



# Children's Agency and Father's Positive Health and Work- Related Benefits

DR. ALEXANDRA MACHT

[AMACHT@BROOKES.AC.UK](mailto:AMACHT@BROOKES.AC.UK) / [@ALEXANDRA\\_MACHT](https://twitter.com/ALEXANDRA_MACHT)

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY, UK

# The Study

Emotions as social relations, a complex consisting of imagination, memory, embodiment, reasoning, feeling and power (Burkitt, 2014)

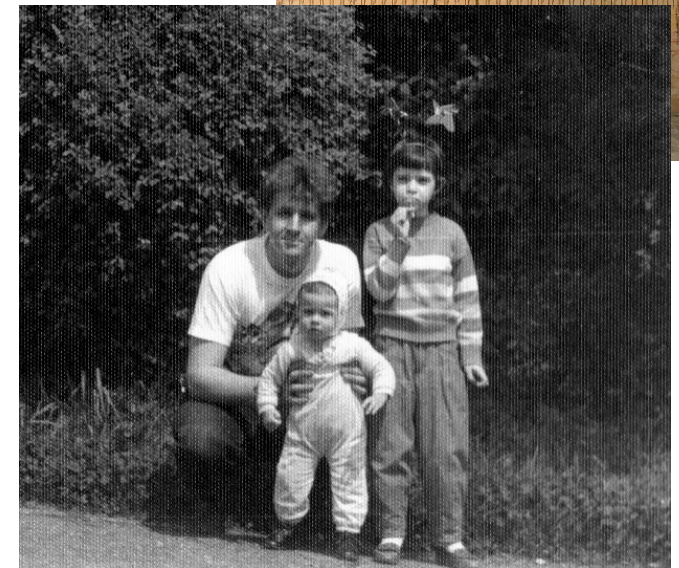
## ***Involvement, class, culture, residency***

A qualitative investigation of how involved urban fathers understand love in their close relationships, comprising of:

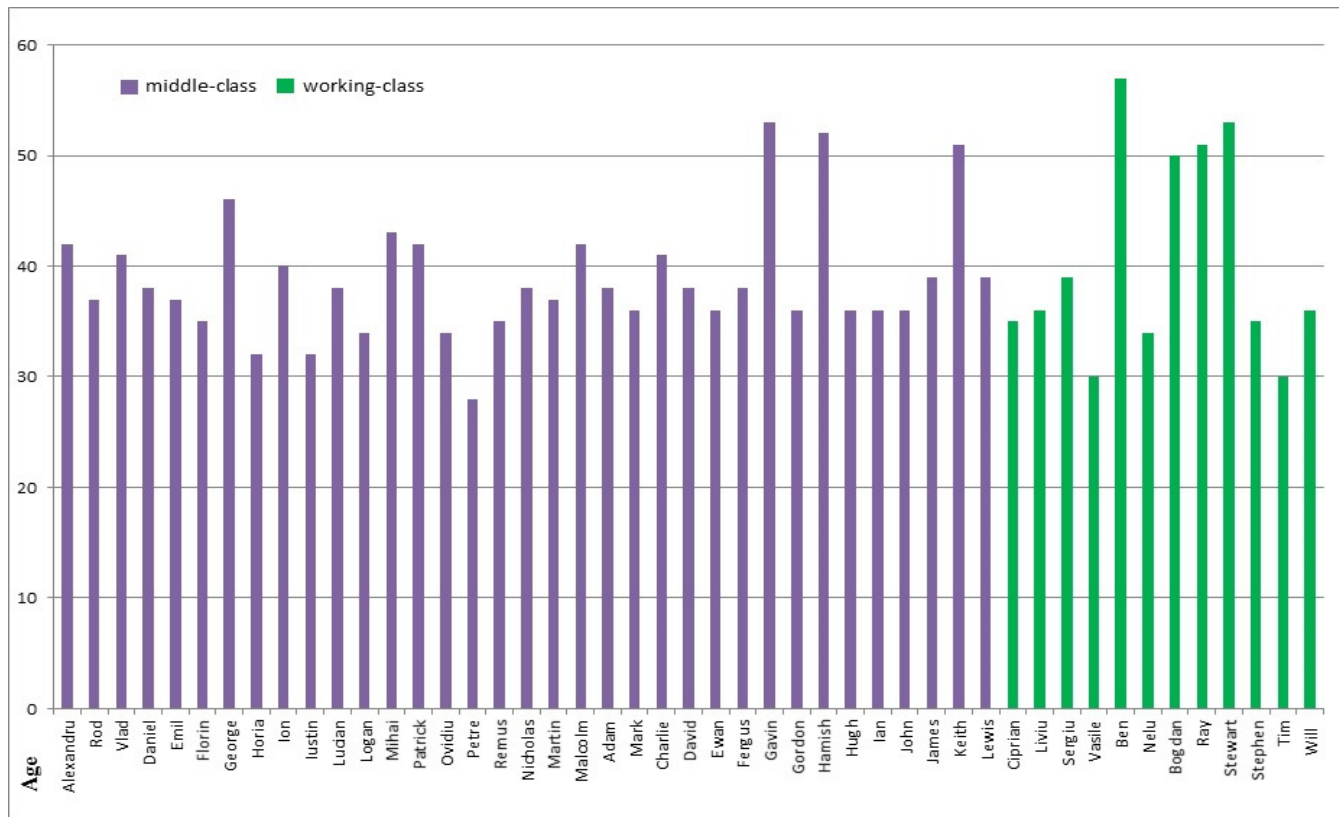
- 47 interviews (20 in Romania, 27 in Scotland; 12 working-class men, 35 middle-class men)
- 6 observations (3 at home, 3 at work).
- Analysis: grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014)

## Emotions and Social Relations

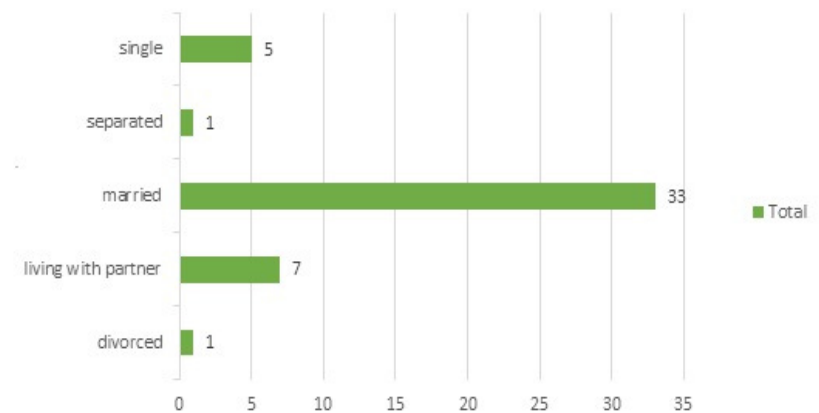
Ian Burkitt



Dr. Alexandra Macht - Oxford Brookes University, UK



Relationship Status of Participants





# Findings



- ▶ **Paternal love is a deeply relational activity, built on a give-and-take**
- ▶ **It requires *time* and *emotion work*.**
- ▶ Men's emotional vocabularies are formed through *verbal enrichment*, and occupation continues to play an important part.
- ▶ Scottish fathers' love helps their children be warm and sociable, Romanian fathers' love helps their children be confident and active.
- The father's role interacts with masculinity and is grounded in emotions -> *emotional bordering*
- Love and power are not opposites but they co-exist; they are *emotional complexes* formed in close relationships.

# Children's Agency (conveyed by fathers)

- ▶ „She changed my whole life around. I was on **drugs** and other stuff and now because of her I'm not on drugs. And that's cause of myself realistically because I chose not to be anymore. I'm quite strong-minded that way when it comes to my daughter [...] you want her to look up to you, and say 'That's my daddy!' **[Stephen, Scottish, WC, non-resident]**
- ▶ „That probably scares me quite a lot as well, that I don't particularly look after myself [...] I think I'd be devastated that what I did to myself meant he didn't have me around. So that's something I need to change as well and I am gradually. But it's a good thing. He has helped me cut down **smoking** a lot.” **[Mark, Scottish, MC, resident]**
- ▶ „Since I had the girls, I became very careful with myself. I started **losing weight**. I realise that they need me long-term and I have to behave in such a way so as not to endanger myself. Up until they were born, I used to drive around like a mad man. Now I'm more careful behind the wheel, I **drive slowly** and not only when I'm the car with them, also when I'm by myself. I think because I'm aware now that I have to remain available for a longer time.” **[Emil, Romanian, MC, resident]**

## Children's agency (continued)

- ▶ **Child-led:** „I don't even know how to express it [love]. It's something I feel for him [sighs] simply put **I just can't wait to see him, even if he's angry**. When I come home from work, I never know if he's angry or happy, if he wants to hug me or he's been upset with his mom. But I just can't wait to come home and see him. And yeah, **it really charges me up for the next day.**” **[Daniel, Romanian, MC, resident]**
- ▶ **Father-led:** I think due to fatigue, lack of sleep, general amount of stress, I was very short-fused and **I remember once just losing my temper shouting at the eldest one**, and the smallest one took herself away (...) that was the real trigger for me. It was like “Why are you away?” she said “You're scaring me” I said “**Well that's it. I'm not doing that, I'm not being a scary dad**”. So that's taught me, that was probably one of the most emotional, sort of negative emotional aspects in the last year I think (...) a real catalyst for change. **[Charlie, Scottish, MC, resident]**

# Key Messages

- ▶ Involved fathers' 'love power' (Ferguson and Jónasdóttir, 2014) is relationally-dependent
- ▶ Love associated with wellbeing and health-improvement.
- ▶ "Time off" spent at home and with child prepared fathers for work -> the role of worry.
- ▶ Male anger had the role of reinstating power and could block child's agency, but child's agency has the power to momentarily dissolve moments of tension.
- ▶ Children of both genders conflict with, energize and empower their parents for work and protect their wellbeing.

	UK	ROMANIA
<b>Length of Leave</b>	<b>1 or 2 weeks</b> (a week is the same amount of days that you normally work in a week). Stipulated as such by the government, ex if father works normally two or three days per week, he would get four or six days leave, and if father works seven days, he would get 14 days.	<b>5 days</b> , with the possibility to reach 15 working days if the father has completed an infant care course. There isn't a ceiling on payment. The father is paid according to his wage and the leave is granted on the same basis as a rest leave ( <u>concediu de odihnă</u> ). This is an individual and specific entitlement for the father, which is non-transferable to the mother.
<b>Payment and funding</b>	Flat-rate payment of GBP£145.18 [€] a week, or 90 per cent of average weekly earnings, if that is less. Funded as for Maternity leave, with employers able to claim back some or all of the payments from the HM Revenue and Customs.	Varies as it is paid from the employment fund of the professional unit and is equal to the wage equivalent to the period taken. This benefit is also available to self-employed fathers if they paid the contribution to the corresponding fund. The father can choose from a legal benefit equal to that of the mother's postnatal leave or can gain a benefit calculated according to his basic pay and his seniority bonus pay, offered by the professional unit where the father is employed. This is dependent on the father's place of work, whether it is in the public or private sector.
<b>Flexibility in use</b>	It cannot start until the baby is born and must finish within 56 days of the baby's birth or within eight weeks of the due date, if the baby is born prematurely. The leave must be taken in one go.	Leave can be taken at any time during a defined period after birth. There is additional time for multiple births.
<b>Eligibility</b>	Men must have an "employee" employment status not a "worker", "self-employed" or "contractor" employment status. Under UK employment law men who have a "worker", "exclusively self-employed" or "contractor" employment status are not eligible to receive Paternity	The beneficiary needs to be insured within the state system of social insurance. This applies to self-employed fathers too, as long as they are paying social insurance. Paternity leave is granted upon request, during the first eight weeks from the child's birth, and after the beneficiary presents the



# Eligibility

## UK

- ▶ they are the **biological father** of the child or also the child's **adopter** or the mother's husband, partner or civil partner;
- ▶ they expect to have **responsibility** for the child's upbringing;
- ▶ they have **worked continuously** for their employer for at least 26 weeks by the end of the 'qualifying week' (the 15th week before the baby is due) and remain employed at the time of the child's birth.
- ▶ Men must be earning at least £116 [€] a week (before tax) – the earnings threshold

## Romania

Men's participation is increasing especially in urban areas

- **Insured** within the state system of social insurance.
- Leave is granted **upon request**, during the first eight weeks from the child's birth,
- Presents the child's birth certificate/paternity certificate, which stipulates his **role as the child's father**.

A certificate of completion of **an infant care course**, demonstrating basic care knowledge → Paternity leave is increased with 10 days (only once)

# Infant care-course for Romanian fathers

The course and certificate are prepared by the family physician by other health state services or private consultancies which are recognized by the state (also online)

The condition tries to increase the father's knowledge and involvement in caring for the infant, since fathers are expected by policy makers to be less skilled in infant care.

Themes covered are birth, first days at home, baby hygiene and managing colic.

If father is a medical specialist he is absolved.

<https://cursdepuericultura.ro>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=87&v=fYZ12lZWzpM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=87&v=fYZ12lZWzpM)





# Conclusion

- \* Connecting leave policies with paternal wellbeing
- \* More time is necessary for father's on leave to develop bonding and love
- \* Spending time with their loved ones: not 'time off' but involves care work
- \* It also re-energizes employees who are fathers for engagement with paid work in organisations

# Publications from research project

## BOOK

Macht, A. (forth. 2019) *Fatherhood and Love: The social construction of paternal emotions*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, Studies in Intimacy and Family Life Series.

## ARTICLES

Macht A, 'Resisting commodification? Paternal love, emotional bordering and narratives of ambivalent intimate consumerism from Scottish and Romanian fathers'  
*Families, Relationships and Societies* (2018)

Macht A, 'Grounding reflexivity in a qualitative study on love with fathers'  
*SAGE Research Methods Cases* (2018)

Macht, A. (2017) *Love, fatherhood and possibilities for social change*, CRFR briefing nr. 90: <https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/25691>