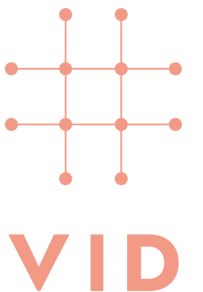


# Involved fatherhood in the Nordic context: dominant narratives, divergent approaches

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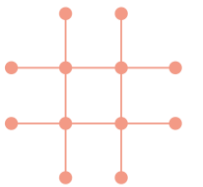


# **Involved fatherhood in the Nordic context: dominant narratives, divergent approaches**

**by Gunhild R. Farstad and Kari Stefansen**

**NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies, 2015. Vol.10, No. 1, 55-70**

**Included in my PhD thesis from 2016**



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# Main focus

How do fathers of young children in Iceland understand their role in infant care?

Two approaches:

- Father as primary carer
- Father as secondary carer



# Method and sample

In depth interviews with 14 cohabiting heterosexual Icelandic parents

Children between 9months- 3 years

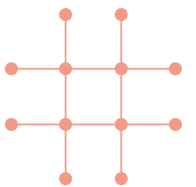
From 2009-2010

Couples interviews in English

Focus in interviews:

Division of parental leave, care arrangements, family life

Life mode interview; detailed description of one particular day



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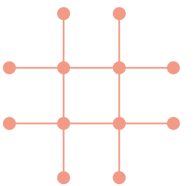
# Dominant narrative of the new father

(Eerola and Huttunen, 2011)

Father as “mother like” caregiver

“widely spread and rarely questioned”

Fathers leave promotes the father’s opportunity to care for the infant child independently of the mother



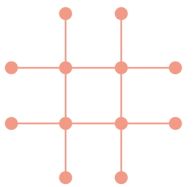
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# The study aimed to explore..

...variation and complexity in the articulation of the ideal of fatherhood and how they intersect with social structures such as class.

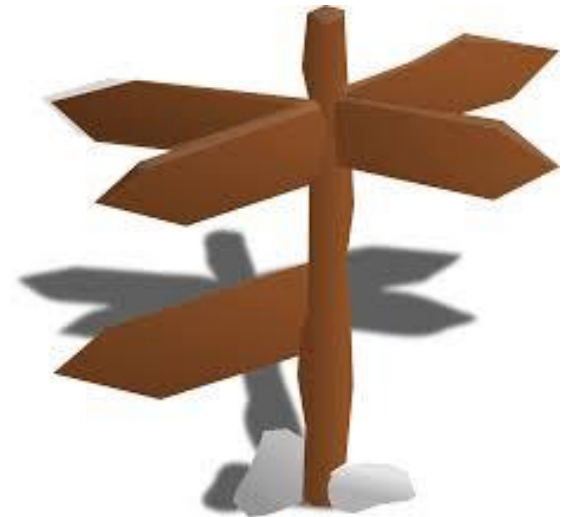
And

To move beyond the fixed categories of old and new, and pay attention to the shifting positionings in fathers' accounts of everyday practices

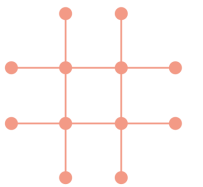


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# Inclusive vs. orthodox masculinity



Anderson, E. (2005) and Anderson, E. (2009)



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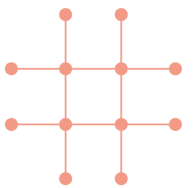
# Two approaches: similarities and differences

Across the sample:

- All wished to prioritize family time
- Move away from distant fatherhood
- Support dual earner/dual carer model

Two main differences:

- Urgency in establishing a caring role for the child
  - Mainly middle class; flexible work hours, public sector
- Caring role emerging over time as the child grew
  - Heterogeneous group; both working class occupations, low education, and higher educated within financial business sector



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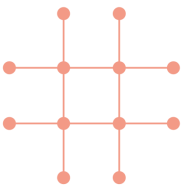
# Father as primary carer

- Focused on independent care practice in early childhood
- Alone-time with the child, without the mother present

“I mean, I thought it was great just to get Kristin [wife] out of the house so that we could be alone together. I just think it, I think it creates a closer bond between the father and the child to be alone and get the mother out of the equation”

- Child centeredness

“So, I’m just present. But I think perhaps I have the conscience to play and just leave other things... the practical things”.



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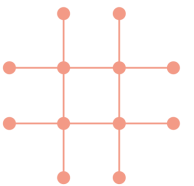
# Father as secondary carer

- Arranging child care around work
- Child needs to get older in order for father and child to bond

“well for one thing it’s much easier to play with a one-and-a-half year old than a nine month old, and I think probably you know, eh, it’s better for us as bonding, it’s what I imagine. At nine months he is more reliant on his mother”.

- Less need to set aside special time for the child
- Takes over partners practices

“you know, its an other person but the routine stays the same”.

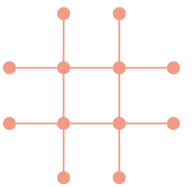


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Albert: But I do almost everything, because she is working nights also, evenings.

I: So in that way you are kind of part of the routines anyway. But still you felt, like when you were on leave, that it was too little?

Albert: Well, no it was enough to do, just the ordinary stuff, but... just to stay and do that would probably drive me crazy.



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# Inclusive or orthodox?

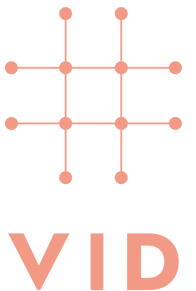
- Competing forms of normative masculinity
- General move from orthodox towards inclusive masculinity in terms of fathers participation in care
- Traces of orthodox masculinity in both approaches

## Fathers as primary carer:

- Need to establish parenting on his own terms, independently, being in charge
- Clearly living up to the standards of the dominant narrative of involved fathering

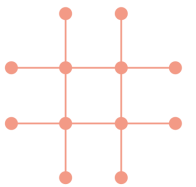
## Father as secondary carer:

- Possible to opt out of caring if its practically possible
- But also willingness to learn from their partners, and to get the practical tasks done
- A type of de-gendering that goes unrecognized?



# Conclusion and further questions

- Simulations processes of continuities and of disruptions of traditional masculinity.
- Fatherhood is situated; not easily put into categories of old and new
- What are the potentials for gender equality in the different forms of involved fatherhood?
- How does the findings relate to different ideals of motherhood and femininity?
- Further studies; longitudinal? Mixed methods?



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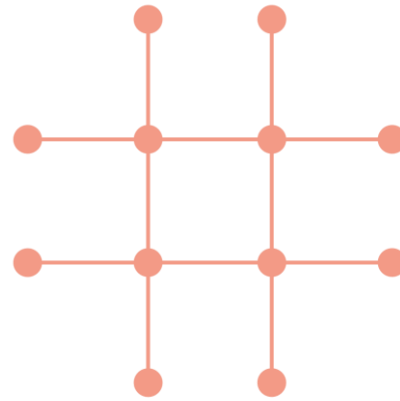
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# Thank you for your attention!