



## *The Present Father*

### **Applying Sociological Theory from A Father's Standpoint**

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**Abstract:** My greatest joy in life and biggest source of pride is being a father. I take the responsibilities that come with being a parent very seriously and I am completely involved in all aspects of my daughter's upbringing. However, there have been many instances where I have felt treated as less than an equal parent because I am not the mother. I have felt like I am on a second tier when it comes to receiving information and making decisions about my daughter's livelihood. The purpose of this sociological self-exploration, applying various sociological theories and concepts in a sociological imagination framework, is to understand why I get so offended by this treatment and why I take it so seriously. I want to learn why this issue has been so important to me ever since my wife and I went to our first doctor's appointment to confirm that we were having a child.

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#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

My greatest joy in life and biggest source of pride is being a father. I take the responsibilities that come with being a parent very seriously and I am completely involved in all aspects of my daughter's upbringing. However, there have been many instances where I have felt treated as less than an equal parent because I am not the mother. I have felt like I am on a second tier when it comes to receiving information and making decisions about my daughter's livelihood. The purpose of this sociological self-exploration, applying various sociological theories and concepts in a sociological imagination framework, is to understand why I get so offended by this

treatment and why I take it so seriously. I want to learn why this issue has been so important to me ever since my wife and I went to our first doctor's appointment to confirm that we were having a child.

I will first examine this issue from a micro-theoretical angle. I will inquire deeply into my personal interactions and socialization in the hopes that I can better understand why I feel the way I do. I will then provide an in-depth look at how my experiences compare to others on a macro-theoretical level. In essence I want to investigate whether fathers have usually had similar experiences in their interactions as a parent.

C. Wright Mills, a well-known sociologist, wrote about the **sociological imagina-**

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**tion** in 1959. The basic idea of the sociological imagination is that it encourages a person to understand history and biography and their intersections within society. He argues that you have not completed any intellectual journey unless you have considered this idea. In the spirit of the sociological imagination, then, I will now try to follow such a complete intellectual journey by examining my biography and broader social history and show how they intersect in society.

## II. PHENOMENOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

An appropriate place to begin this discussion is by looking at the issue from the lens of sociological phenomenology. This theory seeks to explain how people actively produce and sustain meaning (Appelrouth and Edles, 2008). I want to understand what has happened to me in my everyday life that will help to explain why I am so bothered by how I am sometimes treated as a father.

I think that a large part of it has to do with my own upbringing. I was brought up having divorced parents, each of which is now currently on their third spouse. My father, as I heard from my mother's perspective, was to be looked upon negatively. He was only there for me when it was convenient for him and he did not do all that he was supposed to; again this is according to my mother.

In addition, much like former SUNY-Oneonta student Katie Dubaj (2002) experienced, my father was not very good at keeping up with the child support. While I did not experience the same abandonment that she did, as related in her essay titled, "My Translucent Father," I was made well aware of the fact that my father was doing something wrong and that it was to be looked upon negatively. His late payments meant that we were having a harder time making ends meet.

Thus, it was at this point that my **lifeworld** was changed concerning my father. It was now a part of my consciousness that he was not "superman," that he was capable of being less than perfect and that, importantly for this paper, a father can in fact be looked upon negatively. This was new for me at this point in my life but something that is still with me. All of this is similar to what another former SUNY-Oneonta student Nancy Chapin (2002) described in her paper, "Honor Thy Father and Mother," when she said "there was a precipitous event that changed how I perceived my world, how I felt about my parents' abilities to fulfill their roles, and how I saw myself in relation to these new experiences" (48). Despite the fact that her story is different than mine, we both went through the process of realizing that parents were capable of flaws and were not always behaving as they should. For me, the important connection to her paper is that parents are viewed in a negative light when they do things that are disapproved, even by their own children.

My sister, who is two years older than I, had caught onto this notion that dad wasn't always perfect a few years earlier than I. Being older, I think it was just a matter of her being able to piece everything together before I could. Nonetheless it was around the time I realized all of this that we started talking about it, as kids of course, but talking nonetheless. We shared an **intersubjectivity** about the issue because we both understood/experienced this notion that dad wasn't perfect and in fact that he was capable of doing something wrong. We discussed how we felt about dad and that we did not like it when mom spoke badly of him. We knew he loved us and didn't understand why mom didn't see this. As kids, we of course had no idea about the power of money and how it can affect your life. My mother obviously did and that was the sole reason for negativity towards him.

The point of this discussion is not to say that my father is a bad person, because he is not; it is simply to illustrate that a profound memory in my childhood was coming to the realization that the man who picked me up every other weekend and that I had a lot of fun with was not as perfect as he seemed to be on the surface. This represented a challenge to my **stocks of knowledge**, or the recipes or attitudes for every day conduct I had already acquired and taken as true up until this point in my life. To further this thought in the phenomenological vein, my **recipe** for interacting with my father had been altered. Stated differently, my automatic habits and unquestioned interactions with my father were now changed, even if only slightly. It was nevertheless a memorable challenge to my **primary socialization**. Prior to what I have discussed, my father was great, as were all fathers, and it was 'true to me' that this was just the way it was. Since this ideal vision of my father was all that I had ever known, it was difficult for me to actually come to terms with the knowledge that he was not above and beyond others, but rather, the same as everyone else. With time it has made more sense but it is certainly a part of who I am today and affects the way I look at other people.

Again, I love my father very much but this whole time period when my mother influenced how I perceived him is something that is still with me today and I believe it is part of the reason that I have some need to be seen as a "super dad" by my daughter for as long as possible. It has to have something to do with why I need to be seen as a completely involved father. In all honesty, it makes me uneasy to think that there will be a day when my daughter realizes that I am human just like everyone else. I just hope that when she realizes this it is not for negative reasons. I hope that she just comes to understand that her daddy is a regular person who is not at all perfect but someone who happens to love

his daughter more than anything else in this world.

To add to this discussion, my mother's second husband, whom I lived with for many years, was not at all a nice man. He was my stepfather while I was growing up and he was physically and psychologically abusive to me. When I think about myself being abused and mistreated I can relate to the film *The Girl in the Café* (2005), which portrays Gina as a girl finding herself trying to build a new friendship with Lawrence at an international gathering of world leaders, while daring to criticize them in public for their policies toward the world's poor, especially children. Whereas I was a child who assumed that everything at home with "loved ones" was going to be great and if my mother loved this man then it must mean that he will love me, Gina must have had similar feelings about the man she had a child with long before he met Lawrence in the café. She must have probably been also certain that this man would love their child and be good to them. Unfortunately that was not the case in either scenario and in both cases the child suffered.

An unfortunate side effect of this abuse was that I exercised an extreme form of **bracketing**. I went through my childhood trying to play the role of the happy student at school, which did not come naturally. I had to bracket out my entire home life in order to carry out the typified role of the happy kid and good student. If I did not, I would get beaten even worse. This period of my life was so bad that I have literally blocked out much of it and have very few memories. My sister to this day still has to tell me things that should be obvious from our childhood. I can relate this feeling to the PBS documentary film *Multiple Personalities: The Search for Deadly Memories* (1994), which portrays three cases of severe, what is today called, Dissociative Identity Disorder Each at a different stage of recovery. I feel as if I have a self that has gone missing

and that is deeply suppressed due to traumatic experiences. While I know that there was never any sexual abuse like the people whose lives are documented in the film, I still have a part of me that is largely non-existent, at least in my conscious memory. I have things deep in my past that I do not remember and have blocked out because of how horrible and painful they were.

I brought my stepfather into this study because I think it is an important part of why I want to be so involved in my daughter's life and for people to realize that I am always there taking care of her and making sure that she is treated as every child deserves to be. I did not have that growing up and so I think that it has become very important that any child of mine gets to experience all that I did not. I want people to understand that I am not like my stepfather. I love my daughter with all of my heart and I will be present in all aspects of her life in the most positive ways that I know how. My stepfather was the perfect example of everything I will never ever choose to be as a father and I think that I have a need for others to know that I am nothing like him. I have a need for people to acknowledge that I am ever-present and ever loving in my daughter's world.

### III. THE SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST LENS

To build upon the phenomenological investigation that has uncovered some thoughts and feelings about the "fathers" in my life, I think it is important to look at my need to be treated, and—as I am learning throughout this investigation—seen, as a fully involved "good" father myself. It is appropriate at this time then to continue the conversation through the lens of symbolic interactionism.

Another aspect about myself changed when I was in the age range of the issues discussed above and can be related to the

self-study conducted by the former SUNY-Oneonta student M. Goltry (2003). In her article titled, "Theoretical Reflections on Peer Judgments," Goltry wrote: "A significant problem in my life arose at about the time I entered middle school. I began to more than before take into account the opinions and attitudes of others" (19). I too began to take other people's attitudes towards me very seriously around that age. Although my situation was different than Goultry's, I saw the power of other people's opinions. I was not getting the approval of people at home so I went searching for it in all of my other interactions. It was at this time in my life that I consciously began practicing **impression management**. I wanted to present myself in a likable/cool/popular way so that others would like me and give me the positive attention I so desperately needed.

From this time period until the present I have constantly had the need for people to like me and see me as a good person who is good at whatever it is they are doing. The feelings I experienced as a child at home were not pleasant and I was constantly made to feel like I had no self-worth. Well, I was not about to go down without a fight. I did everything in my power to present an acceptable image of myself to others. What I was attempting to do lines up with Charles Horton Cooley's concept of the **looking-glass self**. I made adjustments that made me think that I was giving off the impression of a good/likable person; I imagined that others saw me as the person I wanted to be, and I felt better about myself as a result. I had made a solid decision in my life and as a result I went out into the world and became as involved in positive activities as I could. Not only did this help me feel better but it also kept me very busy outside of the house and away from my stepfather.

I joined the soccer team, did well in school, was respectful toward teachers by day and hung out with other kids after

school doing teenage-type mischievous things. I was going to create the impression of being a good/normal teenager by actually being one despite what I was going through in my home life. I examined what was happening to me personally and how I was being torn down at home and I deliberated that it was time to take a stand in terms of impression management. I was determined to lead a normal public life. I knew that one day it would all be over and that I would go off to college and never have to deal with it again. I just had to be strong until then.

Borrowing from Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory of society in terms of a theatrical stage, my **front**, which is the part of my everyday performance that others see, is to always be in control and always portray myself as a good, likable, well-rounded person, always working hard and making all of my daily relationships with co-workers positive. I was, and still am to this day, hypersensitive to all of my interactions and am constantly making sure that I am presenting myself in the best possible light. I have really been able to see this part of myself ever since I met my wife. She encourages me to relax more and just be my true self as I tend to be **backstage**. Backstage is where I am just me and I swear about things and complain and admit that I am tired or that something is bothering me. She is one of the few people who see this side of me, including many members of my family.

It may seem odd that I am discussing so much about my younger years in a paper about how I am perceived as a father, but all of this biographical information is crucial to understanding why it is so important for me to be seen as the father I strive to be. The important things to understand at this point are that I had a very strained relationship with an ex-stepfather who was abusive and also that I learned that my father was not perfect. Growing up with my stepfather encouraged me to try

extra hard to be a "good" person, not because that was what he wanted but it was the opposite of who he was and I strived to be his opposite. I write "good" in parentheses because we are talking about what I think a good person is and it is important to know that this is my personal definition, which is not necessarily the same as everyone else's. An important part of me trying to be a good person is getting acknowledgement from others and thinking that I am in fact achieving this goal.

Thus far my childhood as it relates to fatherhood has been problematized and it is now important to discuss how these issues relate to the overall purpose of this paper; how am I perceived as a lesser parent in certain situations and why perceptions of fathers are important to me?

#### IV. FROM EXCHANGE THEORY

As far as the interactions with my stepfather are concerned, he served the purpose of teaching me all the ways that I do not want to be a father. I do not want to be a heavy drinking angry person who beats children and has no concerns for their livelihoods. I do not want to be someone who puts others down for their own satisfaction. I want to be, and be seen as, the opposite of that. These ideas can be developed to relate to Exchange Theory, and so I will begin to expand the conversation to involve more than just introspection. I will now bring in my interactions with a broader array of society but yet still pursue the inquiry mainly at the micro-theoretical level.

Based on the personal biography I shared above, and fast-forwarding to the present time frame, it may not be all that surprising for me to say that some of my actions would line up nicely with George Homans' ideas about social exchange. While I certainly do not agree with the relevance of his theory to many aspects of my life, I must admit that it accurately

pinpoints the way I sometimes interact in public spheres with my daughter. For example, when I go to the doctor's office with her I do all that I can to make sure that I present myself as an involved father and I do this in hopes that I will be treated as one in return. What Homans called the **elementary social behavior**—i.e., “face-to-face contact between individuals, in which the reward [or punishment] each gets from the behavior of the others is relatively direct and immediate” (Applerouth and Edles, p. 441)—is what I expect to be present in how I interact with my daughter's doctor. In the face-to-face interactions with the pediatrician the expectation is that the reward we both receive is fairly simultaneous and instantaneous. The doctor will get the reward of discussing their patient's (my daughter's) health with a well-informed and involved parent, one who can in turn answer questions and productively move the appointment along. I should get the reward of being seen and treated as a good parent who is doing all that they should to provide for their child. The reward for me is to feel good about my parenting and be involved in all of the decision-making about her health and development.

The above scenario sounds all well and good, but unfortunately this was not usually how everything turned out when my daughter was very young (and even before she was born). An important piece of the scenario that was left out on purpose is that my wife and I go to all doctor's appointments together. While I am in fact the one who usually takes the lead at the appointments and am the one who holds and comforts her for shots and sits her on my lap while the pediatrician examines her, I was consistently treated as less than equal to my wife. This type of interaction is one where there is not **distributive justice** in my eyes. I did not feel that there was a fair balance between costs and rewards when this happened to me. I put in a tremendous amount of work as a parent and make sure

that I am involved in absolutely everything concerning my daughter and that I made the appointments as smooth as possible for the doctor just to have them turn to my wife at the end and discuss how my daughter's health is and what next steps to take for her development. This type of treatment was downright infuriating to me.

This was not an equal exchange by any means and unfortunately it didn't just happen at the pediatrician's. I have had similar exchanges with her daycare workers as well. My daughter has been in two declares because we moved out to Amherst when she was ten months old. At both declares I was treated as a secondary caregiver when we brought her in for interviews. All of the attention was geared at having my daughter play and be comfortable while the directors and teachers would discuss with my wife how the center was run and what they offered in terms of child development. I was not necessarily treated as if I was not there, but I was not spoken to directly and I was not asked any questions about her health, attitudes, behaviors, eating habits, sleeping habits, etc. An interesting thing that is relevant to this conversation is that I was the parent that stayed home with her the longest after she was born. I was the expert on everything that she did, and my wife will agree with me saying all of this. I had the most exposure to her and so I was the one that should have been asked all of the questions and been given all of the attention by both doctors and daycare workers.

## V. THE FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

Thus far in the exploration I have discussed my interactions with father figures and have explained why I have such a need to not only be a good father, but also to be perceived and treated as one. At this point I want to further explore this

aspect of myself at a macro-theoretical level. I want to understand how my feelings and experiences fit with broader social forces. I will do this in a two-fold manner. I will both continue the development of this issue on a macro-scale and link what is found back to the micro-level exploration detailed thus far.

Continuing the discussion about how I am treated at doctor's offices and declares compared to my wife is important as it relates to Structural Functionalism. The **social system** that is operating within these locations, and in society at large, is one where the shared norm is that fathers aren't as involved as mothers and are not the primary (or even equal) caregivers. My **role** as a father, or the detailed set of obligations for interaction (Applerouth and Edles, p. 352) as a father, is not generally seen as one that includes the obligation of equal caregiver or decision maker for a child.

I must admit that my own **socialization** dictated that a secondary role for fathers was binding. I learned through my upbringing and interactions that mothers were the primary caregivers and that was just the way it is in our society. I had gone through the process of **internalization**, with fathers. To me the father (as a symbol) equated to the secondary caregiver and decision maker for a child's well-being. This was certainly evidenced in the micro-exploration detailing the father figures I had as a child when I was at the height of my socialization.

However, Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2006) highlight the importance that this role has for my child when they say, "an understanding of fathers' perceptions is important since the way they organize and understand their roles as parents affects the nature of father-child interactions and has consequences for child development" (255). This view shows just how important a father's own perception of his role is. The **cultural system** in this country as it relates to father-child relationships has placed

boundaries on father's behaviors and acceptable actions towards their children. It is not the norm that fathers are at least equal caregivers, providers, and decision makers. Mothers are expected to fulfill this role. As such, fathers' own perceptions of their relationships with their children have been affected. To take it a step further, Durkheim would probably say that these ideas are so engrained within us that they are actually a part of the **collective conscience** in the United States.

To further this point, Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2006) write, "Individual behavior is subsequently influenced by the societal expectations and personal meanings one attributes to a role" (258). We have discussed the societal expectations that this statement refers to, but I think it is very important to look at the personal meanings that are referenced within it. I understand that society doesn't expect me to play the part of involved father to the extent that I do but the personal meaning of father (as a symbol) to me is very powerful. As I have discussed in the preceding micro-analysis, I love my daughter very much and will do whatever is needed to always be there for her, even if that means going against norms. So, I attribute a great deal of personal meaning to being a father, to the point that most societal expectations are disregarded. I take great pride in how I conduct myself against the norms of our society as a father and I am quite amused with people's reactions.

My wife is also extremely supportive of the way I perceive what a father's role should be. I discussed previously that my wife would be given the attention at the doctor's offices and day-cares when we first became clients. A final piece of this scenario is that after the initial interactions and snubbing of my involvement, my wife and I would go after whomever it was that was disregarding my presence. She would make it quite clear that I was to be involved in all conversations and in fact would

establish that I was the primary contact, should they ever need to get in touch with us. In this case, while the *manifest function* of our emphasis as such is that I am given professional courtesy and am treated as a client should be, more importantly the *latent function* of our interactions as such is that doctors and daycare workers may now look at all fathers a little bit differently and give them a little bit more credibility in their parenting role.

Returning to the issue of my wife's involvement, Bouchard et al. (2007) write, "a father's perceptions that his partner has confidence in his parenting ability were related to both feelings of competence in parenting and to his motivation, which in turn was related to his involvement and to his satisfaction in his performance of the parental role" (25). I personally relate to these findings because I am confident in my fathering because I have all of the support and encouragement I could ever ask for from my wife. I am motivated everyday to be the best father that I can be, both because of her and because of the experiences I had as a child. I have seen firsthand what can happen when a father assumes the secondary role. In my case, the child support was slowed down and the purse strings were tightened, which led to more stress at home and a stepfather seeing me as nothing but a burden. The act of simply not sending a check by a father led to his child undergoing abuse. This is not something to be taken lightly and is not something that I will never erase from my consciousness.

## VI. FROM CONFLICT THEORY

Looking at this issues from the perspective of Conflict Theory, and all that it encompasses, will be very helpful in tying together a lot of the thoughts that have thus far been expressed.

The first concept that will help to clarify why the perception of fatherhood is a bit

messy is W.E.B. Dubois' idea of *double consciousness*. While he coined this term in the racial context, I think it applies well to my experience as a father. As I discuss previously, society at large dictates that fathers are to play a subordinate role to mothers when it comes to raising and caring for children. This is how people see fathers when they look at them in the United States. This is how I feel that people see me as a father when I am at a doctor's office at daycare, or even in the grocery store. This is despite the fact that I see myself as a good father who is always with his daughter in good times and bad and will do anything for her.

I think that a large part of what people have historically thought about fathers was that their job was to just pay the bills and make sure that the mother could be in a position to do the rest, which plays a role in the double consciousness described above. I do not think that it is still the case that people see fathers as the only working members of the family bringing home money (in fact in my house my wife does quite a bit better than I do at bringing in money) but rather that the associated notion of the woman being in charge of all of the childrearing and housekeeping lives on. I think that there is still the old sentiment that women continue to be the only ones who do these types of functions around the house and so it is difficult for people to see fathers taking up these duties.

There has been some investigation into what I have just mentioned by Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2006) who write, "...fathers themselves hold broad and varied perceptions of their roles and an emerging overall consensus that the father role extends beyond that of a financial provider into multiple dimensions of involvement" (255). From this statement we can see that even the fathers have held onto the beliefs that they were not caregivers, but that they were just supposed to make enough money to support their children from a financial

standpoint. The fact that the idea of the father extending beyond monetary input in the child's life is still emerging is troubling to me. I cannot fathom why fathers are not perceiving their roles as far more important than they have previously; however I do see how this lends itself to what I have experienced in the doctor's offices and day-cares. How can I expect others to see me as the "good," completely involved father that I am when the statistical majority of the fathers out there are working against me?

To extend this line of reasoning it is appropriate to discuss the concept of the *bifurcation of consciousness* coined by the sociologist Dorothy Smith as it relates to Feminist Theory. She argues that, "subordinate groups are conditioned to view the world from the perspective of the dominant group, since the perspective of the latter is embedded in the institutions and practices of that world" (587). In terms of being a very much present father, I am in the subordinate group because I am not a second-tier parent. I am not absent from any aspect of my daughter's upbringing and I am always an equal caregiver and decision-maker when it comes to her. As a result I am currently against the dominant outlook that is *institutionalized* in this country that women do the majority of the responsibilities of child-rearing.

I will never sit by and let my wife be the primary caregiver for two reasons. The most important reason is discussed by Ishii-Kuntz (1994) when he finds that, "American men consider themselves understanding and feel closer to their children when they interact more frequently with their offspring" (30). I want to always be connected with my daughter and understand what her life is like and always be there for her and so it is important that I take an active role in accomplishing these goals. I cannot expect to have a great relationship with her if I am not really involved in what she is doing. Writing this reminds me of a particular scene in the movie *Awak-*

*enings*, which portrays the real story of many patients who lived in a catatonic state for nearly 30 years until Dr. Sayer, played by Robin Williams, discovered how to awaken them, at least for a while, using a drug previously used for Parkinson's disease. In one scene in particular, one could see how strong of a connection the mother had with Leonard, played by Robert DeNiro. Leonard's mother was having a conversation with the doctor and she was saying that she needed to be there because they communicated. The doctor questioned whether Leonard could communicate (speak) in his catatonic state, and she replied, "he speaks to me in other ways. You don't have children do you Dr. Sayer?" To which he replied "no." She then said, "if you did, you would understand." I have every desire in the world to have this strong of a connection with my daughter and the only way she accomplished this was by always being present and always staying involved in his life.

The second reason I will never sit by and let my wife be the primary caregiver is because quite frankly raising a child is a lot of work and it requires a lot of physical and mental energy. It would be completely unfair for one of us to sit by idly while the other one was working feverishly hard to make sure all other aspects of our non-working lives were taken care of. I have seen all of the after-work chores and responsibilities be referred to as the second shift. Well, there is absolutely no way that anyone will have to work the second shift alone at my house. We are a family and we all contribute to the success of our household.

## VII. POSTMODERNIST VIEWS AND EFFORTS TOWARD SYNTHESIS

A final theoretical perspective to look at this issue from is that of postmodernism.

Postmodernists put a lot of emphasis on the relation of knowledge to power, which brings forth the role media plays in shaping family roles and lives. I think that this is an appropriate line of discussion when it comes to exploring how the role of father is perceived. I feel that the media paints a picture of the father in the United States that is less than desirable. Whether it be on television programs or on nightly newscasts, the father is shown as either uninvolved, incompetent, or unattached.

It seems that these *simulations* of the father are ever present in the media. A simulation is a model or reproduction of the original, in this case the father, that is no longer original. Television programming is notorious for its line up of less-than-stellar father figures. We can look back to Archie Bunker lounging around in his recliner while his wife does all of the work and he is not too friendly to his kids. You can see it in the cartoon sitcoms of today that the fathers are the buffoons while the mothers take care of all responsibilities. There are few if any examples where the father is the responsible caring person who truly cares what happens with his family. In my opinion this creates a *hyperreality* for people in the United States. People's current perceptions of the father have always already been reproduced. Even the simulations no longer resemble what happens in the lives of regular people. I think that Jean Baudrillard would argue that the father as portrayed in the media is a *simulacra*, i.e., "copies of objects for which there is no true original" (Appleroth and Edles, p. 666).

This reminds me of the excerpt from the film *The Matrix* in which Neo discovers that everything he thought he knew was simulation/simulacra and that he was living in hyperreality. Everything he knew was divorced from true reality. All that he had ever experienced was not real and it seems to me that all that is portrayed of the father in the media is simulation/simulacra. I can assure you that not all fathers sit

around the house being morons and accomplishing nothing of use because I do not, nor do many of my friends who have children.

One final concept, still a modernist one, that will tie my theoretical thoughts together is Anthony Giddens' *agency*. Agency, as it is defined in Appleroth and Edles (2008), "refers to a person's capability or power to act, to 'make a difference,' or to intentionally intervene in her world. Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently" (755). This concept is a nice fusion between the micro and macro exploration related to the perception of the father.

I would say that I exhibited agency throughout my life as it relates to the role of the father. This concept allows me to make sense of why I take the role of being a father so seriously and why I get so offended about how I am perceived out in society. When I was younger and having a bit of a rough childhood I made the effort to "make a difference" in my world. I strove to be a happy, well-adjusted person despite what was happening with my stepfather. I had choices to make at an early time in my life. I could have been very unstable and secluded because of what I was dealing with; I could have done something drastic like trying to injure him or take my own life to get away from everything, or I could do whatever was in my power to try and rise above it all. I had the agency to make this decision and I am happy to say that I think I made the right choice for myself.

I exhibited agency when I chose to defy what I was socialized into believing the role of the father was supposed to be. It would have been easy for someone like me to sit back and let all of the responsibility fall on the mother. I could have done what society says men do when they have a child and abandoned them or keep myself at a safe

distance while the mother formed the strong bonds and cared for her well being. There is no way that was going to happen. I made the conscious choice to defy everything that I learned as a child and everything that society and the media taught me about being a father. In truth, I did learn something about being a father while I was growing up with my stepfather. I learned what I wanted to be the opposite of. I knew that I would want something completely different and better for my own child someday and I have now used my agency to make that happen and to make a positive impact on her life. Maybe someday she will use me as an example of how she wants to be a parent. That would be the ultimate compliment that she could ever pay me.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I think it is appropriate to discuss what all of this exploration through sociological theories means for me and what I can do as concrete next steps in my life to bring about important changes related to this issue. I have shed a great deal of light on this concern and an important last step for personal development is to walk away with an understanding of how this sociological exploration, of an intensely personal concern, can be put to use in my personal life. The intellectual journey would be incomplete without this last step.

As I have gone through the motions of completing this assignment I have learned a great deal about the social world around me, and how I fit into it as a father. I have learned to come to terms with the fact that I am the product of a difficult childhood in which fathers were not always the best role models. Through reviewing relevant literature I have also learned that fathers are often perceived as I have described my experiences in doctor's offices and daycare centers: as a sort of second-class parent. I

have also learned that I have been exercising my own agency for change throughout my life, which was a great realization.

The most important thing that I have learned however is that when you put all of this newfound knowledge together, I am proud of who I am as father. I realized that I wanted so badly to be viewed as an involved/equal parent because of how proud I am to be Zoe's father. I stated in the introductory paragraph to this paper that my greatest joy in life and biggest source of pride is being a father. Well, throughout this journey I realized that I had it all wrong in my head. The first sentence should have read: My greatest joy in life and biggest source of pride is my daughter. That's it! That minute little change in wording has cleared everything up for me; I need to change the way I look at the issue.

The most concrete next step that I can take about dealing with how I am perceived as a father out there in the greater social world is to know that it doesn't matter. What matters most is not the views of fathers that the rest of the population has; it is the view that my daughter has of me. This intellectual journey inspired by the sociological imagination has now come full circle. It began with a phenomenological examination of this issue, explored the perceptions of fathers on the micro- and then macro- levels and it has now come to the micro-level, the interactions with my immediate family.

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