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ABSTRACT

Fathers' roles in cooperative nursery schools have changed considerably since the 1920s. In the 1920s, American families had a strict father-mother role differentiation. These stereotyped sex roles broke down somewhat in the 1930s and 1940s due to the Depression and World War II, but they returned in the 1950s. A more egalitarian approach to parenthood was evident by the 1970s, and these changes have continued. Parent cooperative preschools have both reflected societal views toward parenthood and contributed to those changes. In the 1920s and 1930s, fathers contributed mostly construction and repair work. References to fathers' regular classroom participation do not appear in preschool materials and doctoral dissertations until the 1960s; rather, fathers were viewed as valuable supplements to the school's real functioning. The 1957 meeting of the National Association for Nursery Education was a turning point when its keynote speaker urged that parent meetings be planned for times when fathers could attend. Regular father classroom participation has increased since the 1960s and is reflected in cooperative preschool materials, oral history interviews, and books on father-child relations. Although current research and preschool materials suggest that fathers participate regularly, fathers' roles in the preschool environment have received scant attention due to subtle resentment and ostracism by female teachers and mothers. Cooperative preschools have contributed to changes in fathers' roles since the 1920s by giving men a socially approved fathering role and helping them develop networks of like-minded men who are typically middle-class professionals and trendsetters in their communities. (KDFB)

# The Changing Role of Fathers in Co-op Nursery Schools

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## The Changing Role of Fathers in Co-op Nursery Schools

Although they were based upon the Froebelian kindergartens that had originated with both male and female teachers a century earlier, American nursery schools of the 1920s reflected the stereotyped roles assigned by society to middle-class fathers and mothers. The sex-role differentiation that was taken for granted in the 1920s is rather recent and is usually attributed to the movement of production from homes to factories. Anthropological studies indicate that most preliterate societies expect boys and men to be involved with young children, and throughout early European and American history there was an assumption that men and women worked together to earn the family income and to rear their children. By the late nineteenth century, successful men were expected to earn enough to be able to say that "No wife of mine is going out to work." To be successful, they needed to master technological skills and be tough decision makers. In parallel with this was the realization that the competitive world of commerce was so defiling to the fathers that it seemed best to pass morality training over to the feminine influences.[1] (My personal and unconfirmed theory is that the popularity of beards during the late 1800s was because the successful businessmen and politicians were ashamed to show their faces in public.)

During these years, there were small groups of humanists who refused to take this approach. Some men and women in the Froebelian kindergartens, precursors to our contemporary early childhood centers, felt strongly that children needed both genders in their classrooms. One was John Krause, who had worked with Froebel in Germany. He complained to Elizabeth Peabody in 1874 that "It is a great mistake that men are excluded from the early education in this country. In Europe it has become an acknowledged fact that Kindergartens become a success only when men and women work together."[2]

The father-mother role differentiation broke down somewhat during the depression of the 1930s and the wartime years of the

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[1] I have discussed this period in "Sisterhood and Sentimentality" Child Care Information Exchange (November 1995), pages 24-27.

[2] This 1874 letter was reprinted in H. Barnard, Kindergarten and Child Culture Papers, Hartford, CN: American Journal of Education. page 555.

early 1940s, first because so many men were unable to find work to support their families and then because of the influx of women into the job market. By the 1950s, just as co-ops moved into their rapid expansion period, television was beginning to influence American culture, mothers were expected to stay home with their children, and fathers once again were expected to assume an authoritarian role. "Father Knows Best" was just one of the regular shows that depicted Dad coming home after a hard day's work to deal with weighty problems, but it would be hard to imagine him mopping the floor after feeding applesauce to a toddler. Most TV fathers were incompetent in dealing with the household tasks that their wives whisked through while wearing high heels and pearls. Television commercials also fit into this mold. So did children's books - with my favorite being the "Big Golden Book of Cars and Trucks" with its center spread picture of a travel trailer. Father was sitting outside in a folding chair enjoying his well-earned vacation and mother was standing in the doorway, dishtowel in hand, drying a saucepan with a cheerful smile on her face.

But society changed. The 1972 "Golden Daddy Book" showed multi-ethnic and multi-careered fathers, including those in nurturant roles with young children. By the time "Kramer vs. Kramer" won the 1980 Academy Award, more and more movies and television programs were depicting nurturant fathers. The obvious point of change came with the social upheaval that began with Berkeley student sit-ins of the mid-sixties and included protests against Vietnam and the shock of Watergate. The developing popularity of childbirthing preparation classes, with the father assisting in the delivery room and bonding at birth, must have contributed. For the co-op nursery schools, change was also tied to the Women's Liberation Movement and to the re-definition of sexual roles. On a more practical level, it was also because middle-class mothers needed to find paid employment and their husbands began helping with household tasks. This egalitarian approach to parenthood has led to public acceptance of nurturant fathers - as is evident in scanning the comic strips in newspapers across the country. Dagwood and Hagar the Viking still reflect the old stereotypes, but they are outnumbered by fathers who are involved with all aspects of their children's lives - including many variations of diaper changing problems. Even a recent New Yorker reflected

this, with a middle-aged man describing his amazement at finding a diaper changing table in the men's room of his favorite restaurant.[3]

Against this background, what do we find in the parent participation preschools? During the 1920s, the AAUW Pre-School Project, directed by Lois Meek (Stolz), was the catalyst for a nationwide interest in child study groups. Many of these evolved into the first wave of parent participation preschools. Reports in the AAUW *Journal* indicate the respective roles of the fathers and mothers. In Ithaca, New York, mothers organized and operated their nursery school but "The husband of one of the members, a professor of Economics, worked out a sliding scale of charges." In Missoula, Montana, we find a typical situation in which "Two mothers coöperated" each day but fathers weren't mentioned. The best known early co-op was Children's Community, in Berkeley, California, described by Katharine Whiteside Taylor in a pamphlet published by the AAUW in 1929. It was planned by AAUW study group mothers, but they consulted with male professors at the university - some of them fathers of the nursery school children. Taylor mentioned that "Several fathers who came out to the evening meetings, rather reluctantly at first, now appear regularly and are very enthusiastic. Observations made when bringing and calling for their children have awakened the interest of some and a Sunday session is under consideration for the purpose of affording all the fathers an opportunity to see what is going on."[4] Her 1967 edition of *Parents and Children Learn Together* only mentioned fathers as being helpful in some of the masculine jobs, but she wrote in 1981 that "Some women have feared that if men were present, they would be dominated. More often the men have felt unimportant and sort of like side wheels in cooperatives' meetings as though they were chiefly the mothers' projects. Unfortunately, many times this has been true. But it is hoped that more and more groups will see the wisdom of working for a balance of the sexes here as elsewhere."[5] An enthusiastic article in a 1934 *Journal of Home Economics* described a scenario that was duplicated over the country for decades, as co-ops improvised and scrounged to convert affordable sites to nursery schools. In this Berkeley co-op, the project was to convert an ex-chicken house, with fathers doing the carpentry and other construction work and mothers sewing and preparing

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3 Calvin Trillan, "Turning the Tables" in The New Yorker (October 2, 1995). page 108

4 The 1929 pamphlet was reprinted as Appendix A in K.W. Taylor's 1981 edition of Parents and Children Learn Together.

5 Taylor 1981 quote pages 359-360.

community dinners - with everybody coming to the realization that "we were having a thoroughly good time."[6]

In none of the descriptions prior to the 1960s have I found any references to fathers who participated on a regular basis in the classrooms. Their role was to do "manly" things, to follow Dr. Spock's advice to be a model their sons could emulate. Cooperative nursery school manuals of the period did include fathers, but continued to view them a valuable supplements to the real functioning of the school. The 1954 manual published by the Silver Spring cooperative in Maryland was one of the first. It was sold to groups across the country as a guide to setting up their own programs. Page 15 begins "In our nursery school the mother has several functions. She is first of all the parent to her own child. Second, she is an assistant to the teachers one day a week and drives the children in her area to and from school that day. And third, as one of a cooperative group, she is responsible for maintaining and administering the school." This is followed by a description of the various jobs she can perform, including "opportunities not fully expended in the home." A section entitled "The Fathers Help, Too" comes on page 26. and describes their importance in digging fence holes, building and repairing equipment, even acknowledging "those who have taken on the weekly driving stint for a non-driving participating mother." (Note: He drives the car, she participates.) They have given advice, legal, financial, and architectural. The paragraph's concluding sentence is that "we are gradually and successfully persuading them to serve on some standing committees, e.g., housing, finance, and equipment."

In its 1955 mimeographed manual, California Council's "Pointers for Participating Parents" had one paragraph headed "Father Participation" that states "Cooperatives have stopped referring to themselves as "mothers clubs" and refer to "parents" instead. ... "In a few schools fathers participate as assistant teachers (to the delight of the children!)." An interesting variation on this in the 1968 edition. Near the back, on page 103, are two brief paragraphs are on "Father Participation." After the usual two sentences about maintenance, we find that "In addition, most schools permit the father to take the mother's place at any participation day and any parent education meetings."

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6 K. Dick, "Nursery School Based on Parent Cooperation" in Journal of Home Economics (January 1934).

The 1953 doctoral dissertation of Sue Hickmott, "The Organization of a Cooperative Nursery School," was based upon 116 returned questionnaires from cooperative nursery schools in 22 states. Chapter VI is entitled "Parent Participation in Cooperative Nursery Schools" and it breaks down how often the mother participates. Their roles varied, from "helping children put on their coats" or "preparing materials for the teacher to use" on to their responsibility for initiating and carrying out activities with groups of children. The dissertation is 223 pages long. On page 219, we find "Fathers Have a Real Part in a Cooperative Nursery School" with twenty-one activities listed - cleaning, yard work, serve as officers and on committees, repair and make equipment, audit books, attend meetings, help transport children, give puppet shows, take still pictures and movies, handle legal affairs, and others. Number 21 is "Act as assistant to the teacher in school." This is picked up in the following paragraph, "In some schools fathers work in the classroom with children. This is a very valuable experience for all concerned; children, teacher, and fathers benefit from it. Every attempt should be made to arrange for fathers to carry through on this activity." It is interesting to note, however, that this statement is followed immediately by the topic heading, "Children Share Their Mothers' Attention." Nothing is mentioned about sharing their father's attention.

Beth Stephenson's doctoral dissertation was published as a 1955 NANE pamphlet called "Mothers in a Cooperative Nursery School." Her detailed observations of participating mothers showed this to be a rich environment for the children, but there was no mention of father involvement. Her study was done at Playhouse, one of the New Jersey schools to respond to my recent questionnaire. Jeanne Ginsberg, who has been there since its founding in 1951, has worked hard to incorporate participating fathers. Checkmarks on their questionnaire indicated that both fathers and mothers are classroom assistants, repair and make new equipment, and engage in the clerical, cleanup, and other work not with the children. The current Playhouse brochure consistently uses the term "parents" and includes a photograph showing two enthusiastic men.

My favorite example for this period is from the archives at Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena. A 1959 newspaper clipping is headlined "Rummage Sale by VVCC Schools is a Huge Success." For this fund-raiser in southern San Francisco, the reporter wrote that "Fathers of the co-op nursery school helped out by carting in merchandise, moving and setting up tables ... and offering

encouragement to the hard working gals." It was spelled G-A-L-S. However, another article from about the same time was about a nearby adult education co-op. It announced that registration was being taken for the next term and explained that "Each child's mother or sometimes the father is at school one day a week to help run the school and to learn."

There were many references to special events held for fathers during the 1950s - such as a meeting at a Los Angeles park with its (male) director talking about "Family Recreation on Parks and Playgrounds" and a "stag night for fathers that was so successful that it will be repeated annually" at the Brookside Park Cooperative in Delaware. When fire fighters were all male, an annual Saturday morning Dads and Kids excursion to the local fire station was an appropriate introduction to the masculine world. The 1955 spring meeting of the Los Angeles Council of Cooperative Nursery Schools, planned and presented by a committee of fathers, included psychiatrist Dr. Isidore Ziferstein speaking on "Dad's Dilemma - Too Little Time" and a skit about "The Fathers' Workshop." A widely distributed handout from the Michigan Council of Cooperative Nurseries suggested that father involvement at various levels should be encouraged and welcomed, that "Saturday sessions should be arranged (with no mothers please!)" and that "the presence of a father on the nursery school board has positive influences and (not surprisingly) agenda items are handled in a more businesslike manner." The general feeling during this period was that fathers would be uncomfortable in the feminine role of caregiver. The main emphasis continued to be the Saturday workparties, the repair and construction of equipment, and the contributions made by lawyers, accountants, contractors who did building projects for the cost of materials, and other professionals.

I am not denigrating these contributions. They enabled the schools to function and they were a point of pride for the children. I recall overhearing a snack table conversation in which the son of a psychiatrist and the son of a milkman bragged to the other children that their dads had planted the new trees in the playground. In response, each of the others hastened to state what his or her dad had done. Filling the sandbox or doing other jobs was tangible evidence of fatherly care beyond the home, and children recognized its importance. Remember, too, that this was before the age of plastics, when most equipment was made-to-order from scrounge materials. Co-op publications from this era are full of creative ideas. As director of Bakersfield Play Center in the 1950s and 60s, I

was appreciative of the many contributions volunteered by fathers. One brought us a discarded rowboat that he'd discovered on a trip to the county dump. With a new bottom and a coat of paint, it provided many happy hours of dramatic play. Another cherished memory is of another father's pride when he converted an applebox into a playhouse kitchen stove with an oven and burner grids devised from sections of black coat hangers.

A turning point was indicated in 1957 when Ernest Osborne of Columbia used the keynote address at the National Association for Nursery Education (NANE) conference to urge that parent meetings should be planned for times when fathers could attend. "We are short-sighted if we relegate fathers to 'masculine activities' only," he pointed out. "Understandably, they are not able to spend as much time parenting as do their wives. But their attitudes and feelings toward children influence the youngsters as much and sometimes more than do the mothers. ... Many a father has the kind of understanding and insight that will make a definite contribution to the development of nursery school programs that serve children best."

The recognition of participating fathers became a topic of discussion at cooperative council meetings, from local to national levels, in the late 'sixties. I still remember my mixed feelings on the day before school opened in 1961 when I took down the rest room sign saying "Mothers" and stuck up one that said "Parents." We had two fathers who were going to alternate participation with the mothers, not because of a family crisis but because they wanted to be a part of their children's lives. One was a history professor and the other was a self-employed construction worker. Some mothers on the Play Center board admitted that they thought this was "odd" and they particularly questioned how the regular rotation to the "housekeeper" position would be handled. At our mid-morning snack time, mothers sat at small tables with groups of children and this meant that men would be serving women their coffee or tea. Men would also be scrubbing toilets and doing other duties that weren't seen as masculine. Even the children were puzzled, with one four-year-old boy looking up from the paint easel to ask, "How come you are here? My dad works." Another boy refused to "Keep the sand low" and defiantly announced, "I don't have to do what you say. You aren't a participating mother!" The majority of mothers and children were highly approving.

At about the same time, a Wardlow Park Play Group in Los Angeles distributed a mimeographed report saying that "Our Fathers

Day workshop helps us keep the costs down for repairs and replacements. We also have had several fathers in the past who have actually come to work for the mother on her turn at school. Needless to say, the children think that is great. They have also been invited to the mothers monthly meeting, but I have yet to see one come. Could they think 35 mothers would be too much at one time?" In reading such statements, I have wondered whether it would have made a difference if those meetings could have been called parents' meetings instead of mothers' meetings.

Now let's jump forward to the 1970s. A front page article in the Fall 1973 Preschooler, the California Co-op Council publication, is entitled "Learning to Grow!" It points out that participating is "a part of mom's growth, feeling secure in the knowledge that her child knows she is there, but can enjoy companionship with someone else's mom, too ....." Below is an editorial note in smaller print, "After reading this over, I realized that I had put 'moms' in nursery school and felt that I couldn't leave out the dads that participate too. More and more schools are adding dads to their rosters of participators, committees, and boards. A lot of schools would like to hear from these dads - their reactions and insights into their nursery school experience. Come on, dads, speak out !!! COME TO CONVENTION!" This was followed by occasional stories about dads, but usually just something like a pancake breakfast with butter made by the children. Then, in spring 1979, there was a front page picture and accompanying story about Paul Orlando, a participating father in a co-op south of San Francisco. He worked as a chef, so could get a free morning once a week. Again, California co-ops schools were editorially challenged to get dads into the classrooms.

Several of the oral history interviews conducted in 1976 by Rose Selesnick for her master's thesis at California State University in Northridge touch on these new attitudes about fathers. In an interview with a director, Kathy Troup, it was agreed that having participating fathers was wonderful, but there was also a discussion of problem parents, such as those on drugs who weren't allowed to pick up their children and drive them home, -

S: Did they ever come to their workdays high?

T: Yes.

S: And then what happened?

T: Well, a couple of times I wouldn't allow them to stay. I sent them home. But we had one, a father, who was always on something - a brilliant, absolute genius but he was either on "uppers" or "downers" all the time. He was not, in any sense,

dangerous. He didn't pick up the kids and he was worthless whether he was high or low in terms of being involved, but his kid was crazy about him. He was just out of it a great deal of the time and it was important for his child that he be there, and so after a while I let him stay.

S: He would put in a regular work day during the week?

T. He would put in a regular day. The mother worked and he was a poet and a drug addict. She supported the family and this child wanted him there, so he was there even though he was absolutely useless. Somehow the group sensed that his presence was better for his child than no parent at all. He didn't do a damn thing and we would get some of that grumbling about what's the point of having him around. As far as I know, nothing much has happend to them. He's either high on uppers or downers.

S: Other than setting up, what other kinds of things do the parents do?

T: They do the housekeeping, fix lunch and rake the grounds. The put away things and they put out paints. I'm just too involved with the kids all the time. That's what I really like to do. They do all the clean-up.

S. Do they ever work with the children?

T: Some, yes, yes. Some are terrific, particularly fathers. We have two fathers now in school. ... One is very robust and active, the other is a very quiet kind of man. The kids are crazy about them. They have children following them whatever they do. I love having fathers work.

S: Especially in a school where there are one-parent families.

T: Right, to see those children who don't have a father at home, how hungry they are for that contact. Or if they have a rejecting father - we have one. The son just never measures up, and when we have these two very accepting loving fathers that boy just beams.

S. Other than these two, how would you describe the father involvement?

T. Well, they don't come to very many meetings. The wives have to pressure them to come to meetings. They are not involved in that aspect of it. Some of it has to do with schedules. With one or two exceptions, the school is mostly female dominated, but they do work on maintaining the schools. There are father workshops every other month, and they are very good about

that. They are great at fund raising. They work very hard. Even the divorced fathers participate in the fund raising and in the workshop, too. And then we have annual father's day picnics. We have such great grounds that we can have Sunday picnics or things at school which make it the kind of social that includes the whole family. [7]

In surveying books that focus upon father-child relations, it was interesting to note that the first sentences in several of them recognized changes of the 1970s. Michael Lamb's 1981 edition of The Role of the Father in Child Development started out with the statement that "Since the first edition (of this book) was published in 1976, the paternal role has elicited a great deal of attention from both theorists and researchers. In fact, the interest has been so great that it has become necessary to prepare a revision." Barry Hewlett's Father-Child Relations - Cultural and Biosocial Contexts, published in 1992, began by saying that "Throughout much of Europe and America, the past 20 years has been a period of increased involvement by fathers in the direct care of their children."

In most child care centers or Head Start and other compensatory programs, however, we probably can agree with Giveans and Robinson's appraisal in 1987 that "The role of the father in his child's preschool environment has received scant attention from researchers." They point out that, like many male teachers, participatory fathers often feel isolation and even subtle resentment and ostracism by female teachers and mothers. This can happen even in parent cooperatives, where a father's presence is often met with stereotypic and homophobic suspicians. Last year at our NAEYC conference, I talked with an exhibitor who told me that he enjoys participating in his daughter's preschool because he learns so much from watching her interact with the other children, but that the director doesn't give him opportunities to become involved with group activities. She usually just hands him a broom or assigns him to some menial tasks - and he isn't sure why. Giveans and Robinson, who run a childcare center called The Nurtury, admonish directors to redefine their attitudes relative to men teachers so that children can see men and women working effectively together and so that other men will be encouraged to become involved.

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[7] Selesnick, R. (1977). An Extended Family Experience (pp. 89-90)

During the spring of 1995, forty-six cooperative nursery schools in California and eight in New Jersey responded to a questionnaire dealing with various aspects of their policies and practices. Under the category of "How do parents participate?" the recipients checked the categories of activities were carried out primarily by mothers, primarily by fathers, or whether both assumed those duties. These were 1) As classroom assistants to the teacher, 2) in full charge of a group, 3) Repair and make new equipment, and 4) Cleanup, clerical work, others not with children.

California Responses - 48 co-ops

| | Primarily mothers | Primarily fathers | Both |
|---|---|---|---|
| Classroom assistants | 19 | 0 | 29 |
| Repair/make equipment | 1 | 6 | 40 |
| Cleanup, clerical | 8 | 0 | 36 |

New Jersey Responses - 8 co-ops

| | Primarily mothers | Primarily fathers | Both |
|---|---|---|---|
| Classroom assistants | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Repair/make equipment | 0 | 2 | 5 |
| Cleanup, clerical | 2 | 0 | 6 |

This seems to clearly indicate that co-op nursery schools are incorporating fathers in their regular participation schedules (and that mothers are doing things beyond supervising children in the classroom). This is confirmed by current brochures and manuals from other areas, with most of them using "parent" or "adult" rather than "mother" - although I found one that carefully used mother/father and similar politically correct non-sexist terms until almost the end - when it said, "If the parent is participating, she must park in the upper level."

During this past year, I have found participating fathers when "dropping in" at several cooperative nursery schools. One was Steven Day, who had just been re-elected president of the Palos Verdes Hills Nursery School. He told me that he is able to participate because he and a partner have a real estate office where hours are flexible. The partner plays golf, and he uses equal time to participate at the nursery school. There was a long-term payoff from participation at this school, also. Several years ago, a participating father got involved fighting threats to their zoning permit. He ran for city council, where he still holds a seat.

The intriguing aspect of these visits is the incredulous look these dads give me when I explain that participating fathers were unusual. They can't believe what I'm saying. At the Unitarian Cooperative Nursery School in San Diego, I got this reaction from a Jack Heinowitz, who is not only a psychiatrist but the author of two books about parenting. This school, which started in 1963, has had participating fathers for many years. One of them, Richard Louv, is a newspaper columnist who writes about family issues and is the author of Children's Future and FatherLove. He told me that when he was participating at the co-op with his sons it was as if he had to slow down his metabolism, that it was sometimes the longest four hours of his life but also some of the best. In FatherLove, there is a statement that "We live in an age when many men sense that fatherhood can be the most mysterious and fulfilling journey that a man can make - but we find ourselves struggling to define the terms, feeling somehow that we have yet to find the essence of our fatherhood in our manhood. Paradoxically, this is also an era in which fatherlessness - the emotional or physical absence of fathers - may be the most dangerous social reality of our time." He reports a discussion with other co-op fathers about the problems and feelings they had about their participation in the nursery school. It wasn't that they felt ill at ease or inadequate, but that it was so difficult to arrange the time. They said working women could work out flexible hours because of children, but that men might lose their jobs or their chance for a promotion. Louv has found that fathers are more likely than mothers to have informal, surreptitious ways of taking time off and in his book he reports on the conflicts felt by fathers he has interviewed across the country.

Louv also authored a booklet, Reinventing Fatherhood, that was published by the United Nations in Vienna as part of the 1994 International Year of the Family series. He wrote "Considering the

continued poor conditions of women in much of the world, and the rise of fatherlessness, it is difficult to see how a new fatherhood could be spreading. ... Yet, evidence for something close to a paradigm shift does exist." He presents convincing historical, biological, and anthropological studies to show that nurturant men are the natural model, including paleological evidence that humankind survived because by walking upright the oldest direct ancestors included fathers who could carry their young children.

David Riley, who became involved with the study of social networks when he was a Head Start teacher, realized that parents were growing more from contacts with one another than they were from the professional staff. In Extending Families - The Social Networks of Parents and Their Children, he cites research showing that American fathers are changing their roles, becoming more actively engaged in the rearing of their children. It may be possible, then, to liken the active fathering role to a social innovation that is slowly spreading throughout our society." The medium for this is formation of personal networks, self selected because of specific common interests and values. Riley suggests that the whole society may frown on a man who changes his baby's diapers, but if he has only a few like-minded compatriots, then they may together reinforce each other to be different from the social norm.

Perhaps because I am so convinced that parent participation preschools are a wonderful institution, I believe that they have facilitated the changed fathering style since the 1920s. Even digging holes for fence posts or constructing a storage shed gave them a socially approved fathering role and helped them develop networks of like-minded men. Claude Fischer, in To Dwell Among Friends: Personal Networks in Town and Country, proposed that "Role change is viewed as a social structural imperative: If men change, it is because of influences channeled to them by their networks. In contrast, role change is viewed from the supportive personal community perspective as a result, in part, of the man's personal initiative. From this perspective, he is assumed to have the potential to construct actively a personal community around himself that will support his development of new roles. ... Any intervention that encourages fathers to talk about childrearing with other parents of young children may serve as a context for the development of social ties and social exchanges."

The role of fathers is gaining increased recognition at the federal level, with President Clinton's June 16, 1995, directive to executive departments and agency heads requesting that they "review every program, policy, and initiative ... the pertains to families" so that fatherhood in America can gain enhanced status. This was followed up by an August meeting convened by Vice President Gore, with about two hundred federal officials meeting in Washington, D.C. to hear the ideas of a panel of eight observers of family trends. One was Richard Louv, who asked if the attendees could recall any other time when a president has instructed the government to take fatherhood seriously. No one could think of a precedent.

While no firm data has ever been available to show how many families belonged, estimates were made by Katharine Whiteside Taylor of fifteen hundred parent participation preschools in 1966 and of at least five thousand in the United States and Canada by 1980. Some had only about twenty children, while others were made up of several classes for a total enrollment of fifty to a hundred. Because of their organizational structure and the requirements of participation, most families were middle-class professionals who were among the trend-setters in their communities. I have concluded from this investigation of the father role in the cooperative nursery schools that they made a strong positive contribution to the changing roles of men in our culture.

Portions of this paper will be included in It's the Camaraderie: A History of Parent Participation Preschools, to be published by the Center for Cooperatives, University of California, Davis, CA 95616

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Notes

The United Nations NGO Committee on the Status of Women includes a Working Group called "Women and Men in Partnership: Working for Equality." The co-facilitators, Eleanor Brown and Gordon Klopf, have compiled an annotated Bibliography on Men to "introduce a field of critical inquiry which, through its diverse visions, desegregates and deconstructs the monolithic posture of traditional masculinity." They believe that society is moving away from the polarization and stereotyping of gender.

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