THE CULTURE OF FATHERHOOD IN THE FIFTIES: A CLOSER LOOK

Ralph LaRossa

Based on a comparative analysis of popular magazine articles, premier child-rearing manuals, and prime-time television shows, this article strives to heighten our understanding of the culture of fatherhood in the fifties (1945-1960) while chronicling the textual configurations that were emerging at the time. A close reading of the materials suggests that the culture of fatherhood in the fifties was neither a simple continuation of previous patterns nor a more progressive version of what had come before, but rather a more traditional strain of patriarchal fatherhood. Also, the culture of fatherhood in the late fifties appears to have been more traditional/patriarchal than the culture of fatherhood in the early fifties. The changes, however, were not clear-cut. Different media industries manufactured a culture of fatherhood that was more textured than smooth. The patriarchal patterns in the fabric were no doubt evident, but so were the distinct threads.

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The span of time from 1945 to 1960 has received considerable interest from historians writing on the cultural history of fatherhood.[1] Commonly referred to as the post–World War II era or simply as the fifties, the period is considered an important juncture in the social construction of men's care-giving roles and routinely is used as a point of reference to judge the societal expectations applied to fathers today.[2] Yet there is much about the culture of fatherhood in the fifties that remains unknown—or at best, unclear. In certain instances, the mere mention of a popular television show—*Father Knows Best*, for example—substitutes for a careful examination of fifties' family culture. In other instances, postwar trends are reported to exist, without systematic comparison to patterns long in place. Sometimes it is implied that the culture of fatherhood in the fifties was a seamless whole, when in fact it was multivocal and in flux.

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Drawing on a comparative analysis of popular magazine articles, premier child-rearing manuals, and prime-time television shows, this article is intended to heighten our understanding of the culture of fatherhood in the fifties by chronicling the textual configurations that were emerging at the time. A close reading of the materials suggests that the culture of fatherhood in the fifties was neither a simple continuation of previous patterns nor a more progressive version of what had come before, but rather a more traditional strain of patriarchal fatherhood. Also, the culture of fatherhood in the late fifties appears to have been more traditional/patriarchal than the culture of fatherhood in the early fifties. The changes, however, were not clear-cut. Different media industries manufactured a culture of fatherhood that was more textured than smooth. The patriarchal patterns in the fabric were no doubt evident, but so were the distinct threads.

What is meant by the culture of fatherhood? Wendy Griswold suggests that culture be viewed as the "expressive side of human life," and proposes the use of a four-point diamond (as on a baseball field or deck of playing cards) to conceptualize the multiple linkages among four elements in a cultural system: cultural objects, cultural creators, cultural receivers, and social worlds. A comprehensive study of culture, according to Griswold, would entail an analysis of these four elements and their interconnections. Cultural objects include symbols, beliefs, values, and interpretive practices that, embodied in form, are manifested as commentaries, correspondence, novels, biographies, treatises, rituals, artistic endeavors, prescriptive articles and manuals, television/film/theater scripts/performances, and so forth. Cultural creators are the individuals who produce and distribute cultural objects. They can work alone or within organizational structures (e.g., in the editorial department at *Parents Magazine*). Cultural receivers are the people who experience cultural objects and the larger cultural system; they are the viewers, listeners, and appropriators. Social worlds denote the contexts in which cultural objects are created and interpreted.[3]

The meanings of cultural objects can vary from individual to individual and group to group, depending on a person's cognitive frame (e.g., attention, focus) and social circumstances (e.g., race, class, gender). How someone interprets a magazine article on fatherhood and how he or she selects/uses differing pieces in a repertoire of meanings about fathers/mothers is an important empirical question. An isomorphism between culture and action is not assumed.[4]

Applying these concepts to the current inquiry, the culture of fatherhood in the fifties would refer to: (1) the variety of cultural objects that, from 1945 to 1960, pertained to fatherhood; (2) the means by which these objects were created, reinforced, and changed; (3) the process by which the objects were received, digested, and used; and (4) the social worlds that surrounded and supported the objects and their creation and reception. The linkages among the four points also would be important to investigate. Thus, this article is not about what fathers did in the fifties, but about how fathers were talked about or portrayed in the fifties.[5]

A full-scale examination of the culture of fatherhood in the postwar era is beyond the scope of this article. Three sets of cultural objects do not an entire culture make. My purpose in introducing the cultural-diamond concept is only to accentuate the fact that culture is a set of objects and connections (technically speaking, culture is plural), and to underscore the importance of at least asking how cultural objects are produced and received.

The magazine items that I have reviewed include 121 articles that were categorized in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* under (1) *father, fatherhood*, or *Father's Day*; or (2) *parent*, *parent-child relationships*, or *family.* The second group was restricted to articles that, judging by their title, were clearly father- or fatherhood-related. These 121 articles do not comprise every piece on fathers or fatherhood published between 1945 and 1960, but they are fairly representative of the kinds of articles that, at the time, were dispensing child-rearing prescriptions for men. Of the many child-rearing books that could have been examined, I chose the two that were most likely to be in people's homes: *Infant Care*, a U.S. government publication written by the Children's Bureau; and *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* authored by Benjamin Spock. One advantage of examining *Infant Care* is that it was first published in 1914 and revised regularly thereafter, making it possible to compare what was being said about fathers in the 1940s and 1950s with what was being said about fathers in the 1920s and 1930s. For data on the television industry in the fifties, I relied primarily on published books and articles. Nielsen ratings are used to indicate which shows people tuned in to from one year to the next. The ratings do not tell us how intensively the shows were watched or how they were interpreted, but they are significant because producers and network executives used the ratings to make programming decisions.[6]

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE CULTURE OF FATHERHOOD

Magazines

Historians often have relied on popular magazines to chart the culture of fatherhood over the course of the twentieth century. Generally, the focus has been on nonfiction fatherhood articles appearing in magazines aimed at families and women (e.g., *Parents Magazine*, *Good Housekeeping*). Popular magazines targeting fathers are rare. The analysis of these articles, however, has not always been systematic. Occasionally, specific articles have been cited as prototypes of what made the culture of postwar fatherhood unique, leaving ambiguous whether the same kinds of articles had been published in the years before. For example, Kathryn Keller, referring to a "new definition" of the father's role in the postwar era, contended that "one motive *introduced* in the fifties was that children benefit emotionally if their father helps care for them." To support her point, she cites a 1951 *Parents Magazine* article titled, "It's a Man's Job, Too." What is not acknowledged, however, is that the same motive for increased father involvement had been offered years before in *Parents Magazine*, as well as other venues.[7]

Researchers who have meticulously compared popular magazine articles on fatherhood from one period to the next have uncovered some interesting patterns. Maxine Atkinson and Stephen Blackwelder analyzed articles in the middle years of each decade (i.e., 1905, 1915, etc.) from the early 1900s to the 1980s. Relying on citations in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, they reported that, between 1945 and 1955, the percentage of magazine articles focusing on fatherhood dropped from 23 percent to 18 percent, while the percentage of gender-nonspecific parenting articles (as opposed to motherhood-specific or fatherhood-specific articles) dropped from 55

percent to 53 percent. These proportions suggest not an increase but a reduction in fatherhood coverage in the postwar era.

Atkinson and Blackwelder also coded articles for the degree to which they emphasized nurturing as opposed to economic providing. Calculating the ratio of articles defining fathers primarily as nurturers versus those defining fathers primarily as providers, they found that in 1925 and 1935, fathers were only slightly more likely to be defined as providers rather than nurturers, but that in 1945, they were 2.5 times more likely to be defined as nurturers. In 1955, however, fathers were only 1.3 times more likely to be defined as nurturers. Thus, the emphasis on nurturing increased between 1925/1935 and 1945 but decreased between 1945 and 1955.[8]

Another detailed study of magazine articles also demonstrates how complex the culture of fatherhood could be. For her analysis of fatherhood discourse, Candice Leonard located all the articles in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, from 1929 to 1994, that were published in *Parents Magazine* and categorized under the subject heading of *father* or *fathers*. Similar to what Atkinson and Blackwelder reported, Leonard found that the number of *Parents Magazine* articles under this heading dropped in the 1950s. Between 1929 and 1939, the number of articles so categorized was 55. Between 1940 and 1949, the number was 43. Between 1950 and 1959, it was 22.

Leonard did find in the 1950s an increase in the percentage of articles that seemed to say that men's involvement in family work would improve the husband-wife relationship, and that fathers were especially important for socializing children. She also discovered that the proportion of articles showing fathers changing diapers went up in the 1950s, and that, within the decade, there was a rise as well: 40 percent of the articles in the early 1950s showed fathers changing diapers, while 57 percent of the articles in the late 1950s did so. Leonard, however, noted that female authors were "more than twice as likely as male authors to depict a father changing a diaper," while male authors were more likely than female authors to depict a father as a reluctant caregiver. This raises the following question: Did the increase in diaper changing reflect the authors' impressions of what was actually occurring in the late 1950s, or did it indicate a change in what the authors hoped would happen more (female authors) or happen less (male authors)? Regardless of the answer, the implication is that the period from 1955 to 1959 was unique.[9]

Although carefully conducted aggregate analyses can be informative, they can gloss over important details. More nuanced approaches to text material often reveal subtleties that other methods miss. Closely inspecting nonfiction popular magazine articles on women published between 1946 and 1958, Joanne Meyerowitz was struck by the contradictions that she came across. It appeared to her that a number of articles "advocated both the domestic and nondomestic, *sometimes in the same sentence*." Questioning the "stereotype of postwar women as quiescent, docile, and domestic," she argued:

> Just as women's activities were more varied and more complex than is often acknowledged, so . . . was the postwar ideology. Postwar magazines, like their prewar and wartime predecessors . . . included stories that glorified domesticity, but they also expressed ambivalence about domesticity, endorsed women's nondomestic activity, and celebrated women's public success. They delivered multiple messages, which women

> could read as sometimes supporting and sometimes subverting the "feminine mystique."[10]

Reviewing the 121 popular magazine articles in my fatherhood-in-the-fifties sample, I found similar kinds of contradictions. In a 1946 article titled "Men Make Wonderful Mothers," a mother strove to make the point that men were more than able to care for infants and toddlers. Indeed, she felt that men had a "natural aptitude" for "loving and handling children" that could be observed even in small boys. Reporting on her own transition to parenthood, she went on to say:

> When I had new babies, and my energy was at a low ebb, Wede [her husband] would slip out of bed without waking me at many a cold and cheerless six A.M., pad down to the icebox, take out a bottle and warm it, spray the milk on his wrist to test, change and wrap the baby, and give it its first bottle—with no more fuss than if he were dictating a letter. Many fathers make a custom of taking the early bottle, before shaving, dressing and catching the train to New York.

It would appear at first that the author was trying to show that fathers and mothers were interchangeable. Yet other segments of the piece accentuated gender differences. For instance, the author also said: "Men are socially closer to children than women who are preoccupied with 'Drink your milk,' 'Tie your shoes,' 'Pick up your blocks,' and 'Wash your hands.'" A skeptical reader may understandably ask, If men are not to be concerned with the basics of whether their kids finish their food or clean up after they eat, how much like mothers can they supposedly be?[11]

Several other examples. A 1948 article, titled "Fifty-Fifty Baby," appeared to begin on one note and end on another:

> My husband and I developed our plan for *sharing* parenthood pretty much by accident and have found it so gratifying that we would like to recommend it to other parents. . . . A word of caution to mothers, however. Do not leave too many of the little jobs for your husband to do in the evening as he has to work all day too. *Help him* enjoy the children without feeling their care is an extra burden.

A plan for "sharing-parenthood" would seem to be merely a façade if the father is not expected to shoulder onerous duties at night. A 1951 article, titled "Father's in the Kitchen," opened with the statement: "Gone are the dark ages when the man of the house was aloof from all activities that smacked of 'woman's work.' Today many a father is making a place for himself in that most vital area of the home—the kitchen." In the very next paragraph, however, the article offered: "Father's attitude toward cooking is different from mother's. It's somewhat of a hobby with him."[12] Finally, a 1958 article, titled "Be Fair to Father," included the proposition that "fathers who take no pleasure in participating in the nursery shouldn't feel as if they have to." A standard men-should-be-free-to-ignore-infants statement. Two paragraphs earlier, however, the article proclaimed that people who believe that fathers should not change diapers or get up for the 2 A.M. feeding, because "men are men" and "women are women," fail to recognize that masculinity and femininity are not "discrete detached-from-each-other entities" but "bents-of-being that run into and overlap with each other." It then went on to say that "the most 'masculine' of men, it is now well known, may have

traits, attitudes and interests commonly thought of as 'feminine'—and vice versa." This is a proposition that contemporary feminists would endorse. So was the article encouraging higher levels of father involvement, or was it not? The authors of the article admitted to being befuddled themselves:

> We're all understandably confused at the moment about the roles men and women "should" play today; about the real meaning of "masculine" and "feminine"; about the emotional differences between the sexes that are biologically founded and those encouraged by the time and place we live in.[13]

Diversity of opinion across the articles could be even more pronounced. The rules for being a father appeared to depend on who was making them up.[14] Some writers lauded the arrival of a new brand of father (one who was involved with the kids early on). Others expressed concern that, by trying to share infant care with their wives, men were losing sight of their true role in the world. I found articles that talked about how much fatherhood had changed, and articles that said that fatherhood was not fundamentally different from what it had been before. Fathers were made fun of, and they were also revered. Although the expectations for fathers in the fifties were, on balance, more traditional than not, the culture of fatherhood reflected in the 121 articles was less a monolith than a mélange.[15]

Manuals

Historians also have relied on child-rearing manuals to chart the culture of fatherhood over the course of the twentieth century. The two manuals that have gotten the bulk of attention are the two that will be reviewed here: *Infant Care* by the Children's Bureau, and *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* by Benjamin Spock.

The analysis of these manuals, while often insightful, sometimes is marred by the failure to note a manual's publication date or to determine whether a manual has changed from one edition to the next. For example, in her discussion of child-care experts in the 1950s, Maxine Margolis chose to rely not on the 1946 (first) edition or 1957 (second) edition, but on the 1968 (third) edition, saying "it include[d] the same topics as the earlier editions" and that "not until the 1976 revised edition . . . did Spock introduce significant changes in his views of the mother and father roles." While it is true that the 1976 edition was a major departure from earlier editions, it is incorrect to assume that the first three editions of the manual offered virtually identical prescriptions for fathers.[16]

The ideas in the first edition of a text generally can be linked to the time that it was copyrighted, but reissued texts typically are a combination of ideas conceived in different years. Studies of the culture of fatherhood in the fifties thus must pay careful attention to a text's vintage. If child-rearing manuals are the objects of study, earlier and subsequent editions must be scrutinized so as to ascertain, as much as possible, the birth date of the ideas scattered throughout.

Infant Care. Published under the auspices of the Department of Labor's Children's Bureau, *Infant Care* was the most popular child-rearing manual in the early twentieth century. Initially distributed free and later sold at cost, it served as a guide for many parents throughout the United States. Up to and including the postwar era, editions of

the manual were published in 1914, 1921, 1929, 1931, 1938, 1940, 1942, 1945, 1951, and 1955. Newer editions have come out since.[17]

The 1914 edition of *Infant Care* was addressed, in the words of the Chief of the Children's Bureau, "to the average mother of the country."[18] As for the "average father," he was rarely mentioned; if and when he was mentioned, he was told either to be supportive of his wife or simply stay out of the way. In time, however, the manual's message to fathers would change.

A content analysis of *Infant Care* from 1914 to 1942 shows the Children's Bureau increasingly extending an invitation to men to become involved in the lives of their children.[19] The 1929 edition, influenced by behaviorism, emphasized the importance of mothers and fathers "working together," while the 1935 reprinting of the 1931 edition took a section previously titled "Selected Books of Interest to Mothers" and renamed it "Selected Books of Interest to Parents." The 1942 edition went even further and began with the sentence, "This book is intended to help *mothers and fathers* in taking care of babies." Although earlier editions had used the phrases "mother and father" or "parents" to talk about an activity or responsibility, the 1942 edition was the first to say that the book itself was addressed to both parents. Interestingly enough, despite these and other father-embracing changes over seven editions, including the addition of pictures of fathers holding babies, there was one section of the manual that remained basically the same. When it came to a discussion of what to do when the baby was ill, it was decreed that the mother (in consultation with her pediatrician) was ultimately responsible. This maxim would be repeated in the 1945, 1951, and 1955 editions.[20]

During World War II, *Infant Care* changed hardly at all. The 1945 edition included some revisions to the section on nutrition but, as the Children's Bureau noted in the Foreword, "The text was largely that of the edition of 1942." It did, however, come out in a double-column format "to conserve paper and cost."[21]

The next edition of *Infant Care* was published in 1951. A quick comparison with the 1945 edition suggests additional movement toward father inclusion. A photograph on the third page portrayed a father holding an infant, with his wife at his side, and was captioned, "When the baby arrives home from the hospital, his father can get acquainted with him." Later, there was a photograph of a black father feeding his child. "Fathers can be just as patient as mothers about early attempts at eating solid foods," was the message underneath. In the chapter titled, "How Your Baby Develops and Learns," another picture of a man can be found, one depicting a father hoisting his baby over his head. Here the caption read, "When sharing fun begins early it forms the basis for later companionship with father."[22] The presence of drawings or photographs showing fathers with children was not unique. The 1945 edition had a photograph of a father giving a baby a bath, another of a father with his child on his knee, and yet another of a father holding an infant *en face*.[23] What was different were the forceful statements accompanying the photographs. Especially noteworthy was the inclusion of a minority father. This had not occurred before. (While there were two photographs of a father alone with a child, and one of a father and mother together with a child, there were eight photographs of a mother alone with a child.)

Several pages later, in a new section titled, "Your Baby Needs His Father," the Children's Bureau declared:

> Some fathers feel they've had one strike against them by not having a chance even to hold the baby till they carried him home from the hospital. A father wants to have some part in the care of his baby, but he doesn't want it to be only the middle-of-the-night floor-walking that is such a favorite of cartoonists. He's good at more than bottle-warming and diaper-changing, though at times inexperienced mothers seem to cold-shoulder the idea that he can have any worthwhile suggestions about a baby's care. A father feels just as necessary to his son or daughter as a mother does. And a new father may be no clumsier at giving a baby a bath than his wife is.[24]

Not every change, however, encouraged greater father involvement. A closer examination of the 1951 edition reveals that at the same time that the Children's Bureau was ostensibly inviting fathers to become partners with their wives, it also was recommending a more peripheral role for men. The 1951 edition repeated the inclusive opening, found in the 1942 and 1945 editions, that "this book is intended to help mothers and fathers in taking care of babies," but it introduced a section titled "The New Experience of Becoming a Parent" that began, "'If only I could have had my second baby first!' Many a mother has jokingly said this because she has found the care of her second child so much easier than that of the first." The second paragraph in the new section then followed with,

> In this booklet we are going to try to help you feel easy and confident with your first baby. A woman who is relaxed and fear-free finds that her baby responds to her feelings and is easier to take care of. And a man who knows something about what to expect of a baby can side-step his nervousness and enjoy his first-born sooner.[25]

Although men were mentioned early on, women appear to be the intended audience more so than in the two editions before. The culture of fatherhood, as represented in the 1951 edition of *Infant Care*, thus was inconsistent and, if the opening of the new section is seen as especially significant, more father disconfirming than were the 1942 and 1945 editions.

The next edition, published in 1955, employed drawings rather than photographs and had two images of fathers rather than three: one of a father holding a baby in his arms, and another of a father feeding a child with a spoon. Unlike in the 1951 edition, this time the father feeding his child appears to be white.[26] (In this edition, there were only three images of a mother alone with a child, compared to eight in the 1951 edition.)

The 1955 edition eliminated the statement, "This book is intended to help mothers and fathers in taking care of babies."[27] The opening introduced in the 1951 edition was repeated in the 1955 edition, "If only I could have had my second baby first. Many a mother . . ."[28] The section, "Your Baby Needs His Father" was the same, except for one sentence. In 1951, the section began, "Some fathers feel they've had one strike against them by not having a chance even to hold the baby till they carried him home from the hospital."[29] In 1955, the section began, "Fathers are likely to feel they've had one strike against them if they have not had a chance even to hold the baby till they carried him home from the hospital."[30] The difference basically is that, in 1951, the Children's Bureau seemed to assume that fathers would not have the opportunity to hold their babies in the hospital, whereas, in 1955, it seemed to assume that they would ("*if* they have not had the chance"). This slight change could be nothing more than a copy edi-

tor's rephrasing, or it could reflect an acknowledgment by the Children's Bureau that some fathers in the fifties not only were holding their newborns at the hospital but were present in the delivery room as well.[31]

Infant Care thus changed significantly between the 1942 and 1945 editions and the 1951 and 1955 editions. The observed changes in the opening sections of *Infant Care* (e.g., the elimination in 1955 of the statement that the manual was "intended to help mothers and fathers") could be interpreted as regressive, with fathers being made less central rather than more.

The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care. While *Infant Care* was the most popular child-rearing manual in the early twentieth century, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (hereafter *Baby and Child Care*) by Benjamin Spock was the most popular child-rearing manual in the late twentieth century. The first edition of the manual was published in 1946, the second edition in 1957. Newer editions have come out since.[32] Although prewar versus postwar comparisons cannot be made, an examination of the 1946 and 1957 editions sheds further light on how the culture of fatherhood changed during the fifties.

The 1946 edition of *Baby and Child Care* opened with "A Letter to the Mother and Father," and followed with a section on "The Right Start" and subsection on "The Parents' Part." Given these headings, one might believe that Spock intended his prescriptions to be read by men as well as women. Throughout the manual, however, there were far more references to *mother* than *father*, suggesting that Spock thought he was speaking mainly to women.[33]

The subsection on "The Parents' Part" included a drawing of a father looking at his baby through the nursery window, with a caption that read, "The father is apt to get the mistaken idea that he's unimportant." Opposite the picture, there was a discussion of "The Father's Part." (No similar discussion of the "The Mother's Part" can be found.) Spock's commentary on fatherhood, meanwhile, was contradictory:

> Some fathers have been brought up to think that the care of babies and children is the mother's job entirely. This is the wrong idea. You can be a warm father and a real man at the same time. We know that the father's closeness and friendliness to his children will have a vital effect on their spirits and characters for the rest of their lives. So the time for him to begin being a real father is right from the start. That's the easiest time. The father and mother can learn together. In some cities, classes in baby care are given for fathers too. If a father leaves it all to his wife for the first two years, she gets to be the expert and the boss, as far as the children are concerned. He'll feel more bashful about pushing his way into the picture later. Of course, I don't mean that the father has to give just as many bottles or change just as many diapers as the mother. But it's fine for him to do these things occasionally. He might make the formula on Sunday. If the baby is on a 2 A.M. bottle in the early weeks, when the mother is still pretty tired, this is a good feeding for him to take over. It's nice for him, if he can, to go along to the doctor's office for the baby's regular visits. It gives him a chance to bring up those questions which are bothering him and of which he doesn't think his wife understands the importance. It pleases the doctor, too. Of course, there are some fathers who would get goose flesh at the very thought of helping to take care of a baby, and there's no good to be gained by trying to force them. Most of them come around to enjoying their children later "when they're more like real people." But many fathers are only a little bashful. They just need encouragement.[34]

Although Spock appeared to advocate that fathers should connect with their children from the very beginning, he blunted that advice when he said that fathers need only engage in routine child care "occasionally," and that men should not be "forced" to "help," if caring for the baby made them squeamish. Also, proposing that fathers "go along" to the pediatrician's office would seem to make fathers health care partners, but then Spock quickly added that the main reason fathers would want to be in attendance was so condescendingly they could ask "those questions" that they thought their wives did not comprehend. (Two other sections prominently mentioned fathers. One talked about how important it was for children, both sons and daughters, to have a "friendly, accepting father." The other was devoted to "The Fatherless Child.")[35]

The 1957 edition of *Baby and Child Care* retained much of the text of the 1946 edition, but it also was different in several ways. The opening, formerly titled "A Letter to the Mother and Father," became "A Letter to the Reader of This New Edition." The drawing of the father gazing at his baby in the nursery appeared again, but the discussion of "The Father's Part" was expanded from no more than a page to about two and a half pages. "The Father's Part" itself was divided into three subsections titled, "Men React to Their Wife's Pregnancy," "The Father's Opportunity in the Early Weeks at Home," and "The Father and His Baby." The last subsection reproduced what had been the text for "The Father's Part" in the 1946 edition, with two notable changes. One was a reference at the end of the subsection to other places in the manual where fatherhood also was discussed: "There's more on fathers in Sections 460-463, 477, 507-509." The other was that the second and third sentences in the original version were collapsed into one: "Some fathers have been brought up to think that the care of babies and children is the mother's job entirely. But a man can be a warm father and a real man at the same time."[36] Not only did this rewording eliminate the direct statement about how it was wrong to think that caring for babies and children was the mother's job entirely, but it also shifted the text grammatically from the second to the third person. Thus, in the 1946 edition, "The Father's Part" was addressed to fathers ("You can be a warm father and a real man at the same time"), whereas in the 1957 edition, Spock seemed to be talking to mothers about fathers.

There were modifications to other sections as well. The subsections in the 1947 edition that dealt with boys and girls needing a "friendly, accepting father" were subsumed in the 1957 edition under a more general heading titled, "The Father as Companion." Also included under this heading were two new subsections titled, "A Little Rough-Housing Goes a Long Way" and "A Father Should Go Light on the Kidding." Both cautioned fathers to be sensitive to their sons' and daughters' perceived frailties, with the implication that men's and women's approaches to child rearing were starkly unalike: "On the average, men seem to have more fierceness in them than women do. In civilized life, they have to keep this under control."[37] The section on "Discipline" also was expanded, with fathers being mentioned more, and a subsection titled "A Father Should Share in Discipline" was added. Finally, in the 1957 edition, Spock gave greater attention to the notion that fathers and mothers should serve as masculine and feminine role models. Enlarging a section on three- to six-year-olds' "devotion" to parents, Spock ventured into a discussion of how "a boy wants to be like his father" and "a girl wants to be like her mother." He also talked about the "romantic attachments" that boys developed toward their mothers and that girls developed toward their fathers.[38] Especially interesting were his admonitions to fathers to be stern with sons

whose attachment to their mothers had gone "so far" as to possibly last through childhood or beyond.[39]

In sum, *Baby and Child Care* expanded its coverage of fatherhood from 1946 to 1957, but it did so in such a way as to further delineate socially constructed gender distinctions. Also striking is the fact that the 1951 and 1955 editions of *Infant Care* and the 1957 edition of *Baby and Child Care* seemed to expect either lower levels of father involvement or more traditional kinds of father involvement than was expected in the 1940s. As was true for the culture of fatherhood reflected in popular magazines, the culture of fatherhood reflected in child-rearing manuals in the 1950s did not continue on the progressive path it had been on since the turn of the century but stopped short, perhaps making something of a U-turn.

Television

When people talk about the fifties, they often talk about the importance of television to the era. And for good reason. Between 1948 and 1960, the percentage of U.S. households with at least one television climbed from less than 1 percent to close to 90 percent.[40] Mention fatherhood in the fifties, and again people often will talk about television—or, more specifically, talk about four particular television shows: *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *The Donna Reed Show*.[41] Over the years, these four shows—which caricatured and celebrated white, middle-class suburban domesticity—"have become synonymous with our ideas about family life during that period."[42] *Father Knows Best*, and situation comedies like it, are highlighted because they are said to reflect "the postwar emphasis on men's family roles."[43]

Why would these four shows be identified with families and fatherhood in the fifties more so than others? Some might hypothesize that it is because the programs dominated the television schedule then. But did they? *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*—the fictional account of a real-life family, Ozzie and Harriet Nelson (musicians by trade) and their sons, David and Ricky—started as a radio series in 1944, was first telecast on October 3, 1952, and ended on September 3, 1966. *Father Knows Best*—a program about the characters Jim and Margaret Anderson and their children, Betty, Bud, and Kathy—also started as a radio series (in 1949), but did not become a television sitcom until the fall of 1954, ending its run in the spring of 1963. The 1959-1960 season also was the last to use original episodes. Thereafter, the network broadcast repeats. The other two shows began their runs even later in the decade. *Leave It to Beaver*—which told the fictional story of the Cleavers (Beaver, his brother Wally, and their parents, June and Ward)—first aired in 1957 and continued until 1963. *The Donna Reed Show*—in which Oscar-winner Reed played Donna Stone, wife of Dr. Alex Stone and mother of Mary, Jeff, and later Trisha—began in 1958 and ceased production in 1966. Thus, two of the shows that today have come to symbolize families and fatherhood in the postwar era did not go on the air until the late 1950s, while one did not begin until the fall of 1954.[44]

Then there is the question of ratings. How popular were these shows when they were broadcast? During its entire run, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* never made it into the top twenty-five in the Nielsen ratings. *Father Knows Best* was canceled at the end of its first season, but was picked up by a rival network when viewers

complained. Still, it did not rank in the top ten until its last new-show season (1959-1960). In every other year, it was ranked either thirteenth (1958-59), twenty-third (1957-58), or did not make it into the top twenty-five. *Leave It to Beaver* and *The Donna Reed Show*, like *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, never ranked among the top twenty-five.[45]

This is not to suggest that the shows were unpopular or that no one watched them. Given that the three major networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) had a virtual monopoly on what people could see during prime time (compared to the number of stations and choices available today), a show ranked as low as twenty-third, as *Father Knows Best* was in the 1957-1958 season, could receive a fairly hefty rating of 27.7, which meant that, over the course of that season, 27.7 percent of television households tuned in.[46] Significant, too, is the fact that on four different occasions—in 1956, 1958, 1959, and 1960—one or more of the cast was featured in *TV Guide*. The U.S. Treasury Department also commissioned a special episode of *Father Knows Best*, which was distributed in schools throughout the country to promote the purchase of government savings bonds. No doubt this contributed to the show's notoriety, and demonstrated also that people did not have to watch the show to know about it. Finally, *Father Knows Best* was one of those rare television series to end at its peak. (Actor Robert Young tired of the role, having also played the role of Jim Anderson on the radio.) But however popular *Father Knows Best* may have been, on the Monday evenings (at 8:30 PM) that it was broadcast in 1959-1960, the show's highest rated season, it enticed fewer viewers than the family sitcom that immediately followed it, *The Danny Thomas Show* (originally titled, and hereafter referred to as, *Make Room for Daddy*), about which I will have more to say in a moment.

If *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *The Donna Reed Show* were not necessarily the most popular shows of their time, why are they accorded so much attention today? One answer, simply, is reruns. Their resurrection, every now and then on afternoon or late night television, accounts in part for why these programs are collectively remembered.[47] The fact that these shows are routinely mentioned in popular and scholarly articles, as well as in textbooks and web sites, also helps to explain why they stand out. They have their historians, so to speak, people willing to tell their tale.[48] Because of their repeated mention, our memories of these shows are very sharp, perhaps even sharper and "fresher than memories of real life."[49] In other words, people may have come to think that *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *The Donna Reed Show* are representative of what television viewers mostly watched in the fifties. Some of us may go so far as to believe that the fictional households in the shows were what families in the fifties were "really" like.[50]

It seems clear that if we are going to try to get a sense of the culture of fatherhood in the fifties, as reflected in the world of television, we will have to ask, What were people watching besides these four shows? The most popular shows at the dawn of the television age were dramatic anthologies and comedy variety shows, for example, *Texaco Star Theater*, *Fireside Theatre*, *Philco TV Playhouse*, *Kraft Television Theatre*, *Your Show of Shows*, *The Colgate Comedy Hour*, and *The Toast of the Town* (later called *The Ed Sullivan Show*). The earliest shows to center on families, fathers and/or mothers, grandfathers and/or grandmothers (as well as parental figures), children, and domestic life in general were the following, in chronological order by their debut dates: *The Goldbergs* (1949), *I Remember Mama* (1949), *The Life of Riley* (1949), *The Aldrich*

Family (1949), *Beulah* (1950), *The Trouble with Father* (a.k.a *The Stu Erwin Show*) (1950), *I Love Lucy* (1951), *Life with Luigi* (1952), *My Little Margie* (1952), *Bonino* (1953), *Life with Father* (1953), *Make Room for Daddy* (1953), *My Favorite Husband* (1953), *My Son Jeep* (1953), *Sky King* (1953), *The Wonderful John Acton* (1953), and *Lassie* (1954). Between 1955 and 1960, another set of shows, often focusing on fatherhood, premiered. These were: *The Adventures of Champion* (1955), *Brave Eagle* (1955), *Circus Boy* (1956), *Fury* (1955), *Professional Father* (1955), *My Friend Flicka* (1956), *Bachelor Father* (1957), *The Real McCoys* (1957), *The Rifleman* (1958), *Bonanza* (1959), *Dennis the Menace* (1959), *The Dennis O'Keefe Show* (1959), *Dudley Do-Right* (1959, a cartoon series), *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* (1959), *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960), *Guestward Ho!* (1960), *Harrigan and Son* (1960), *My Three Sons* (1960), and *Peter Loves Mary* (1960).[51]

Historians of fatherhood often have limited their analysis to domestic comedies and/or dramas. Seldom are westerns, action shows, or animated series looked at. But if these shows depict fathers or father figures, there is no reason that they should be excluded. Why should we assume that a child who watched television in the 1958-1959 season would not draw conclusions about what it meant to be a father from the story lines presented in *The Rifleman* as opposed to *Father Knows Best*? *The Rifleman* was pitched as "the saga of Lucas McCain, a homesteader in the Old West struggling to make a living off his ranch and make a man out of his motherless son, Mark."[52] The fact that *The Rifleman* was set in the Old West and not in the fictional "Midwestern community of Springfield" (circa late 1950s), where the Andersons reportedly lived, does not make the fatherhood messages in *The Rifleman* irrelevant. Television shows that are set in the past almost always are anachronistic, relying more on strained contemporary relevancy than on historical accuracy to connect with their audience. Producers and advertisers would not have it any other way. Incidentally, more people watched *The Rifleman* than *Father Knows Best* in 1958-1959, when the two shows were ranked fourth and thirteenth, respectively.[53]

Significant, too, were the number of shows depicting single fathers or father figures. In addition to *The Rifleman*, the count included: *My Little Margie*, *Bonino*, *My Son Jeep*, *Sky King*, *The Wonderful John Acton*, *The Adventures of Champion*, *Brave Eagle*, *Fury*, *Circus Boy*, *My Friend Flicka*, *Bachelor Father*, *The Ed Wynn Show*, *Jefferson Drum*, *Bonanza*, *The Dennis O'Keefe Show*, *Dudley Do-Right*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and *My Three Sons*.[54] The most popular shows, besides *The Rifleman*, were *Bonanza*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and *My Three Sons*. *Bonanza* was "set in the vicinity of Virginia City, Nevada, during the years of the Civil War." In the series, "Widower Ben Cartwright was the patriarch of the all-male clan and owner of the thousand-square-mile Ponderosa Ranch. Each of his three sons had been borne by a different wife, none of whom was still alive."[55] *The Andy Griffith Show* and *My Three Sons* told the story of two widowers, one a small-town sheriff and the other an aviation engineer. Single television fathers in the fifties almost always were widowers, as opposed to divorcees.

Some of the shows that debuted in the fifties did not last very long, while others grew to become legendary. *Bonino*, starring opera star Enzio Pinza as a widowed father raising seven kids, was on the air for only three months. (Nonetheless, it was part of the culture of fatherhood for those three months.) *I Love Lucy* was—and is—one of the most renowned shows of all time. (Lucy and Ricky's televised "transition to parenthood" on January 19, 1953, was watched by 40 million people.)[56] *Make Room for*

Daddy ran from 1953 to 1965. The show got off to a slow start, but caught on in its fourth season. In 1957-1958, 1958-1959, and 1959-1960 (when *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *The Donna Reed Show* were also vying for attention), *Make Room for Daddy* ranked second, fifth, and fourth, respectively. The title of the show was based on nightclub-entertainer Thomas's real-life experiences as a father. Thomas said that when he came home after being on the road, his children had to move to different bedrooms to "make room for Daddy."[57] Curiously, *Make Room for Daddy*, set in the city rather than suburbs, is rarely cited today as an example of how fathers were portrayed in the fifties. Although it was a very popular show at the time, without recurring reruns it has been largely forgotten.

Looking beyond *The Ozzie and Harriet Show*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *The Donna Reed Show* allows us to see that there were a number of shows in the fifties that portrayed men in care-giving roles. The presence of shows depicting single fathers/grandfathers, or father/grandfather figures, indicates as well that, while the breadwinner-father married to the homemaker-mother was a powerful symbol at the time, it was not the only family scenario found on the small screen. Fatherhood images in the fifties also were not limited to suburban dads. *The Goldbergs* was set in an apartment in the Bronx. *I Remember Mama* was about a family living in San Francisco at the turn of the century. *Brave Eagle* focused on a Native American chief and his foster son in the southwest during the mid-1800s. *Lassie*, in its first three seasons, often pictured Gramps Miller dispensing sage advice to his grandson, Jeff, on their small farm. In *Circus Boy*, Joey, a professional clown, guided twelve-year-old-orphan, Corky, as they picked up stakes and moved from town to town. These are but a few of the shows that deviated from the white picket fence ideal. There also was, at the beginning of the fifties at least, more racial and ethnic diversity. The Goldbergs were Jewish. The Hansens (*I Remember Mama*) were Norwegian. Bonino was Italian, as was Luigi, whose best friend was a father. Beulah was a black woman working as a maid for a white family. (Ethnic and racial stereotypes, needless to say, were the norm.) Then, "as the decade wore on, television families became almost exclusively white as well as middle class." Schedulers appeared to "assume" that "*everyone* would want a family like the Nelsons or Cleavers."[58] The homogenization of family life on television thus was more characteristic of the late fifties rather than before.

How were fathers in particular portrayed? Some have suggested that fathers were uniformly depicted as incompetent.[59] Others have contended that the portrayals varied.[60] The weight of the evidence supports the second view. First, there was a class effect. In general, working-class television fathers were presented as less competent than middle-class television fathers.[61] The correlation was not perfect. The father in *The Trouble with Father*, for one, was middle-class and inept. But overall, working-class fathers were more likely to be the brunt of the joke.

Second, similar to what we saw in the child-rearing manuals, there was a vintage effect. *I Remember Mama*, *The Life of Riley*, *The Aldrich Family*, *The Trouble with Father*, *Life with Father*, and *Make Room for Daddy* all tended to depict fathers as inept. All of these series also debuted in the early part of the fifties (between 1949 and 1953). By contrast, comparable family sitcoms, which began later, tended to depict fathers as competent. This latter group included: *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *The Donna Reed Show*.[62] Although some scholars have classified Jim Anderson of *Father Knows Best* as a bumbler, the argument has been made that he was just the opposite—"superdad incarnate,"[63] "the symbol of the ideal American father."[64]

Critics in the fifties complained about how fathers were being portrayed, much as they do today. Highlighted for their negative portrayals were *I Remember Mama*, *The Life of Riley*, and *Make Room for Daddy*.[65] *Father Knows Best* also was targeted, but it was the radio version, not the television version, that raised people's ire. In its transformation from audio in the early fifties to video in the late fifties, Jim Anderson became the mid-twentieth-century poster guy for "New Fatherhood." "Robert Young proves a TV dad doesn't have to be stupid," reported *TV Guide* in 1956.[66] Perhaps therein lies the reason that *Father Knows Best* and, to a lesser degree, *Leave It to Beaver* and *The Donna Reed Show*, continue to reside in our imagination of fatherhood past. The men on these shows were designed to be liked. They were manufactured "heroes."[67]

The thing is, however, the domestic comedies that were broadcast in the late fifties (vs. those broadcast before) were more likely to elevate fathers at the expense of mothers. Nina Leibman's careful analysis of the narrative patterns in *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, *The Donna Reed Show*, and *My Three Sons*, with particular emphasis on the middle three, revealed that:

> The fictional dads were always available, and were much more desired than the mother in their ability to resolve family crises. . . . The centralization of [these] fathers and the father-filial bond resulted in a consequent denigration of the status of the mother. . . . They [June Cleaver and Donna Stone] *seemed* to be crucial to the emotional needs of their children, just as these series *seemed* to be comedies. Only with a closer reading and the benefit of . . . years of hindsight does it become clear that visibility does not render the television mothers important any more than the laugh track renders the domestic melodrama a comedy.[68]

In the main, the shows were "characterized by their consistent thematic emphasis on patriarchy"[69] and thus mirrored the textual patterns observed in the popular magazine articles and premier child-rearing manuals.

WRITING AND READING THE CULTURE OF FATHERHOOD

Within the framework of the "cultural diamond," the culture of fatherhood in the fifties includes not only the cultural objects that, from 1945 to 1960, pertained to fatherhood, but also the sociohistorical mechanisms by which these objects were written and read. My primary focus in this article has been on three sets of cultural objects—how they were configured and how they changed. But what about the process of construction and interpretation? Although my analysis at this point does not allow me to demonstrate empirically how the process works, I want to take the opportunity to speculate on some connections and pose several questions that could be explored in future research.

The culture of fatherhood reflected in popular magazines was a potpourri of ideas, with different cultural creators offering conflicting axioms on what fathers should be doing. Thus, for example, female reporters were more likely to talk about a father changing a diaper, while male reporters were more likely to concentrate on a father's reluctance to engage in infant care.[70] Different cultural receivers probably influenced the content of magazine articles as well, albeit indirectly. Anthony Vigorito and Timothy Curry, analyzing 7,900 illustrations in 83 popular magazines published in 1992,

discovered that the images of men in men's magazines contrasted sharply with the images of men in women's magazines. In magazines with a majority of male readers, men typically tended to be portrayed as dominant, in control, cool, and unemotional. In magazines with a majority of female readers, men were more likely to be shown as nurturing.[71] Extrapolating these findings to studies of parenting articles in the fifties, we should recall that virtually every study of how fathers are represented in popular magazines has focused on magazines directed to women. If the images of fathers in these magazines became more traditional in the fifties, there is a good chance that the images of fathers in men's magazines were even more traditional. Vigorito and Curry also made the point that "men are likely to come away from reading their magazines with traditional identities reinforced, while women are likely to come away from reading their magazines with more nurturing visions of men in their minds."[72] If this is so, then the culture of fatherhood in men's minds would be different from the culture of fatherhood in women's minds. That there are minimally two fatherhoods (his and hers) is a well-known hypothesis among family social scientists, but it is not a proposition that historians of fatherhood have fully explored.[73] More attention should be devoted to the fact that how people interpret the culture of fatherhood at any given time can be influenced by gender as well as by race, class, and age.

Yet another noteworthy characteristic of magazine articles on fatherhood is how redundant they could be from one decade to the next. Some of the articles published after the war closely resembled articles published before the war. Why? Had the culture not changed at all? The answer, first of all, is that there were similarities between the "New Fatherhood" of the postwar era and the "New Fatherhood" of decades before, and these similarities cannot be ignored. It also is true, however, that there were important differences between the pre- and postwar culture that could be underestimated if we were to rely exclusively on magazines. Magazine editors do not require authors to carry out literature reviews to ensure that manuscripts build on, or at least not repeat, ideas that have been proffered before. They are more concerned that the articles grab people's attention enough for them to want to buy the magazine and peruse the advertisements inside. Thus, while a systematic analysis of popular magazines may indicate that the culture of fatherhood became more traditional in the postwar era, we need to take into account the redundancy factor in the magazine industry and consider the genuine possibility that the shift in the culture of fatherhood was more pronounced than might be surmised from studies of popular magazines alone.

A redundancy factor also is at work in the child-rearing book industry. Here serious attention is paid to what has been said before, because subsequent editions of a popular manual almost always build on previous editions of that manual. The challenge for the publisher is to change enough of the book so that it can be marketed as "new," but not change so much of the text that it loses whatever audience appeal it may have had to begin with. Closely examining *Infant Care* and *Baby and Child Care* from one edition to the next leaves little doubt that previous editions were used as templates for subsequent editions. When there were changes within a paragraph, the changes would involve altering only a few words. Broader changes generally entailed the substitution of one paragraph for another, or the insertion of a new section or new drawing/photo. Later editions of a manual typically were a mixture of ideas introduced at different times.

The process by which books are revised would suggest that any changes in the culture of fatherhood that might be reflected in child-rearing manuals would be a more

deliberate kind of change. In his autobiography, Spock acknowledged that he gave a great deal of thought to the prescriptions in his book, to whether they were correct, and to whether they should be revised. Spock also mentioned the letters he received from mothers and how they forced him to change his views on certain issues.[74]

Especially influential was an incident that occurred in 1972, when Spock was running for President of the United States. At a meeting with the National Women's Political Caucus, Gloria Steinhem and other feminists accused Spock of being "a major oppressor of women in the same category as Sigmund Freud." This event prompted Spock to admit that "some things in *Baby and Child Care* were obviously sexist."[75]

Spock said he prided himself on being a "friend and helper" to women, and that it "hurt [his] feelings to be called an enemy of women."[76] Some of the changes to the 1976 edition represented his attempt to respond to these particular criticisms. What is interesting about the account is how much the 1972 forum influenced Spock's prescription for fathers. This should cause us to wonder to what degree other personal experiences affected the content of *Baby and Child Care*.

If we look at the 1957 edition, we can see a Freudian turn in the text. Freudian theory was popular in the fifties, so it may very well be that Spock was simply following a trend. But it also is true that Spock had extensive psychoanalytic training.[77] Would Freud's ideas have been as prominent in the 1957 edition if Spock had been schooled differently? The larger question is, how much was the culture of fatherhood in the fifties, as reflected in the most popular manual at the time, the product of one person's inclinations?

The world of television provides still another take on the culture of fatherhood in the fifties. Parenting articles and books no doubt were influential in the postwar era, but their impact on the culture of fatherhood paled in comparison to what the television industry was able to achieve. Television reached millions, as opposed to thousands. Also, father's and children's popular conceptions of fatherhood were more likely to be affected by a weekly television show than by a magazine or manual, the reason being that men and kids were not avid consumers of how-to-parent prescriptions but were inveterate television watchers. What distinguished television, too, was the fact that it was a collaborative endeavor. Spock may have had considerable control over the content of his manual (especially after it became a best-seller), but no single individual could hope to exercise that amount of control over a television series because of the interdependency of producers, writers, directors, technicians, and actors in formulating a show. Here was a medium where cultural creators, working as a team, infused their own notions of what it meant to be a father in their visual and auditory texts.

How do we account for the homogenization of television fare in the late fifties? Perhaps the most important factor was the financial advantage that network executives saw in family programming. The television industry, like other media industries, is a "big business looking to sell [its] products to an audience." Thus, "it was the obsession with finding and keeping that audience that perhaps determined the dominance of the domestic melodrama."[78] In other words, how best to sell the products was the primary concern. During the postwar era, marketers viewed families as the target audience.

> In the 1950s, the networks were determined to reach as many consumers as possible —large family groups who would be interested in furnishing and feeding a household. One of the best ways to encourage consumer families to watch a program and buy the

> products was by example, presenting television consumer families as typical visions of American family life that the viewer would want to emulate.[79]

Whether the families on television were representative of families in America probably was of little concern to network executives. Their goal, like their counterparts in the magazine industry, was to sell advertising. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, vaudeville-like shows dominated prime time, and family-oriented series and scripts often included slapstick comedy (the classic example is *I Love Lucy*). In the late 1950s, family melodramas with an underlying, but not overpowering, element of humor took hold. These shows depicted fathers, mothers, and preteens and teenagers (with their requisite fan clubs). Ironically, infants were rarely shown, despite the fact that the country was in the midst of a baby boom. Perhaps infants were perceived to be too boring to young television watchers.

No matter how much these family melodramas are remembered today, they were not the only shows, nor necessarily the most popular shows, to depict fathers and father figures in the fifties. Because there were no easy formulas to determine a hit series, the variety of programming in the early days of television reflected the willingness of the industry to experiment. Some of the shows caught on. Others lasted only a few months, or a season or two. Short lived they may have been, but they still were elemental to the culture of fatherhood in the fifties and should not be ignored.

CONCLUSION

Recent feminist scholarship has begun to establish that the culture of motherhood in the fifties was more complex than previously realized. The "competing voices" and "internal contradictions" within and across a variety of cultural objects demonstrate that the dominant histories about the culture of motherhood in the fifties fail to capture the full range of public discourse on women at the time.[80] A similar point can be made about the culture of fatherhood in the fifties. It, too, was a lot more complex than the standard narratives allow.[81]

Examining popular magazine articles, premier child-rearing manuals, and prime-time television shows produced between 1945 and 1960 suggests that the culture of fatherhood in postwar America was neither a simple continuation of previous patterns nor a more progressive version of what had come before, but rather was a more traditional strain of patriarchal fatherhood. Within the era itself, the culture of fatherhood in the late fifties appears to have been more traditional/patriarchal than the culture of fatherhood in the early fifties. That there were differences across the fifties should not come as a surprise, given other documented trends. The earning power of women was lower in the late 1950s than it was in the early 1950s; the probability of having children in the first half of the 1950s "barely foreshadowed what was to come in the height of the baby boom [in the latter 1950s]"; the new parents of the late postwar era were more conservative than the new parents of the early postwar era.[82] The more patriarchal face of the culture of fatherhood in the late fifties thus has its parallels. By the same token, it should be acknowledged that when scholars and others point to the prescriptive literature and family sitcoms showcasing fathers and produced between 1955 and 1960 as evidence of what the culture of fatherhood for the entire fifties was like, they run the risk of overlooking important shifts.

Conducting a comparative study and applying a cultural diamond conceptual framework encourages us to think about how the culture of fatherhood was—and still is—contingent on the agents through which it is transmitted, and on the respective audiences involved. More research should be done on the processes by which the culture of fatherhood is manufactured and ultimately received. Understanding how people create and appropriate culture is unequivocally central to understanding history.

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NOTES

1. See, for example: Peter Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1974); Julia Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book: The Education of American Mothers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Joseph H. Pleck, "American Fatherhood: A Historical Perspective," in *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987), 83-97; Elizabeth H. Pleck and Joseph H. Pleck, "Fatherhood Ideals in the United States: Historical Dimensions," in *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, 3rd ed., ed. Michael E. Lamb (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997), 33-48; E. Anthony Rotundo, "American Fatherhood: A Historical Perspective," *American Behavioral Scientist* 29 (September/October 1985): 7-25; Robert Rutherdale, "Fatherhood, Masculinity, and the Good Life During Canada's Baby Boom," *Journal of Family History* 24 (July 1999): 351-73; Jessica Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

2. The *fifties* (vs. 1950s) generally is understood to encompass more than the years from 1950 to 1959. For some, the period began at the end of World War II and ended with the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963). See Jessamyn Neuhaus, "The Way to a Man's Heart: Gender Roles, Domestic Ideology, and Cookbooks in the 1950s," *Journal of Social History* 32 (spring 1999): 529-55. Others define the fifties as the time between the end of World War II and the election of John F. Kennedy, that is, 1945 to 1960. It is the second definition that is being used here. See Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard Books, 1993); Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994). The culture of fatherhood in the fifties continues to loom large in people's minds, operating as a moral marker of sorts to judge the culture of fatherhood today. In much the same way that the Vietnam War and Gulf War are invoked during discussions of subsequent wars, so also do various histories of the culture of fatherhood in the fifties insinuate themselves into present-day discourse. Two recent examples: Andrew Sullivan, "Who's Your Daddy?," *Time*, June 18, 2001, 92; Margaret Talbot, "Paternal Verities," *New York Times Magazine*, May 27, 2001, 7-8. The first article refers to President Bush and Vice President Cheney as "reconstructed [father] figures from the 1950s." In the second, the author says of her

father, "While in public he resembled the 50's patriarch of right-wing nostalgia . . . at home he was different, in some ways true to the stereotype and in other ways not."

3. Wendy Griswold, *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1994).

4. On the social recognition and meaning of cultural objects, see Eviatar Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). For a discussion of how cultural creators and cultural receivers may "read" cultural objects differently, see Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Wendy Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture: Reading Between the Lines* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992). Ann Swidler also argues that social actors actively use culture: "A culture is not a unified system that pushes action in a consistent direction. Rather, it is more like a 'tool kit' or repertoire . . . from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action." See Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review*, 51 (April 1986): 273-86.

5. For a discussion of how the culture and conduct of fatherhood can be distinguished, see Ralph LaRossa, "Fatherhood and Social Change," *Family Relations* 37 (October 1988): 451-57; Ralph LaRossa, *The Modernization of Fatherhood: A Social and Political History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

6. Ella Taylor, *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 22.

7. Kathryn Keller, *Mothers and Work in Popular American Magazines* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 26 (italics added). For a historical account of how popular magazines portrayed fathers from 1901 to 1942, and of how children were said to benefit from greater father involvement, see LaRossa, *The Modernization of Fatherhood*.

8. Maxine P. Atkinson and Stephen P. Blackwelder, "Fathering in the 20th Century," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 55 (November 1993): 975-86; Stephen P. Blackwelder, personal communication, April 11, 1994.

9. Candice Leonard, "Illusions of Change: An Analysis of the Fatherhood Discourse in *Parents Magazine*, 1929-1994" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Hampshire, 1996), 37, 113, 272.

10. Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 231 (italics added), 250, 251. When Meyerowitz compared articles published in 1932-1934 with articles published in 1942-1944 and 1952-1954, she found that the proportion that focused on mothers, wives, or housewives had declined from 36 percent in the early 1930s, to 27 percent in the early 1940s, and to 21 percent in the early 1950s (p. 260). We may wonder what she would have found had she included the late 1940s and late 1950s, and representations of fathers and husbands, in her prewar and postwar comparisons.

11. Hilda Cole Espy, "Men Make Wonderful Mothers," *Ladies Home Journal*, October 1946, 260-61.

12. Edith C. Campbell, "Fifty Fifty Baby," *Parents Magazine*, June 1948, 23, 117 (italics added); Rita B. Marshall, "Father's in the Kitchen," *Parents Magazine*, June 1951, 52, 106-7.

13. Gunnar Dybwad and Helen Puner, "Be Fair to Father," *Parents Magazine*, June 1958, 38-39, 94-95.

14. At least one article explicitly pointed to the contradictions, presenting two press reports: (1) "Fathers are Held Family Autocrats. Today's father likes to think of himself as thoroughly democratic in his family relationships, but he's likely to border on the autocratic in the way he treats his youngsters"; and (2) "Laxity Laid to Fathers. It is past time for many fathers to take over as head of the household. . . . No less than dreadful have been the results in the form of child delinquency, adult criminality and of ineffective family living generally." Benjamin Powell, "Father on the Other 364 Days," *New York Times Magazine*, October 15, 1952, 18.

15. Meyerowitz's findings, as well as my own, support Swidler's contention that culture is a repertoire of ideas. Swidler, "Culture in Action."

16. Maxine Margolis, *Mothers and Such: Views of American Women and Why They Changed* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 281.

17. For a history of the Children's Bureau and *Infant Care*, see Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Raising a Baby the Government Way: Mothers' Letters to the Children's Bureau, 1915-1932* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986); Nancy Pottishman Weiss, "Save the Children: A History of the Children's Bureau, 1903-1919," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1974).

18. *Infant Care* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Children's Bureau, 1914), 7.

19. The content analysis is reported in LaRossa, *The Modernization of Fatherhood*, chap. 3.

20. *Infant Care* (1929, 1931 [1935], 1942, 1945, 1951, 1955) (italics added).

21. *Infant Care* (1945), ii.

22. *Infant Care* (1951), 3, 35, 78.

23. *Infant Care* (1945), 30, 40, 56.

24. *Infant Care* (1951), 9.

25. *Infant Care* (1951), 2. In the 1942 edition, the statement, "This book is intended to help mothers and fathers in taking care of babies," was in a section titled, "The Purpose of This Book." In the 1945 edition, it was in the "Foreword." In the 1951 edition, it preceded the "Foreword," and was included in a letter by Oscar R. Ewing, Federal Security Administrator.

26. *Infant Care* (1955), 7, 23.

27. The 1955 edition had a "Foreword" by Martha Eliot, Chief of the Children's Bureau. The statement, "This book is intended to help mothers and fathers in taking care of babies," was not included, however.

28. *Infant Care* (1951), 2.

29. *Infant Care* (1951), 9.

30. *Infant Care* (1955), 6-7.

31. "A Father Sees His Child Born," *Life*, July 4, 1955, 133-38.

32. Benjamin Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1946, 1957). Also published by Pocket Books.

33. The correspondence between Spock and his publisher suggests that Spock viewed his audience as primarily mothers. For example, in one letter, published several years after the first edition came out, Spock talked of how "mothers" were likely to discuss the book among themselves, and of how he had thought about paying for an ad to promote the book on Mother's Day. Benjamin Spock to Charles Duell, May 7, 1949, Box 1. Benjamin Spock Papers, Syracuse University. The letters that he received, however, sometimes talked of both mothers and fathers reading the book. "Just a short note telling you how wonderful your book has been to my wife and myself in regard to bringing up our child." E. A. to Benjamin Spock, May 2, 1954, Box 2, Benjamin Spock Papers. See also Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book*, 237.

34. Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, 1946, 15-16.

35. Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, 1946, 254-55, 489.

36. Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, 1957, 1, 15-18.

37. Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, 1957, 314-16.

38. Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, 1957, 357-59.

39. Specifically, Spock said:

> A father who realizes that his young son sometimes has unconscious feelings of resentment and fear toward him does not help the boy by trying to be too gentle and permissive with him or by pretending that he, the father, doesn't really love his wife very much. In fact, if a boy was convinced that his father was afraid to be a strong man, a firm father, and a normally possessive husband, the boy would sense that he himself was having his mother too much to himself and would feel really guilty and frightened. And he would miss the inspiration of a manly father, which he must have in order to develop

his own manliness and courage. (Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, 1957, 360)

40. Karen A. Cerulo, "Television, Magazine Covers, and the Shared Symbolic Environment: 1948-1970," *American Sociological Review* 49 (August 1984), 566-70; Cobbet Steinberg, *TV Facts* (New York: Facts on File, 1985), 86.

41. See, for example, Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 247; Mary Ann Schwartz and BarBara Marliene Scott, *Marriages and Families: Diversity and Change*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 12-13.

42. Muriel G. Cantor, "Prime-Time Fathers: A Study in Continuity and Change," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7 (1990): 279.

43. Weiss, *To Have and to Hold*, 83.

44. Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows, 1946-Present*, 4th ed. (New York: Ballantine, 1988).

45. Brooks and Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows, 1946-Present*; Steinberg, *TV Facts*. Daniel Scott Smith makes this point with respect to *Ozzie and Harriet*, noting that it "was never among the most popular" programs when it was broadcast. Daniel Scott Smith, "Recent Change and the Periodization of American Family History," *Journal of Family History* 20 (fall 1995): 329-46.

46. To put the ratings for *Father Knows Best* in a historical perspective, the *New York Times* reported that, in the 1957-1958 season, *Leave It to Beaver* had a rating of 19.6, which meant that 8.2 million households watched the show. In the 1999-2002 season, *The Sopranos* had a rating of 6.8, which translated into 7.3 million households. Bill Carter, "Calibrating the Next Step for 'The Sopranos,'" *New York Times*, October 7, 2002, C1, C4.

47. Diana C. Reep and Faye H. Dambrot, "TV Parents: Fathers (and now Mothers) Know Best," *Journal of Popular Culture* 28 (1994): 13-23.

48. One fifties' Web site spotlights only these four shows on its "TV Families of the Fifties" page (www.fiftiesweb.com/families.htm).

49. Halberstam, *The Fifties*, 514.

50. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992). Coontz wryly remarks, "Contrary to popular opinion, 'Leave It to Beaver' was not a documentary" (p. 29).

51. Including shows that debuted in the fall of 1960 may seem a stretch, since they were on the air for only a few months before the fifties, as defined here (1945-1960), ended. We should bear in mind, however, that these shows were conceptualized in the midst of the fifties and thus reflect the television industry's mindset at the time.

52. Brooks and Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows, 1946-Present*, 664. The same point can be made for other westerns that showcased fathers. When Lorne Greene, the father on *Bonanza*, died, it was said that his television character "became a worldwide image of firm but gentle fatherhood." Associated Press Report, "Actor Lorne Greene Dies at 72, Starred as Father in TV's 'Bonanza,'" *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, September 12, 1987, 2A.

53. Many of the most popular shows in the late fifties were westerns. Brooks and Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows, 1946-Present*; Taylor, *Prime-Time Families*, 33.

54. There is a Web site devoted to chronicling single television fathers (www.tvdads.com).

55. Brooks and Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows, 1946-Present*, 543, 56, 97.

56. Judy Kutulas, "'Do I Look Like a Chick?' Men, Women, and Babies on Sitcom Maternity Shows," *American Studies* 39 (summer 1998): 13-32.

57. Brooks and Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows, 1946-Present*, 184.

58. Taylor, *Prime-Time Families*, 26; see also 40.

59. Elizabeth and Joseph Pleck contend:

> Both white working-class fathers in sitcoms, such as Stuart Erwin in "The Trouble with Father," and their middle-class counterparts, Jim Anderson, Ward Cleaver, and Ozzie Nelson, were portrayed as bumblers. These men were often manipulated by their wives, who had an intuitive and empathic understanding of the best course. (Pleck and Pleck, "Fatherhood Ideals in the United States," 43)

Lynn Spigel takes a similar position. Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 64. Others disagree (see note 60).

60. Cantor, "Prime-Time Fathers"; Lynda M. Glennon and Richard Butsch, "The Family as Portrayed on Television, 1946-1978," in *Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties, Volume II, Technical Reviews*, ed. David Pearl, Lorraine Bouthilet, and Joyce Lazar (Rockville, MD: National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), 264-71; Lisa Heilbronn, "Breadwinners and Loafers: Images of Masculinity in 1950s Situation Comedy," *masculinities* 2 (fall 1994): 60-70; Nina C. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); May, *Homeward Bound*, 129; Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 190-93.

61. Glennon and Butsch, "The Family as Portrayed on Television, 1946-1978"; Cantor, "Prime-Time Fathers"; May, *Homeward Bound*, 129; Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 190-93.

62. Mary Beth Haralovich, "Sitcoms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s Homemaker," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 11 (1989): 61-83.

63. Glennon and Butsch, "The Family as Portrayed on Television, 1946-1978," 265.

64. Cantor, "Prime-Time Fathers," 280. Also: "In 1955 the Family Service Association presented Robert Young—Superdad Jim Anderson on Father Knows Best—a plaque for his Constructive Portrayal of American Family Life." Mark Crotty, "Murphy Would Probably Also Win the Election—The Effect of Television as Related to the Portrayal of the Family in Situation Comedies," *Journal of Popular Culture* 29 (1995): 1-15.

65. "Who Remembers Papa?," *Saturday Review of Literature*, July-December 1951; Morton Hunt, "The Decline and Fall of the American Father," *Cosmopolitan*, April 1955, 20-25.

66. "Father Knows Best: Robert Young Proves a TV Dad Doesn't Have to Be Stupid," *TV Guide*, June 16-22, 1956.

67. Glennon and Butsch, "The Family as Portrayed on Television, 1946-1978," 267.

68. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures*, 252-53, 256.

69. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures*, 259.

70. Leonard, "Illusions of Change."

71. Anthony J. Vigorito and Timothy J. Curry, "Marketing Masculinity: Gender Identity and Popular Magazines," *Sex Roles* 39 (1998): 135-52.

72. Vigorito and Curry, "Marketing Masculinity," 150.

73. Ralph LaRossa and Donald C. Reitzes, "Gendered Perceptions of Father Involvement in Early 20th Century America," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 57 (February 1995): 223-29.

74. Benjamin Spock and Mary Morgan, *Spock on Spock: A Memoir of Growing Up With the Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 245.

75. Spock and Morgan, *Spock on Spock*, 247-48.

76. Spock and Morgan, *Spock on Spock*, 248.

77. Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book*, 218-27; Robert Picket, "Benjamin Spock and the Spock Papers at Syracuse University," *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier* 2 (fall 1987): 3-22. Charles Strickland and Andrew Ambrose point out: "Although basically Freudian in his psychological orientation, Spock chose, like many Americans, to strain out the pessimistic elements of Freud's thought and to emphasize, instead, the possibilities of creating a democratic

person who was at peace with both self and society." Charles Strickland and Andrew Ambrose, "The Baby Boom, Prosperity, and the Changing Worlds of Children, 1945-1963," in *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook*, ed. Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 540.

78. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures*, 251.

79. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures*, 252.

80. Joanne Meyerowitz, "Introduction: Women and Gender in Postwar America," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 2; see also Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Joannne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver* (the full collection of essays); Eva Moskowitz, "'It's Good to Blow Your Top': Women's Magazines and a Discourse of Discontent, 1945-1965," *Journal of Women's History* 8 (fall 1996): 66-98; Neuhaus, "The Way to a Man's Heart."

81. Jane E. Levey's recent article, grounded in what Robert L. Griswold refers to as "the *Not June Cleaver* school of post–World War II family historiography," explores some of the ambiguities of the culture of fatherhood in the early fifties by dissecting two best-selling books of the late 1940s, Betty MacDonald's *The Egg and I* (1945) and Frank Gilbreth, Jr. and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey's *Cheaper by the Dozen*. Jane E. Levey, "Imagining the Family in Postwar Popular Culture: The Case of *The Egg and I* and *Cheaper by the Dozen*," *Journal of Women's History* 13 (fall 2001): 125-50; Robert L. Griswold, "If Not Ward Cleaver, Then Who?," *Journal of Women's History* 13 (fall 2001): 160-61.

82. Linda J. Waite, "Working Wives, 1940-1960," *American Sociological Review*, 41 (February 1976): 65-80; John Modell, *Into One's Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States, 1920-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 256; William M. Tuttle, Jr., *"Daddy's Gone to War": The Second World War in the Lives of American Children* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Also, the cultural patterns observed here are not necessarily limited to magazines, books, and television. A recent study of Father's Day and Mother's Day comic strips found higher levels of "patriarchal gender disparities" in the late 1950s than in either the late 1940s or early 1950s (or at any other time covered in the project). Ralph LaRossa, Charles Jaret, Malati Gadgil, and G. Robert Wynn, "Gender Disparities in Mother's Day and Father's Day Comic Strips: A 55 Year History," *Sex Roles* 44 (June 2001): 693-718. See also Ralph LaRossa, Charles Jaret, Malati Gadgil, and G. Robert Wynn, "The Changing Culture of Fatherhood in Comic Strip Families: A Six-Decade Analysis," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62 (May 2000): 375-87.