

Participators, Reciprocators and Renouncers:2 Paternal Orientations in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This paper charts some of the changing psychoanalytic ideas about fathers, and a historical overview of vicissitudes of fatherhood over the last few centuries until the 21st century. This focuses on today's greater freedom for both, mothers and fathers to decide whether, when, how, where and with whom to have a baby and what their relationship to the child and the other parent will be. Juxtaposed with my typology of mothering [Facilitators/Regulators (Raphael-Leff, 1986)], fathering patterns are presented in the context of two parent families which either follow a 'traditional' pattern of the mother as primary caregiver while the 'Renouncer' father is breadwinner and instrumental executor. Or other families, where childcare is shared more or less equally between the 'Reciprocator' partners, while in yet others, the 'Participator' father plays a primary (or even, sole) caregiving role when the mother returns to her workplace or absents herself emotionally or physically for part of the day, or entirely. [Same-sex families may follow similar orientations]. It is suggested that these differing patterns are a function of social changes (e.g. giving men access to labour), socioeconomic necessities and state maternity/paternity provisions. However, where individual choices prevail what is played out in parenting modes are internal world representations, coupled with preconscious beliefs about babies and their needs. The various permutations of coupled orientations affect the climate of the household, and inevitably, form and inform the baby's internal reality.