a social reevaluation. For reasons of the increasing social significance of 'parental investment' it has become much more attractive to certain groups of fathers to spend more time with the child, quite independently of the other role distribution among the couple.

In the following, empirical findings on the commitment of fathers in Germany to their children are introduced and discussed. First the subjective level of attitude is observed (Chapter 2), whereby the question is asked, what share of the tasks of the two parents in respect of childcare and upbringing do fathers like best. Then follows a look at the behavioural level, in which (Chapter 3) the vocational commitment of fathers, the actual distribution of tasks in childcare and the use of time of fathers is researched.

2 THE ATTITUDE LEVEL: HOW DO FATHERS SEE THEIR ROLES AND WHAT DIVISION OF TASKS WOULD THEY LIKE?

A large amount of empirical research shows that the *attitude* to gender roles over the recent decades has changed to the benefit of more equal role expectations (Kurz 1998; Blohm 2002; Lück/Hofäcker 2003; Kurz 2004). All the same new studies have identified a proportion of about twenty percent of so-called "new men", respectively "new fathers". Under this label Zulehner/Volz (1998) have identified men who have a "modern" gender role orientation. They assume it to be an enrichment for the new man (1) to take parental leave in order to be able to very closely experience the growing up of their own child. Furthermore, the new man is convinced that (2) the emancipation of women is a good thing and that (3) both partners should contribute to the household income, the best way being indeed, that (4) both partners work half days, in order to enable an equally valuable organisation of the housework and childcare to take place.

The following table reflects the ratio of men who agree with the traditional breadwinner model, those who would rather see a larger participation of men in childcare and those who think that small children suffer when their mothers go to work:

Table 1: Men's Family-Related Attitude (18 – 60 years old) in Germany

Region	“Men’s job is work, women’s job household”			“Men should do larger share of childcare”	“Working mom: pre-school child suffers”		
	1988	1994	2002	2002	1988	1994	2002
Germany-West	38 %	35 %	16%	67 %	71%	70 %	55 %
Germany-East		8%	12%	67 %		35 %	31 %

Source: ISSP 1988, 1994, 2002; own calculations

Whilst in 1988 38% of men in West Germany still agreed with the traditional division of labour in families (the man works, the woman is housewife and mother), the percentage with this opinion dropped to 16% by 2002. The percentage in East Germany of proponents of the traditional role distribution amongst couples at 12% of men is even at a lower level. That problems occur for a small child when its mother works, was the opinion of only 55% of West German men in 2002, as against 70% eight years earlier. Two thirds of the men between 18 and 60 years of age who were contacted, agreed that men must be more involved with childcare. There does thus seem to be a process of rethinking taking place amongst men over the past few years with regard to the gender roles within the family and in working life.

Some interesting patterns emerge when men and women are asked which concrete tasks in respect of childcare should be done by the father, respectively the mother, or both (see Table 2). What is obvious initially is that the percentage of answers of men and women hardly differ from one another. The highest agreement of men and women, practically without exception, was to the category “both”, i.e. the majority of fathers think themselves to be just as responsible as the mother in practically all areas of childcare.

The task area that, as can be expected, attracts the fathers even more than it does the mothers, is sport with their children. 28% of the men feel that the father must above all be active in sport with their children. At the same time it emerges that nappy changing, dressing of children and taking children to doctors' appointments, i.e. the jobs that are closer to the skin, lie rather in the mothers' domain in the point of view of the men.

Table 2: Childcare Tasks according to Gender: Who should be the main performer of the Task?

Family child care:	<i>Should be done mainly by ...</i>	men	women	total
Sport and Playing	<i>father</i>	27.5%	15.2%	21.4%
	<i>mother</i>	4.6%	7.9%	6.2%
	<i>both</i>	68.0%	76.9%	72.4%
Bringing to activities	<i>father</i>	9.5%	4.0%	6.8%
	<i>mother</i>	18.1%	16.6%	17.4%
	<i>both</i>	72.3%	79.4%	75.8%
Changing nappies	<i>father</i>	1.3%	0.3%	0.8%
	<i>mother</i>	45.6%	33.5%	39.7%
	<i>both</i>	53.0%	66.2%	59.5%
Choose clothes	<i>father</i>	0.7%	0.4%	0.5%
	<i>mother</i>	52.5%	46.7%	49.7%
	<i>both</i>	46.8%	52.9%	49.8%
Take to doctor	<i>father</i>	1.7%	1.0%	1.3%
	<i>mother</i>	38.7%	36.5%	37.6%
	<i>both</i>	59.6%	62.5%	61.0%
Schoolwork	<i>father</i>	3.2%	1.9%	2.6%
	<i>mother</i>	19.2%	17.9%	18.5%
	<i>both</i>	77.6%	80.2%	78.9%
Reading aloud	<i>father</i>	2.1%	2.7%	2.4%
	<i>mother</i>	22.9%	18.6%	20.8%
	<i>both</i>	75.0%	78.7%	76.8%
Buying toys	<i>father</i>	4.1%	2.1%	3.1%
	<i>mother</i>	19.0%	17.4%	18.2%
	<i>both</i>	76.8%	80.5%	78.6%
Punishing	<i>father</i>	6.5%	5.4%	5.9%
	<i>mother</i>	9.3%	7.6%	8.5%
	<i>both</i>	84.2%	87.1%	85.6%
Putting to bed	<i>father</i>	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%
	<i>mother</i>	23.5%	17.7%	20.7%
	<i>both</i>	74.9%	80.6%	77.7%
Answer questions	<i>father</i>	2.9%	1.5%	2.2%
	<i>mother</i>	8.3%	8.2%	8.2%
	<i>both</i>	88.8%	90.3%	89.5%

Source: Eurobarometer 59.0 (2003); own calculations

The decline in German men's agreement with the traditional provider model, their reducing scepticism towards mothers' careers and the attitude of the majority of men that fathers should be more involved in childcare show quite clearly, that the acceptance by men of more egalitarian role concepts is on the increase.

However, there is evidence that, with regard to the more concrete childcare tasks, men ascribe certain, more unpleasant activities such as nappy changing and managing children's medical appointments much more to the mothers than to themselves. All the same the attitude dominates among fathers, that they are equally as responsible as mothers for looking after the children.

3 THE BEHAVIOURAL LEVEL – THE ACTUAL PARENTAL COMMITMENT OF FATHERS

A comparison between the attitude indicators in the previous chapter with data on the everyday *behaviour* of fathers can give indications to the drifting apart of the increasingly egalitarian role ideas on the one hand and their actually practiced workshare arrangements on the other hand. In the following this will be observed, first of all from the point of view of the labour market (Chapter 3.1), then the responsibility of fathers with regard to childcare tasks will be shown (Chapter 3.2), before finally the commitment of fathers in respect of the time they spend with their children will be researched (Chapter 3.3).

3.1 Fathers and Employment

Many men find that their commitment to work in fact increases for financial reasons after starting a family. Since many fathers have to compensate for the loss in income formerly earned by their wives by working overtime, the time spent at home is further reduced. Men, who at the cost of their career switch to “part time” or “full time” care of their children on the other hand are still the exception. Where fathers are at home and not working, then this is as a rule because they are out of work.

Table 3: Labour Participation of Men with Children under 18 years of age in Germany

Age of the youngest child	Working Time Pattern of Fathers			
	Full time	Part time	Unemployed	Unemployable
Under 3 years	86.9 %	2.9 %	7.1 %	3.0 %
3 to under 6 years	88.0 %	2.9 %	6.5 %	2.6 %
6 to under 10 years	88.7 %	2.8 %	5.2 %	3.4 %
10 to under 15 years	87.2 %	2.3 %	6.1 %	4.4 %
15 to under 18 years	83.3 %	2.3 %	7.4 %	7.0 %
Total	87.0 %	2.6 %	6.4 %	4.0 %

Source: German Microcensus 2002; own calculations

Part time jobs are the way most women manage to reconcile family and work, and indeed over 80% of part time working women give “family commitments” as the reason for their reduced working hours. When men work part time it is rather because they cannot find any full time work or because, for health reasons or owing to further training, they cannot work full time.

Table 4: Reasons for Part time Work according to Gender

Gender	Reason for Part time Work				Total
	Cannot find full time work	Still at school or other secondary training	Personal or family commitments	Full time work not desired for other reasons or not realisable	
Men	20.3%	23.6%	27.8%	28.3 %	100.0%
Women	7.6%	2.4%	79.8%	10.1 %	100.0%

Source: German Microcensus 2002; own calculations

Looking at the *institutional structures* that young couples come up against when they become parents, it becomes at least in part understandable, why the change of father’s role has stagnated. The framework conditions of young families in West Germany are still too strongly aimed at the traditional family model (Berghahn 2004; Rüling 2004). An important consideration is that men in employment often have better chances of *higher earnings* than women. Therefore, the woman usually leaves her employment for the sake of the family, which is made an even more attractive option through the tax system called “*Ehegattensplitting*” in which husband and wife each pay income tax on half the total of their combined incomes. In addition giving up work is necessary for the simple reason that the *network of childcare facilities* for children under three years of age in Germany is *not sufficiently widespread*. It would, however, be shortsighted to explain the necessity of stopping work for family reasons alone by the lack of institutional childcare facilities. In Germany, the *paradigm of private childhood* overdominates that ascribes the main task of childcare to the family in the first instance - and within the family to the mother in particular - and views institutional childcare only as a second-best solution (Pfau-Effinger 2000: 124; Schneider/Rost 1998). Owing to this, the issue of parental leave in Germany still is ideologically laden.

Men as a rule are not confronted with the problems of work-family compatibility in the same way that women are. It is an interesting fact that single fathers, finding themselves more involved in the area of conflict between childcare and career than fathers who live with a partner, relatively often work part time, as can be seen in the table which follows.

Table 5: Ratio of Fathers with Children under 18 years of age who Work Part Time in Germany, according to Family Set-Up

Family Set-Up	Type of work of the employed fathers	
	Full time	Part time
Married couple with children	97.4 %	2.6 %
Co-habiting couple with children	93.4 %	6.6 %
Single parents	86.2 %	13.8 %
Total	97.1 %	2.9 %

Source: German Microcensus 2002; own calculations

In this context it is also the employers in Germany who play a central role. Although a lot has happened over the past few years in companies that makes working life more family friendly, the steps taken are predominantly aimed at women, whom the employer would like to hold on to after the transition to parenthood. Men who use their paternity leave, respectively wish to work part time still come up against resistance from their employers (Gesterkamp 2005; Oberndorfer/Rost 2002: 79ff.).

In the year 2000 the proportion of fathers on parental leave was about 2% (see Engstler/Menning 2003: 188). The changes in the law made in the year 2001, in which the entitlement to parental leave (the former *Erziehungsurlaub*, now called *Elternzeit*) was made more flexible³, the proportion of fathers who shared part time working and parental leave with mothers was 5.5% in West Germany in the year 2003 and 2.4% in East Germany. The proportion of fathers not working on parental leave in the same period amounted to 0.3% (West) and 0.0% (East) (see Dressel et al. 2005: 314).

The study “Fathers and Parental Leave” reached the conclusion that in fact about 20% of fathers would be pleased to use these family policy measures. The non-use of them is mainly attributable to financial calculations and fear about the future of their careers (Rost 1999: 255; Rost 2001). Recent surveys carried out on the attitudes of young men (Allensbach 2005) confirm these misgivings towards utilising the parental leave.

³ Since 01.01.2001 the modified *parental leave (Elternzeit)* has applied to mothers and fathers of small children. This parental leave specifies – besides a complete release from work – a legal entitlement to part time work (in companies with more than 15 employees) of between 15 and 30 hours per week. Thus, a reduced working commitment following the birth of a child is supported as a „compromise“ between stopping work completely and continuation of full time work. The new, more flexible regulation involves further advantages for young parents, it is possible now, for example, with the agreement of the employer, to take a year of the parental leave as late as between the third and eighth year of a child’s life. Furthermore the three years of parental leave can be divided into four parts. In addition both parents may take parental leave at the same time and share the childcare, or alternate their parental leave (see BMFSFJ 2003: 9f.). If both parents take their parental leave at the same time, then a total of 60 hours a week can be worked. After expiry of the parental leave all the rights and obligations of the previous permanent working relationship remain in place, as there is protection against dismissal during the parental leave period (BMFSFJ 2003: 10f.).

3.2 Fathers and their Childcare Responsibilities

In much of the literature on fathers, the behaviour of mothers is the benchmark for evaluation. The fact that 87 % of fathers work full time naturally limits the amount of time they can spend at home and with their children. As a result remains a large gap between fathers' level of engagement and mothers' level. In the case of most parent couples it is the mother who is chiefly responsible for the multi-faceted childcare tasks, as can be seen, for example, in the data from the Eurobarometer (see table 6).

Among external influences on the involvement of fathers like his employment characteristics, his role identification as a father and his attitude toward the child, the role of the mother has particular importance. Mothers sometimes serve as *gatekeepers* in the father-child relationship. Studies have shown, that many mothers are ambivalent about the fathers' active involvement with the children. Given the social norms that expect absorption by women in their mother role, active paternal involvement would threaten some women's identity and sense of control over this central domain of their lives (Fthenakis 2001: 84).

Table 6: Childcare Tasks: Who has the Predominant Responsibility for these Tasks?

Child care responsibilities	Who is mainly responsible?	Men	Women
Take to school	<i>me</i>	13.8%	88.4%
	<i>my partner</i>	84.1%	7.9%
	<i>someone else</i>	2.1%	3.7%
Put to bed	<i>me</i>	16.3%	88.2%
	<i>my partner</i>	83.5%	10.9%
	<i>someone else</i>	0.3%	0.9%
Changing nappies	<i>me</i>	6.1%	93.2%
	<i>my partner</i>	93.4%	6.3%
	<i>someone else</i>	0.5%	0.5%
Buy clothes	<i>me</i>	7.1%	93.1%
	<i>my partner</i>	92.1%	6.5%
	<i>someone else</i>	0.8%	0.3%
Bathing	<i>me</i>	9.7%	91.3%
	<i>my partner</i>	89.9%	7.9%
	<i>someone else</i>	0.4%	0.8%
Playing	<i>me</i>	28.9%	76.9%
	<i>my partner</i>	69.5%	21.6%
	<i>someone else</i>	1.6%	1.5%
Feeding	<i>me</i>	5.8%	93.1%
	<i>my partner</i>	93.8%	6.3%
	<i>someone else</i>	0.5%	0.6%
Dressing	<i>me</i>	6.3%	93.4%
	<i>my partner</i>	92.9%	6.0%
	<i>someone else</i>	0.8%	0.6%

Source: Eurobarometer 59.0; own calculations

Fathers are most strongly involved in playing with their children. This finding is consistent with the behaviour expectations, which can be deduced from the concept of “positive fatherhood” touched upon in Chapter 1. Fathers more often take over the tasks that are in the play and leisure time zone and include experience of positive interaction with their child.

3.3 Length of Time Fathers spend with their Children

Fathers today want to play an increasingly active part in the upbringing of their children, and active parenthood is chiefly defined as the time period that fathers and mothers invest

with their children. The time period that fathers (can) invest with their children, thereby is far behind that of working and non-working mothers invest on average:

Table 7: Time Periods of Couples with Children invested for Childcare

Parent	Minutes per day for ...	
	Childcare	Travel services for childcare
Working women with children between 6 and 18 years of age	29	9
Working women with children under 6 years of age	110	20
Non-working women with children between 6 and 18 years of age	52	13
Non-working women with children under 6 years of age	177	20
Working men with children between 6 and 18 years of age	15	4
Working men with children under 6 years of age	60	6

Source: German Time Use Study 2001/2002; Statistisches Bundesamt

If we look more closely at the time allocation of fathers, it becomes clear that the investment for their work and the necessary regeneration leaves hardly any scope for substantial parental dedication or cooperation in the household. Fathers catch up, especially on Saturdays, when household management and care of the family are their most significant activity.

Table 8: Average Time Expenditure of Fathers with Children under 18 years of age for Selected Categories

Activity	Time expenditure of Fathers in Minutes ...		
	on work days	on Saturday	on Sunday
Employment	430	86	43
Household Management and Family Care	160	264	179
Sports	19	39	54
Hobbies and Games	14	20	23
Honorary Post, Voluntary Work	19	30	28
Mass Media	132	172	202
Social Life and Entertainment	73	147	141
Sleep	447	499	569

Source: German Time Use Study 2001/2002; own analysis of the Scientific Use File

The main activities in the time fathers have with their children are “games and sport” (an average of 26 minutes on a Sunday), followed by “personal hygiene” and “travel time/accompaniment to appointments”. How much time fathers spend with their children and in which activities depends to a great extent on age and number of children: fathers of children of under 3 year old invest about 50 minutes on Sundays in playing with the child and

personal hygiene as well as several minutes of cuddles and story reading. If fathers spend a lot of time with their children, then that is as a rule to the cost of their assistance with housework, but also to the cost of their own leisure and regeneration time, as has been seen from research on time budgets (Rosenkranz et al. 1998).

4 CONCLUSIONS

Noticeable in Germany is the drifting apart of the modern attitudes of fathers on the one hand and the practiced role organisation on the other hand. The self-definition of fatherhood has changed without any doubt, men today want to contribute actively to the upbringing of their children and no longer return to the role of the absent provider. All the same workplace-related, financial and social barriers of every kind to date prevent the modernised attitudes in the minds of the “new” fathers from being realised to their full extent. Therefore, the situation in Germany often is described as "verbal progressiveness with behavioural immobility" (Rost 2002: 373).

Quite clearly changes are taking place in the daily dealings of fathers, their provider role, however, remains untouched. Particularly in economically difficult times fathers have little scope for experimenting with part time jobs and the enforcement of family friendly schemes at work. It can be assumed that the persistent male provider function is the chief influence on fathers' time allocation. The tight framework, in which the father has time available for family tasks, is decisively stuck in his job requirements. This leads to target conflicts, especially for men with a strong family orientation and modern gender role ideas. The changed role expectations seem to be limited to “after close of business” and at the weekends in respect of fatherly input (Rosenkranz et al. 1998; Ballnik et al. 2005). We know very little so far of how the fatherly commitment “after close of business” has developed over time. It can, however, be supposed that the emotional closeness between father and child has tended to increase. The results presented in this essay are evidence that fathers feel themselves to be directly responsible for games and sports with the children.

Both social science research and businesses have for a long time ignored the fact that the work/life balance is not only a female theme, but also a man’s problem. Parental leave and part time employments are still taken almost exclusively by women. Although the number of fathers on parental leave is still very low, the more flexible parental leave has at least slightly increased the proportion of fathers since 2001. Surely the so-called “Parents Benefit” (*Elterngeld*), which is being prepared at present, will create further meaningful incentives. According to this, working parents who remain at home for childcare in the first year of a child’s life will, by latest 2008, receive parents benefit of about two thirds of their last salary. After all 46 % of fathers and 56 % of men wishing to start a family stated that such an income

replacement theme would motivate them to stop working for a year or a few months, according to a recent survey (Allensbach 2005). In connection with the planned “father component” of two months, which cannot be transferred to the woman, there is thus a chance that the parents benefit will increase male participation in parental leave and provoke new experiences and role innovations concerning fathers, mothers and employers.

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