

FocusFamilyINSIGHT

Strategy Development – Family Research

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To: Jim Daly

Re: Research Overview on the Importance of Fatherhood

"Women, it is true, make humans,
but only men can make men."

-Margaret Mead, *Male & Female*, 1968

Newsweek's cover story last week lamented the "man-problem" in America and did so as if the only problem facing the American male is lack of access to paternity leave from work.

Did lack of paternity leave prevent iconic television dads Andy Taylor or Heathcliff Huxtable (whose wife worked) from being good men? *What about your own dad?* Newsweek flubbed a wonderful opportunity to thoughtfully explore an important family and national issue. Attentive students of the family know the weakening of fatherhood is not new, nor does it center on access to paternal leave from work. It is about how a culture treasures and encourages fatherhood.

The problem of fatherlessness is what launched the modern culture war around family.

And it started in March 1965 by a Democratic Presidential Administration!

It was then that Assistant Secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan,¹ released his report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* which was both a family and civil rights manifesto. It warned that while the newly-passed Civil Rights Act of 1964 could do much to lift the fortunes of the Black Americans, these gains could be undercut by another important factor: the crumbling Black Family. And the husband and father was the critical weak link.

He opened his report with these words:

The United States is approaching a new crisis in race relations. ...The fundamental problem, in which this is most clearly the case, is that of family structure. The evidence – while not final, but powerfully persuasive – is that the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling. So long as this situation persists, the cycle of poverty and disadvantage will continue to repeat itself.²

Moynihan, with great passion, warned that the fact that a majority of Black children reach adulthood having lived *apart* from their father was a situation so serious it demanded "national action" to correct it.

Criticism of the "Moynihan Report" (as it became known) and its author was fierce, immediate, unanticipated, and highly personal. Writing to a friend months after the report's release, Moynihan lamented, "If my head were



¹ Moynihan of course went on to serve as a long-standing Senator from NY, replaced by Hillary Clinton upon his retirement.

² Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, March 1965, p. 1.



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sticking on a pike at the South West Gate to the White House grounds the impression [of disdain toward me] would hardly be greater.”³

Today, however, opinion about the Moynihan Report has changed dramatically. As Professor James Q. Wilson explains, at the time, it was “denounced left and right by academics...now it is generally regarded to be right on the mark.”⁴

On the 40th anniversary of the report – just five years ago - *Newsweek* noted that,

Moynihan’s report died a public death—a victim of ideological politics, misleading press coverage and the report’s own loaded language. Yet, the truth is that Moynihan was onto something—just not precisely what he thought he was.⁵

Ellis Cose, a leading African-American journalist, explains Moynihan erred “in assuming that trends he saw in the black community were somehow peculiar to the black community and that the white family was a model of stability.... Moynihan could not foresee that the statistics, so alarming about blacks, would eventually describe reality for many whites.”⁶

And such is where we are today, 45 years later. More fathers becoming more loosely connected to more mothers and children.

Are we forced to accept the pandemic of fatherlessness as inevitable?

Is it beyond our control?

I. Prevalence of the Problem of Fatherlessness

Data shows that not only has the problem gotten *dramatically* worse in the Black community since the 1960s, it has also worsened in both the White and Hispanic communities.

| Percentage of All U.S. Births to Unmarried Mothers | | | | |
|--|------|----------------------------|------|------|
| race | 2008 | 1970 | 1960 | 1940 |
| overall | 40.6 | 10.7 | 5.3 | 3.8 |
| white | 28.6 | 5.7 | 2.3 | 2 |
| black | 72.3 | 37.6 | 23.6 | 16.8 |
| Hispanic | 52.5 | 36.7 <small>(1990)</small> | | |
| Asian – Pacific Islanders | 16.9 | 14.2 <small>(2002)</small> | | |

Below is the historic trend line for the percentage of all U.S births to unmarried mothers from 1940 to the most recent data.⁷ The overwhelming majority of these children will grow-up fatherless.

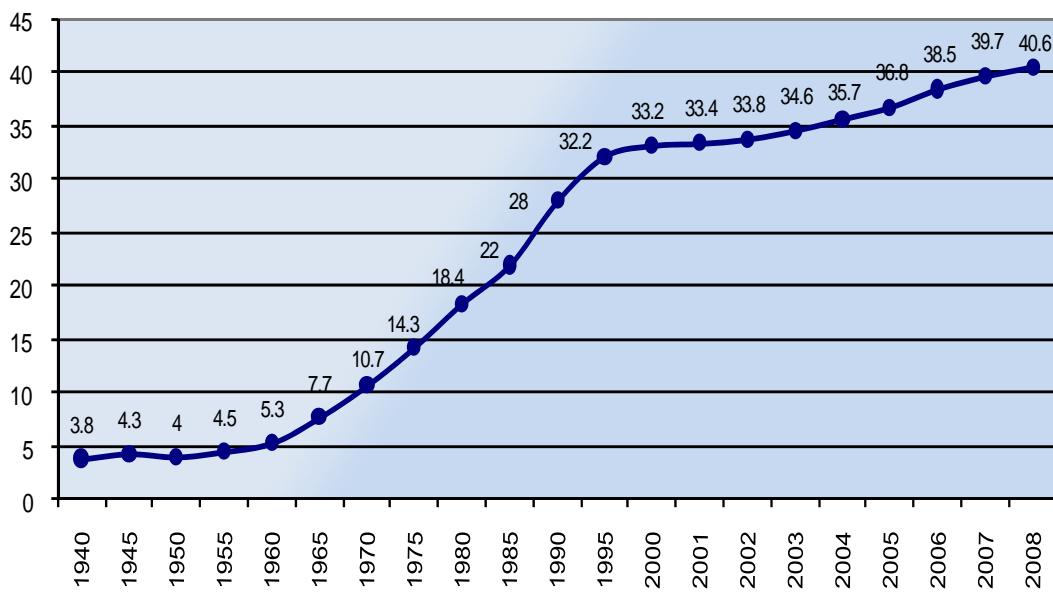
³ Nicholas Lemann, “Postscript: Daniel Patrick Moynihan,” *The New Yorker*, April 7, 2003.

⁴ Interview with James Q. Wilson, *The First Measured Century*, Public Broadcasting System, <http://www.pbs.org/fmc/interviews/jwilson.htm>, accessed September 12, 2005;

⁵ Ellis Cose, “Long After the Alarm Went Off,” *Newsweek*, March 14, 2005, p. 37.

⁶ Cose, March 14, 2005, p. 37.

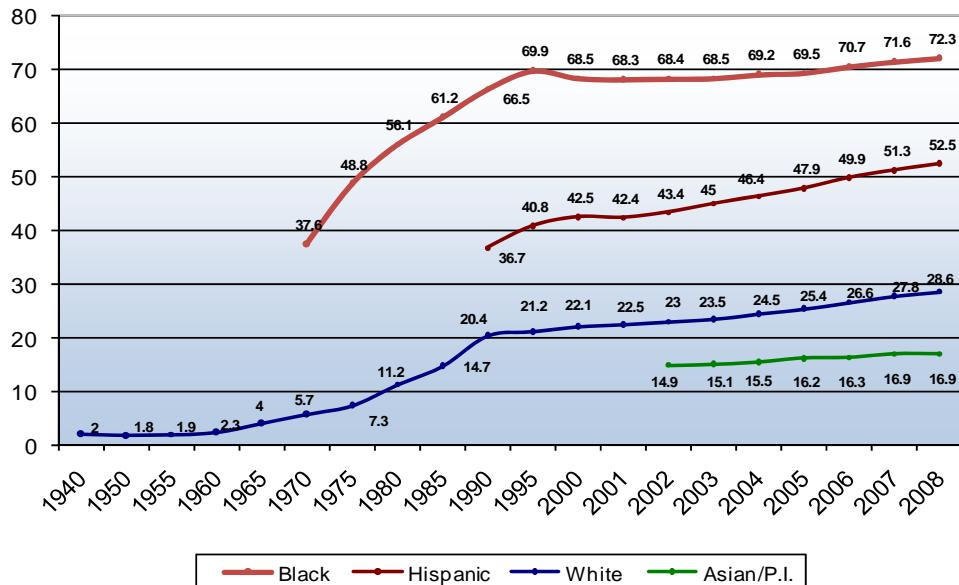
⁷ Stephanie J. Ventura, “Changing Patterns of Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States,” *NCHS Data Brief*, No. 18, May 2009, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Stephanie J. Ventura, “Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States, 1940-99,” *National Vital Statistics Report*, Vol 48, No 16, Oct 18, 2000.



The 2010 “State of Our Unions” Report from the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia explains,

The percentage of children who grow up in fragile—typically fatherless—families has grown enormously over the past four decades. This is mainly due to increases in divorce, out-of-wedlock births, and unmarried cohabitation. The trend toward fragile families leveled off in the late 1990s, but the most recent data show a slight increase... (p. 101)

Unmarried Childbearing in U.S. by Race and Year⁸



⁸ Ventura, 2009; Ventura, 2000.



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We must have both the courage and compassion to say that having and raising a child to be intentionally fatherless is morally wrong.

- According to the National Marriage Project, in 1960 only 8% of all children lived in a fatherless family and most of these were homes where the father had died.
- Currently, 34% of U.S. children live absent their biological dad.

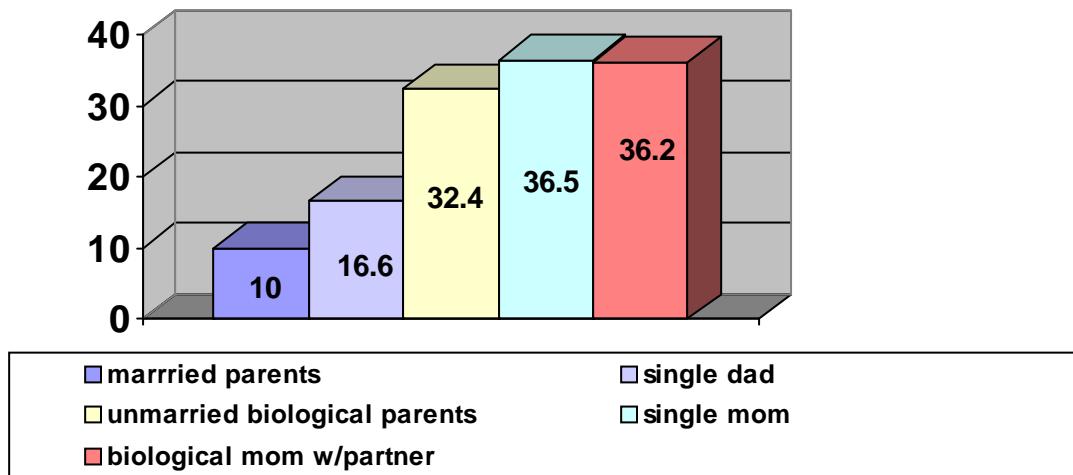
II. The Individual and Social Impact of Fatherlessness

The federal government spends \$99.8 *billion* dollars every year on programs - such as child support enforcement and anti-poverty efforts – needed to support father-absent homes.

This is not including the substantial additional spending on the social problems fatherlessness creates, such as criminal activity, increases in teen-childbearing, school drop-out, etc.

(National Fatherhood Initiative research findings)

Percentage of Children Living in Poverty by Family Form



President Barack Obama, speaking at the Selma Voting Rights March Commemoration (March 04, 2007) lamented,

We have too many children in poverty in this country and everybody should be ashamed, but don't tell me it doesn't have a little to do with the fact that we got too many daddies not acting like daddies. Don't think that fatherhood ends at conception. I know something about that because my father wasn't around when I was young and I struggled.

A virtual sea of good, diverse research shows that all other things being equal, children without fathers are *two to three times* more likely than peers with married fathers to experience:⁹

- Greater infant mortality

⁹ Wendy Sigle-Rushton and Sara McLanahan, "Father Absence and Child Well-Being: A Critical Review," in Daniel P. Moynihan, Timothy M. Smeeding and Lee Rainwater, eds., *The Future of the Family*, (New York, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004) and numerous others published studies over the past 3 decades.



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- Poorer physical health
- Greater likelihood of depression
- Poorer school readiness and performance
- Poorer cognitive, motor and verbal skills
- Highly elevated probability of living in poverty
- Seriously elevated (120-165%) risks of some sort of significant physical or sexual abuse
- School drop-out
- Teen child-bearing
- Criminal/Violent behavior
- Elevated likelihood of being incarcerated
- Drug use
- Child obesity
- Decreased feelings of adequacy and confidence
- Lowered demonstrations of empathy toward others

Professor Michael Lamb, in one of the first academic articles summarizing the irreplaceable role of fathers in healthy child development, explains that long-term studies demonstrate:

...there are indeed qualitative differences between the mother-infant and father-infant relationships, and suggest that we can no longer accept the implicit assumption that fathers are occasional mother-substitutes... Both mother and father thus play *qualitative* different roles in the socialization of the child.¹⁰

A 2001 article reviewing the overall body of research on fatherhood, published in the *Review of General Psychology*, concludes:

Much of this evidence suggests that the influence of father love on offspring's development is as great as and occasionally greater than the influence of mother love.¹¹

Renowned Rutgers sociologist, David Popenoe explains,

Fathers are far more than just 'second adults' in the home. Involved fathers – especially biological fathers – bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is likely to bring. They provide protection and economic support and male role models. They have a parenting style that is significantly different from that of mother, and that difference is important in healthy child development.¹²

Research shows, time and again, that a father - much more than mother - is the parent who gives both boys and girls:¹³

- Greater sense of confidence, less general sense of fear
- Greater sense of empathy toward others
- Greater sense of respect for women
- Greater sense of control of violent urges
- Greater independence

¹⁰ Michael E. Lamb, "Fathers: Forgotten Contributors to Child Development," *Human Development* 18 (1975) 245-266, p. 251,257.

¹¹ Ronald P. Rohner and Robert A. Veneziano, "The Importance of Father Love: History and Contemporary Evidence," *Review of General Psychology* 5.4 (2001): 382-405.

¹² David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence that Fatherhood and Marriage are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society*, (New York: The Free Press, 1996) p. 163.

¹³ Glenn T. Stanton, *Secure Daughters, Confident Sons: How Parents Guide Their Children into Authentic Masculinity and Femininity* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2011), chapters 7-13.



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- Greater problem solving skills
- Greater verbal development
- Greater understand of right and wrong
- Healthy sense of gender and psycho-sexual development

III. What Fatherhood Does for Men

Anthropologists tell us that a society's most pressing and original problem is the unattached male. Most often, marriage or prisons are the answers societies find to this problem.

This making of men needs to be intentional, and is largely done through connecting boy to their fathers through marriage.

UC Berkeley (and Nobel Prize winning) economist George Akerlof addressed this question of how fatherhood impacts men - and therefore the rest of us - in a prestigious lecture entitled "Men Without Children" just over a decade ago, saying "the impact on society of men neither marrying nor living with children" was quite significant.

Akerlof found that men who are married fathers are:

- more attached to the labor force
- on average earn higher wages each year they are married
- have less substance abuse
- commit less crime
- are less likely to be the victims of crime
- have better physical and psychological health
- live longer
- are less likely to be victims of a serious accident

Akerlof explains that single men (childless or living apart from their children) are nearly *six times more likely* to go to prison than married men, and are *four to five times more likely* to be a victim of crime themselves.

Also, ladies, Professor Akerlof finds that married fathers are more cultured, *twice* as likely to be a member of a book group, have visited a museum or gallery and significantly more likely to have attended the opera or symphony in the last year!

He found cohabitation was incapable of providing these benefits, explaining that "men settle down when they get married and if they fail to get married, they fail to settle down."¹⁴

IV. Larger Research Picture of How Fathers Boost Healthy Child Development

General Overview

- In a review of studies on father involvement and child well-being published since 1980, it was found that 82% of these studies found "significant associations between positive father involvement and offspring well-being..."¹⁵
- In an analysis of over 100 studies on parent-child relationships, it was found that having a loving and nurturing father was *as important* for a child's happiness, well-being, and social and academic success as having a

¹⁴ George A. Akerlof, "Men Without Children," *The Economic Journal* 108 (1998) 287-309.

¹⁵ Paul R. Amato and Fernando Rivera, "Paternal Involvement and Children's Behavior Problems," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 61 (1999): 375-384.



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loving and nurturing mother. Some studies indicated father-love was a *stronger* contributor to some important positive child well-being outcomes.¹⁶

- “There is no doubt that fathers are important contributors to child development. In particular, fathers significantly affect the development of sex roles, cognitive abilities and achievement motivation.”¹⁷

Security, Confidence and Attachment

- Infants who have involved fathers in their lives from the first eighteen to twenty-four months of life are more secure, and more likely to explore the world around them with increased enthusiasm and curiosity than children who did not have close, involved fathers. Fathers’ active play and slower response to help the child through frustrating situations promotes problem-solving competencies and independence in the child.¹⁸

School Readiness and Behavior

- Children who have an involved father in their life in the early years show up for school with more of the character qualities needed for learning. They are more patient, curious and confident. They are better able to remain in their seats, wait patiently for their teacher and maintain interest in their own work.¹⁹
- Educational psychologist Paul Amato explains that this higher level of self-control in school children with involved fathers was also associated with many other healthy qualities, such as improved general life skills, self-esteem and higher social skills.²⁰
- Kyle Pruett, in his book *Fatherneed*, reports on another major scientific study indicating positive fatherhood involvement was closely associated with:
 - a. lowered levels of disruptive behavior, acting out, depression and telling lies
 - b. obeying parents, being kind to others and being responsible
 - c. fewer behavioral problems in young boys
 - d. girls being happier, more confident and willing to try new things

Pruett concludes, “positive father care is associated with more pro-social, and positive moral behavior overall in boys and girls.”²¹

Cognitive, Motor and Verbal Development

- Psychologist Ellen Bing, in the early 1960s, found that children who had fathers who read to them regularly were more likely to do much better in many important cognitive skill categories than children who didn’t have fathers who read to them. One of the strongest benefits was a substantial increase in a daughter’s verbal skills. Interestingly, mother-reading time did not strongly affect verbal skill development in daughters or sons.²²
- A study nearly ten years later, published in *Developmental Psychology*, found that well-fathered preschool boys and girls had increased verbal skills compared with kids with absent or overbearing fathers.²³
- Ross Parke’s research shows that father involvement in the early months of a child’s life contributes to increased intellectual, motor and physical development.²⁴

¹⁶ Ronald P. Rohner and Robert A. Veneziano, “The Importance of Father Love: History and Contemporary Evidence,” *Review of General Psychology* 5.4 (2001): 382-405.

¹⁷ M. Weinraub, “Fatherhood: The Myth of the Second Class Parent,” in J.H. Stevens and M. Matthews, eds., *Mother/child and Father/child Relationships*, (Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1978), p. 127

¹⁸ Kyle D. Pruett, *Fatherneed: Why Father Care is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child*, (New York: The Free Press, 2000), p. 41-42.

¹⁹ Henry B. Biller, *Father and Families: Paternal Factors in Child Development* (Westport, CT: Auburn House, 1993)

²⁰ Paul R. Amato, *Children in Australian Families: The Growth of Competence*, (New York: Prentice Hall, 1987).

²¹ Pruett, 2000, p. 52.

²² Ellen Bing, “The Effect of Child-Rearing Practices on the Development of Differential Cognitive Abilities,” *Child Development* 34 (1963): 631-648.

²³ Norma Radin, “Father-Child Interaction and the Intellectual Functioning of Four-Year-Old Boys,” *Developmental Psychology* 6 (1972): 353-361.

²⁴ Ross Parke, *Fatherhood*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996)



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- Henry Biller, noted fatherhood researcher, finds time and again that father-involved children are more confident and successful in solving complex mathematical and logical puzzles because fathers tend to be more specialized in and have a higher interest for analytical problems. Norma Radin found that high father involvement contributed to higher mathematical competencies in young daughters.²⁵
- Michael Yogman conducted a study of the role fathering plays in overcoming the effects of prematurity in Latino, African-American and other inner-city populations. When he followed up with these preemies at three years of age, Yogman found that kids who had highly involved fathers had substantially higher cognitive skills than those children who didn't have involved fathers.²⁶
- Michael Lamb found higher cognitive competencies on standardized intellectual assessments for preschool children who had involved fathers.²⁷

Making Wise Life Choices

- Research from the University of Pennsylvania found that children who feel a closeness and warmth with their father are twice as likely to enter college, 75 percent less likely to have a child in their teen years, 80 percent less likely to be incarcerated and half as likely to show various signs of depression.²⁸
- “A white teenage girl from an advantaged background is five times more likely to become a teen mother if she grows up in a single-mother household than if she grows up in a household with both biological parents.”²⁹
- The likelihood that a young male will engage in criminal activity doubles if he is raised without a father and triples if he lives in a neighborhood with a high concentration of fatherless families.³⁰
- “The research is absolutely clear...the one human being most capable of curbing the antisocial aggression of a boy is his biological father.”³¹

Development of Empathy

- A long-term study started in the 1950s found that the strongest indicator for a child being empathetic later in adult life was warm father involvement in the early years of the child's life.³²
- In a 26 year-long study, researchers found that the number one factor in developing empathy in children was father involvement. Fathers spending regular time alone with their children translated into children who became compassionate adults.³³

Yale University's Kyle Pruett, after reviewing the large body of research on father involvement and child development, concludes “these findings take us beyond a shadow of a doubt here” that fathers play an important and irreplaceable role in healthy child development.”

He adds, “the closer the connection between father and child, the better off they both are now and in the future.”³⁴

²⁵ Henry B. Biller, “The Father and Personality Development: Paternal Deprivation and Sex-Role Development,” in Michael E. Lamb, ed., *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1981), p. 104.; Norma Radin, cited in Pruett, 2000, p. 45.

²⁶ Michael Yogman, et al., “Father Involvement and Cognitive/Behavioral Outcomes of Preterm Infants,” *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 34 (1995): 58-66.

²⁷ Michael E. Lamb, “Introduction: The Emergent American Father,” in Michael E. Lamb, ed., *The Father’s Role: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum and Associates), pp. 3-25.

²⁸ Frank Furstenberg and Kathleen Harris, “When and Why Fathers Matter: Impacts of Father Involvement on Children of Adolescent Mothers,” in *Young Unwed Fathers: Changing Roles and Emerging Policies*, R. Lerman and T. Ooms, eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

²⁹ Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “Facing the Challenge of Fragmented Families,” *The Philanthropy Roundtable* 9.1 (1995): 21.

³⁰ Anne Hill and June O’Neil, *Underclass Behaviors in the United States: Measurements and Analysis or Determinants*, (New York: City University of New York, 1993).

³¹ Forensic Psychologist Shawn Johnston, quoted in *The Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, March 29, 1998.

³² Robert R. Sears, et al., *Patterns of Childrearing* (Evanston, IL: Row Peterson, 1957); Pruett, 2000, p. 48.

³³ Richard Koestner, et al., “The Family Origins of Empathic Concern: A Twenty-Six Year Longitudinal Study,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58 (1990): 709-717.



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V. Evangelical Faith and Fatherhood

Interestingly, recent scholarly research indicates that the evangelical faith has a positive impact for father, mother and child in regards to quality of fathering. One study reports:

Protestant fathers are considerably more likely than their non-evangelical counterparts to engage in paternal supervision and affective parenting. This finding - which at first glance seems to contradict the authority-minded character of conservative Protestant families - is quite consistent with a burgeoning body of research on the affective, nurturing and emotionally expressive dimensions of evangelical parenting.³⁵

University of Virginia sociologist, W. Bradford Wilcox, explains from his research, that apart from the widely held picture of harsh, patriarchal fathers found in conservative churches, a different picture emerges:

My findings show that conservative Protestant fathers are more likely to praise and hug their children and less likely to yell at them than are mainline Protestant or unaffiliated fathers. ... Conservative Protestant men's active and expressive approach to fathering would seem to be largely a consequence of the family-focused norms and ethos found in conservative Protestant institutions.³⁶

Professor Wilcox explains these influencing institutions include Focus on the Family and other pro-family Christian ministries and churches.

VI. Fatherhood in Christian Worldview

At the center of the Christian story is a God who reveals Himself of us as Father, and He has a beloved Son.

Jesus tells us in his High Priestly prayer (John 17) that fatherhood is the core of the universe and the center of all reality because before there was anything, there was a Father loving a Son and a Son loving a Father. The universe is not a cold, impersonal place!

The first and last recorded words of Christ in scripture speak either of or to his Father. These are found when his parents find the very young Jesus teaching the elders in the temple and he explains "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49) and on the cross asking why His Father had forsaken him (Matt 27:46).

Fatherhood is central to the universe, the Christian story, and our lives, as well as the Trinity itself.

No wonder fatherlessness hurts so deeply.

No wonder it is the family topic that would launch the current culture war on family.

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³⁴ Pruett, 2000, p. 44, 41.

³⁵ John P. Bartkowski and Xiaohe Xu, "Distant Patriarchs or Expressive Dads: The Discourse and Practice of Fathering in Conservative Protestant Families" *The Sociological Quarterly* 41 (2000) 465-485, p. 478,479.

³⁶ W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) p. 129, 131.