

# Involved Fatherhood, Love and Power: British and Romanian Fathers' Accounts of Emotionality

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## Background

In the current sociological literature, the subject of the love shared between parents and children has not yet been addressed in depth. In addition, masculinity studies have up until now disregarded fathers' emotionality and experiences of paternal love.

By drawing on Ian Burkitt's aesthetic theory of emotions (2014) and feminist critiques of gender and power (Jonasdottir and Fergusson, 2014), this PhD research presents how fathers' embeddedness in a particular class and culture, and adherence to multiple discourses of fatherhood guides them to challenge but also to reinforce hegemonic masculinity. By focusing on men's emotionality rather than the work/life balance, researchers can gain a fresh perspective on the lived reality of intimate relationships and how inequalities can appear.

## Method & Participants

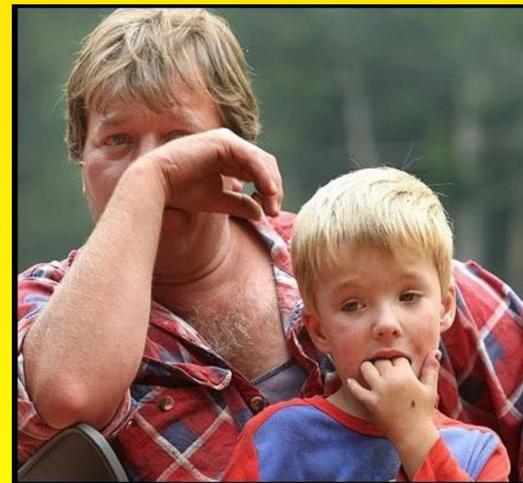
- Qualitative semi-structured interviews.
- 6 home/at work observations of child-father interactions.
- Involved fathers recommended by people who knew them well. Fathers were contacted directly not through their wife/partner.
- 20 Romanian fathers living in Bucharest and 27 British fathers living in Edinburgh – 35 middle class (blue) and 12 working class (orange).



*Peter, middle-class Br father:*  
"I think it's a connection were you understand how the other person is feeling, just by the way that they behave and the way that they respond, I think sometimes it could be as simple as a shared stare or a look, were you both laugh at the same thing, at the same time"

*Stewart, working-class Br father:*  
"Love? It's something that's inherently built within your mechanisms...it's a whole load of things. It's about their development, actually being there for them, it's about support."

*Bogdan, working-class Ro father:*  
"A lot of people put their children to sleep in separate beds, but then he won't feel a mother's love or a father's love, to be caressed, to have him caress you, to feel you close, and this counts a lot for him, being a child. If he turns around in bed with his mom and dad being next to him, he can touch us and he knows we are there. So he's calm emotionally."



*Fergus, middle-class Br father:*  
"It's almost because it's unconditional that you have to enforce a sense of discipline in terms of the way that you bring them up. It's almost because yeah, you can't love them too much, you have to be careful."

*Remus, middle-class Ro father:*  
"Ok, smacking is relative, if I give them a smack it doesn't mean I'm beating my kids up it means I drew their attention to something important. In my opinion, you have to be as natural as possible. When I quarrel with my wife I want them to see the argument but also how at the end we apologize, because I want them to know that life has both of these things."

## Emerging results

- Love was defined by fathers as both an *emotion* (instinctual, powerful, over-whelming, deeply embodied, warm) but also as a *relationship* (a bond, a connection, a give-and-take). However, it was not a direct and comfortable feeling for all men, as a small number of them struggled with identifying as 'a loving father', preferring to be seen as a 'friend' instead.
- *'A slower burn'*: For most men even if they felt strongly at their child's birth, bonding with them took time to develop. It was dependent on child's development, shared activities, being together and getting to know them.
- Paying attention, responding to the child and talking to them were crucial aspects in creating a close bond. However, expressing love through language was considered not as valuable as physical touch and actions done for their child's good.
- Love empowered men and motivated them to make financial sacrifices and change their work to fit in family time. It also disempowered them, making them feel vulnerable, and at the mercy of feelings of fear, panic, guilt and worry.
- With older children physical touch diminished and love turned into pride for child's accomplishments. Fathers of adolescents planned activities to keep in touch with their children even after leaving 'the nest'.

- Across class, Romanian and British fathers adopted both a *traditional breadwinner identity* and an *intimate type of fathering*, adapting those according to the context (since both identities are socially rewarded). Such adaptations came with contradictions because ideas of non-violent and affectionate fathering collided in practice with emotionally stoic, dominant types of masculinity.