Sweden has for a long time been characterized by the implementation of an active and radical gender equality policy, with one manifest intention being that of modernizing Swedish parenting. In the late 1960s, Sweden became the first country in the world to adopt an official policy for equality between the sexes. At the beginning of the 1980s, the first minister with special responsibility for gender equality issues was appointed. The goal of this gender equality work has been not only to strengthen mothers’ rights to work and financial independence, but also to create opportunities for fathers to assume a more active responsibility in all areas of the everyday life of the family. This “double emancipation” is thus about ensuring that women and men are given the same opportunities in both work and family life. In order to realize this objective, the Swedish welfare state has assumed a major responsibility and offers a range of different forms of support; first and foremost, today’s parents have access to a well-developed and highly subsidized childcare system, as well as to a very generous system of parental insurance.

From an international comparative perspective, there are good grounds for saying that Swedish parents, both mothers and fathers, have been given unique opportunities to strike a balance between individual wishes and needs relating to their working lives and the joint responsibilities associated with having children (Bäck-Wiklund & Plantin 2007; Plantin & Bäck-Wiklund 2009). The Swedish parental insurance system, for example, introduced in 1974, gives all fathers the opportunity to stay at home with their child for eleven months during the period before the child’s eighth birthday, as well as to receive compensation amounting to 80 percent of
their salary while they do so. This may be seen as constituting a unique political signal marking the reproductive responsibility of the male, and it is something that has greatly influenced the expectations that exist in relation to men’s parenting in Sweden. In spite of this, the fatherhood research shows that a shift toward these ideals of improved gender equality is not occurring as quickly as one might expect. The number of parental leave days used by men remains relatively low, and men continue to occupy a more central position than women as providers—and do significantly less household work than mothers (SCB 2014). At the same time, the situation has not remained static, and there are many indications that fathers are gradually moving toward the ideals of greater gender equality and a more caring approach to fathering in both their attitudes and behaviors. The amount of parental leave used by men has more than doubled over the past fifteen years, for example, and they are now devoting more time to their children than they used to (SCB 2012).

There is thus much to suggest that high levels of central government support to parents are important but themselves may not be sufficient to guarantee change. What, then, influences men’s perceptions and experiences of parenthood? How do the attitudes and behaviors of fathers change over time—and, perhaps most important, how can we understand this at the theoretical level? In this chapter, I attempt to provide some answers to these questions in my discussion of fathering in Swedish society. I start out by describing the emergence of fatherhood research in Sweden and how the research focus has shifted over time. After that, I discuss the process of becoming a dad—the different expectations and the careful planning that underpin the decision to become a father. Following this discussion, I present a picture of how fathers combine work and family life with the support of the parental leave system. Finally, I describe men’s participation and involvement in internal family work, care of children, and involvement in
household work in everyday life.

The emergence of fatherhood research in Sweden must be understood in the light of Sweden’s unique welfare policy context. The gender equality debate that took place in relation to the “double emancipation” of the 1970s and 1980s contributed to directing a major focus on men, masculinity and the traditional fathering role. It was thus not strange that much of the early research on men and fathers was clearly linked to the issue of gender equality. In one of the first, and more extensive, studies of Swedish men, it was noted that a majority were in principle positive toward gender equality, both within the family and at work (Jalmert 1984). It was also noted that men had a clearly negative attitude toward the use of corporal punishment and that they often emphasized the importance of an active, caring form of fatherhood. Strikingly, the men often felt that they were unable to live up to these views for various reasons. Different factors linked to the men’s individual situations made it difficult for them to act in accordance with their positive views on gender equality. The author of the study therefore coined the expression “the Swedish in-principle-man,” a concept intended to symbolize both the sluggishness of the pace at which men were changing and their ambivalence toward the new expectations being placed on them (Jalmert 1984). Swedish fathers were thus branded as being modern in their rhetoric but traditional in their actions. Talking and doing fatherhood were two different things.

In parallel with this research, there also developed a strong interest in a number of psychological dimensions of fatherhood, particularly those linked to the relationship between fathers and their children (Åström 1990; Hwang 1985; Lamb et al. 1982). In line with this interest, during the 1990s research also came to adopt a more therapeutic approach, discussing
the difficulties faced by men in connection with the changes required to move closer to what was often described as a “more androgynous” ideal. The principal concern related to how men would cope with being both “macho” and “velour dads” (Hagström 1996) and how they, faced with the very powerful influence of pro-feminist ideologies, would be able to get in touch with their “true,” “natural,” and “genuine” masculinity (Högberg 1995). The background to these ideas lay in an intensified debate during the 1980s on the increasing number of divorces, broken homes, and fathers who had no contact with their children. In the wake of the successive development of the feminist movement, conservative men’s groups felt that men had experienced a loss of status in family life and that masculinity had become far too feminized. One special area of concern was the way in which young boys were viewed as showing signs of having a fragile gender identity, formed without the guidance of the adult male experience. The growing presence of criminal youth gangs and “hypermasculine” acts of excessive violence were often explained by referring to the absence of a clear frame of reference in the current view of masculinity (Plantin 2001).

This perspective never established a firm foothold in Sweden, however, and quickly became criticized for being essentialist and reactionary from the perspective of gender equality policy. Above all, it was felt that men returning to their “true, natural, and genuine” role within the family involved a risk that this would simply lead to men retaining a patriarchal dominance over women. Instead, a more social constructivist oriented approach to research on fathers emerged, clearly inspired by contemporary studies that discussed the diversity of multiple masculinities (Connell 1995). In these studies, fatherhood was viewed not as something predetermined or static, but rather as something that was formed actively and in interaction with both the immediate environment and structural factors (Bangura Arvidsson 2003; Berg&
Johansson 1999; Bergman & Hobson 2002; Chronholm 2004; Plantin 2001). Here the focus was directed at emphasizing the differences between fathers in relation to class, age, the family and work situation or the relationship to one’s own parents, and at how this generated different fathering practices. This theoretical point of departure has since retained a dominant position in the Swedish fatherhood research to the present day.

Over recent decades, much of the Swedish research on fathers has also had a strong focus on the effects of society’s different regulatory and support systems. The research on parental leave, and on how it is negotiated both within the family and at work, is today extensive, as is the research on whether the Gender Equality Act is being implemented in working life (Bekkengen 2002; Haas & Hwang 2000; Haas, Allard, & Hwang 2002; Haas & Hwang 2007). By contrast, there is little research focused on other forms of support, such as how grandparents, siblings, friends or work colleagues constitute sources of support in various ways in the lives of fathers. Thus the questions posed by the research community are greatly influenced by childcare in Sweden’s being very much viewed as a shared responsibility between parents and the state. In turn, this has naturally also affected the contents of the following presentation of what we know about today’s Swedish fathers.

**The Decision to Become a Dad—High Expectations and Careful Planning**

Against the background of the extensive societal changes witnessed over recent decades, with increased demands placed on having a higher education and increasing competition in the labor market, it is relevant to begin by asking the following questions: How do the young men of today view the opportunities for both becoming a parent and simultaneously establishing themselves in the labor market? Do they want to have children? If so, how many?
Studies in this area show that a majority of the young adults in Sweden today have a positive attitude toward having children, even if they are choosing to have them increasingly later in life (SCB 2009; Ungdomsstyrelsen 2003). The average age at which men have their first child is 31, whereas the corresponding age for women is 29 (SCB 2011). The increasingly delayed initiation of parenthood has also meant that the time between the first, second, or third child has become shorter, more or less halved. Thus people are having children later in life and within a shorter period. In spite of this, the Swedish ideal remains that of having two children (Engwall 2005; Socialdepartementet 2001). There are certain sex and class differences in views of when people want to have children, however. Men are generally somewhat less inclined than women to actively develop an attitude toward having children, and parents who are planning a shorter educational career have children earlier than those who are planning to spend more time in education (Schmidt 2008).

The path to becoming a parent appears to follow a partially preplanned course, despite the increased freedom to choose and the individualization associated with life in late modernity. The majority feel that becoming educated, testing different jobs, and becoming established on both the housing and labor market fronts all constitute important prerequisites for having children (Duvander 2000; SCB 2009; Socialdepartementet 2001). Finding a place in the labor market is not entirely easy for today’s young people. Statistics show that levels of unemployment are three times higher in this group than they are among adults (Schröder 2010). Similarly, it is becoming increasingly difficult to enter the housing market, and many young people today live with their parents several years after having completed upper secondary education (SCB 2008). It has become increasingly common for young people to continue into higher education and to remain in the education system for longer periods. The so-called establishment age, which
specifies when women and men finally enter the labor market, has increased successively over recent decades, from approximately 20 years old at the end of the 1980s to 27 in 2011 (Ungdomsstyrelsen 2012). By extension, this means that the initiation of parenthood is being postponed and that Swedish first-time fathers are becoming correspondingly older. When one finally becomes established in the labor market, and also has children, the difficult balancing act of combining work and family life begins—to be a present parent as well as both a partner and a work colleague.

Combining Work Life and Family Life

A fairly extensive body of research in Sweden now describes the everyday life of the family and the balance between work life and family life. One common conclusion drawn from studies in this field is that parents of young children often perceive themselves as finding it difficult to combine family and work. There is not enough time to meet all the expectations, both one’s own and others’, that are placed on working parents. What is surprising, however, is that Swedish parents who have young children—and also parents in other countries that provide high levels of welfare state support to the “double-income-family,” appear to be particularly affected by this pressure (Larsson 2006; Strandh & Nordenmark 2006). In a comparative study of eight European countries, it was found that specifically Swedish parents, fathers as often as mothers, perceived themselves as experiencing more stress than others in relation to the difficulties of combining work and family life (van der Lippe et al. 2006). This might be considered somewhat remarkable, because the welfare state support provided to parents is specifically intended to minimize the conflicts between these two spheres. This argument can be turned on its head. By guaranteeing a high degree of welfare state support with the objective of strengthening the individual’s freedom and opportunities both to work and be a parent, the risk that conflicts will
arise increases. But what does the situation look like in practice? How do fathers use the support that is offered?

As already noted, Swedish fathers do not use the parental leave to the extent they might. As early as in the 1970s, when parental leave was introduced, it was noted that men only used a small percentage of the leave days available to them; it would take more than fifteen years before this figure rose above 10 percent. Today, 40 years after its introduction, fathers use approximately 25 percent, and mothers 75 percent, of the total number of available parental leave days. This means that Swedish men, after Icelandic men, have the highest takeup of parental leave among the Nordic countries, as well as among European countries (Duvander 2014). But the sluggishness of this trend toward a more equitable use of parental leave has been perplexing for both public sector agencies and researchers. A large number of studies have been conducted to offer plausible explanations for this phenomenon.

One explanation that has been offered refers to the persistence of a traditional view of the roles of fathers and mothers in the context of family life. Motherhood is still most commonly linked to the primary parenting role, not least during the child’s first years, whereas fatherhood is more often associated with a secondary responsibility of care, with a stronger emphasis on providing for the family’s financial and material needs (Gislason & Björk Eydal 2010). This means that many men primarily adopt a position as a “backup” for the family while the children are small. Only later, when the children are older and can play or communicate, do the men recognize a clearer fathering responsibility in relation to their children (Forsberg 2009; Plantin 2001). Another explanation focuses on inequalities in the economic situation of men and women. Because men often earn more and have a more firmly established position in working life than women, and because the levels of compensation in parental insurance are related to work
incomes, it usually pays families better for the man to work and the woman to use parental leave (Plantin et al. 2003; SOU 1998). A number of parents also have difficulty calculating the relevant financial consequences of the situation and therefore do not always have a clear picture of these issues (Gislason & Björk Eydal 2010).

Table 1. Leave length with income-related compensation in 2010 (weeks)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Iceland</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maternity leave</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17,5</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(2)³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paternity leave</td>
<td>2⁴</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2⁵</td>
<td>2⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared parental leave</td>
<td>32/40⁷</td>
<td>26,5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27/37⁸</td>
<td>51,5⁹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s quota</td>
<td>(3¹⁰)</td>
<td>5¹¹</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s quota</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9¹²</td>
<td>8,5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A further explanation targets the negative attitudes of employers to men taking parental leave. Swedish work organisations are characterized by traditionally gender-specific norms, and employers often adopt a passive or indirectly reluctant attitude toward encouraging an increase in the extent to which men use parental leave (Haas & Hwang 2000). In times of labor shortages, however, employers tend to become more family-friendly and take more initiatives intended to increase the opportunities for men to use parental leave. This is primarily intended as a means of attracting labor. In recent years, there has been a gradual change in attitudes toward paternal leave and work. A study by Haas and Hwang (2007), for example, found that many Swedish men perceived receiving support from their employers and work colleagues with regard to being able to stay home to care for sick children or not having to work overtime.

The way the parental insurance system is formulated also contributes to how women and
men use leave. Some argue that the system’s flexibility—the way it allows leave days to be transferred between parents—in practice gives men greater opportunities than women to refrain from taking parental leave, for the traditional view of motherhood leads to an expectation that the mother will use a greater part of the available parental leave (Bekkengen 2002; Klinth 2002). With this in mind, changes have been made to the parental insurance system, and today four of the thirteen months of available parental leave can no longer be transferred to the other parent. Two of the months are exclusively to be used by the father, and two by the mother, and if they are not used by the designated parent, they are forfeited. Followups that have examined the effects of this change have shown that this restriction of parents’ freedom to choose how to share the available parental leave has dramatically increased the amount of leave used by men (Försäkringskassan 2011).

Finally, there is a range of demographic explanations for variations in the use of parental leave. We know, for instance, that mothers and fathers use more parental leave in connection with their first child and that younger fathers and older mothers use longer periods of parental leave than others (Duvander & Eklund 2006). Similarly, immigrant fathers use fewer parental leave days than other fathers (Duvander & Eklund 2006), as do unmarried men by comparison with their married counterparts (Sundström & Duvander 2002).

A majority of these explanatory models discuss the negative influence that male hegemony and patriarchal power structures have on the use of parental leave. The range of the posited explanations, which touch upon all areas of the relational “state–market–family” triangle, shows that the issue of the patterns of parental leave use cannot be understood exclusively on the basis of a structural power perspective. Negotiations about parental leave are often more complex than this and are intimately linked to other factors, such as the economic cycle, the
labor market situation, and individuals’ levels of education, life experiences, and family situation
(Plantin 2001). Furthermore, today we have only a weak picture of how constructions of gender,
parenthood and use of parental leave are influenced by other social categories, such as social
class and ethnicity (Plantin et al. 2003). Though statistical data indicate that working-class men
use less parental leave than men from the middle classes, as well as that fathers who have an
overseas background use less parental leave than native-born “Swedish” men (Försäkringskassan
2009; Nyman & Pettersson 2002), we know very little about the factors influencing these
relationships at a deeper level.

Parental leave in connection with the birth of a child only constitutes a temporary
solution to the problem of striking a balance between work life and family life. When the period
of parental leave is over, when the woman or the man is to return to work, there arises a need for
new adaptive strategies to combine working life with the life of the family. But in the same way
as is the case in connection with the birth itself, the Swedish welfare state provides several
different forms of support even here. All children in Sweden are, for example, entitled to
municipal childcare provision in return for a low, government-subsidized fee, and all parents are
entitled to the so-called temporary parental allowance to stay home and care for a sick child.
Once again there are substantial differences between the adaptive strategies adopted by men and
women and how they relate to the available welfare state support.

Men appear to adapt their work life to fit their family life to a lesser extent than women,
with the majority of fathers of small children continuing to work full-time. Seventy-four percent
of children aged 0–17 have a father who works full-time, whereas the corresponding figure
among mothers is 42 percent. There is a tendency for fathers to focus on more short-term
strategies to resolve conflicts between the demands of work life and family life (Forsberg 2009;
Tyrkkö 1997). This may, for example, involve staying at home to look after a sick child, taking
time off to accompany children to the dentist, or occasionally leaving work early to collect
children from school or the nursery. There is no definitive knowledge of how often or to what
extent men regulate their work life or family life in this way. By contrast, women are seen to
employ longer-term strategies, in which work life is adapted to the life of the family to a much
greater degree. Following parental leave, for example, it is common for women to reduce their
working hours to part-time to devote more time to family life (Larsson 2012). Other strategies
that have been identified involve working different hours, putting one’s career on hold until the
children are older, or delaying having children (Kugelberg 2000). These differences in adaptive
strategies need not exclusively be related to gender, however, but may also be influenced by
other factors, such as an individual’s occupational affiliation or the organizational structure at the
workplace (Lewis et al. 2009).

Plantin and Bäck-Wiklund (2009) found that an unwillingness on the part of employers to
appoint replacement staff in cases of temporary absences had a powerful effect in limiting the
opportunities to take part-time parental leave or to stay home for a brief period to care for a sick
child. When no replacement is appointed, the individual’s work tasks either pile up or spill over
and affect the workload of colleagues. Individuals are therefore reluctant to stay home out of
consideration of loyalty to colleagues. In the same way, many of the social workers who
participated in the study stated that their loyalty to clients in difficult situations contributed to
their avoiding staying at home for a number of days even though they are entitled to do so. This
was attributed to the lack of replacements at work. The nature of an individual’s work tasks and
position in the organizational hierarchy has also been found to influence how parents manage the
balance between work and family life. Individuals who have predictable, instrumental, and
highly regulated forms of work have been shown to find it easier to maintain a distinction between the spheres of work and family, whereas individuals who work in projects, with people, or in different types of management position find it more difficult to make this distinction (Bäck-Wiklund & Plantin 2007).

Fatherhood, Everyday Life, and Family-Related Work

In a study of Swedish men conducted more than 30 years ago, it was noted that their attitudes toward paternal involvement in childcare and housework had in many ways changed more quickly than their actual behavior (Jalmert 1984). The Swedish “in-principle-man” was very positive toward becoming more involved in housework and with children but, for various reasons, often found it difficult to actually live up to this ideal. It transpired that women devoted five times as much time as men to housework and child supervision. Though men with children younger than 6 devoted somewhat more time to these areas, there was a substantial difference between men’s ideas and their actions. Fifteen years later, at the end of the 1990s, a major inquiry into the gender distribution of economic power and resources was conducted in Sweden and showed that these patterns remained largely the same (SOU 1998). Broadly stated, fathers devoted only half as much time as mothers to cooking, washing dishes, and cleaning. The unequal division of household labor had certainly become less marked, but only one in ten Swedish families that had young children could be characterized as manifesting gender equality in the sense that both parents cooked, washed, and cleaned as often as one another. The move toward a more equal division of household labor between fathers and mothers was more a result of women’s having reduced their share of the housework than it was of men’s having increased theirs.

The inquiry discussed a range of different explanations for the lack of further
progress toward gender equality in family life. First and foremost, a persisting traditionalism was noted in views regarding the division of responsibilities between the sexes, together with an underlying hegemony whereby men actively chose not to involve themselves in certain aspects of work in the family. Men appeared to be engaged in a more limited gender equality project, which was more focused on involvement with children, and which left the responsibility of housework to women (Brandth & Kvande 1998). Björnberg (1994) came to similar conclusions, arguing that fathers tended to participate more in the “fun” aspects of family-related work, whereas the more “tedious” aspects were left to mothers. In a comparative study focused on Sweden and the United States that had been conducted some years earlier (Sandqvist 1992), it was found that Swedish fathers, unlike their American counterparts, experienced less joy and more anxiety in the time spent with their children, because they also participated to a greater extent in regular household chores. The Swedish fathers also expressed feeling more tired and irritable in the context of their parenting than the American fathers.

In the most recent survey of how the Swedish population spend their time, conducted in Sweden in 2012, it was found that the differences between fathers and mothers have declined further, though the traditional gender patterns continue to persist—Swedish mothers devote more time to housework than Swedish fathers (SCB 2012). According to this study, they also spend more time with their children than fathers. This is largely because fathers spend more time in paid work than mothers. By comparison, time-based surveys showed that playing with children is more evenly distributed between parents. The same is true of reading aloud and attending various leisure time activities. Nonetheless, it should also be emphasized that time-based surveys of parents’ behavior only provide a very limited picture of everyday life. In particular, they do not capture the perceptions, the meaning creation, and the emotional components that sustain
relationships among family members. That one parent devotes fewer minutes than the other to the children, for example, says nothing about what this means for the parent’s relationship with the child or about how it is perceived by the child. In the following section, I take a closer look at how both fathers and children perceive their relationships with one another.

**Children’s and Men’s Perceptions of Involvement in Fatherhood**

There are now a large number of qualitative studies, both in Sweden and internationally, showing that parenthood and family life have a deep emotional significance for today’s fathers (Chronholm 2004; Dermott 2008; Klinth & Johansson 2010; Miller 2010). Many fathers describe parenthood as a maturation process and say that their relationship with their children develops new aspects of their personality—producing greater humility or inner calm or leading them to become more patient. A greater sense of taking responsibility is also often mentioned along with improved receptiveness and empathy (Plantin 2001). Devoting time to one’s children, and preferably much more time than one’s own father did, is therefore regarded as important by many men (Klinth & Johansson 2010; Plantin 2001). These experiences are also echoed in cross-national studies, wherein Swedish fathers tend to rate themselves higher than other fathers in acceptance and warmth in relation to their preadolescent children (Putnic et al. 2012). Perris et al. (1985) also showed that Swedish fathers were less rejecting toward their children than, for example, Italian and Australian fathers.

These perceptions are also partly confirmed by studies that have examined fatherhood from the child’s perspective. Ulf Hyvönen’s doctoral dissertation *Om barns fadersbild* (On children’s conceptions of the father) shows that although some children, and particularly girls, wished that their father would spend more time at home, the father was, according to the children’s descriptions, “not at all a distanced and absent family father in the
classic sense” (Hyvönen 1993, p. 60). Quite the reverse: The picture that emerged was one of a father who “clearly participated and was both practically and emotionally involved in the everyday life of his children” (p.139). Similar results also emerged in a large-scale study of children’s social relations at age 10–12, wherein both girls and boys stated that their contact with their fathers was good (SCB 2011). Eighty percent of girls and 86 percent of boys in the same survey also stated that their father always, or almost always, had time if they wanted to talk or do something with them. Perhaps a question of greater significance is what significance this involvement on the part of fathers has for children’s and youths’ health, development, and well-being.

An international literature review conducted by three Swedish researchers found twenty-two large-scale studies that had specifically focused on this question (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, & Bremberg 2004). The conclusions drawn from this review indicate that fathers who involve themselves with their children have a beneficial effect on their children’s mental health and social adjustment. A correlation of this kind was found in eight of the nine studies that examined the effects of fathers’ involvement while including controls for the family’s social background. The same effect was also found in a majority of the studies that had been conducted without the inclusion of controls for the family’s social situation. At the same time, the authors emphasize that these studies are not able to clarify whether the positive effects are linked to whether the father is the child’s biological parent or even whether he is a man. The same result would probably also be produced by a long-term relationship with another adult, irrespective of the adult’s sex. The American fatherhood researcher William Marsiglio (1995) draws similar conclusions:

Most scholars agree that, although fathers typically interact with their children
differently than do mothers, men are not inherently deficient in their ability to parent and a father’s gender is far less important in influencing child development than are his qualities as a parent.

A qualitative study of thirty Swedish fathers also asked whether they felt that their involvement with their children differs from that of the children’s mothers, and whether they do things that the mothers can’t do—that is, what is it that makes the fathers unique (Plantin 2001)? All of the men spontaneously answered that fatherhood was special, but they could not put their finger on what it was that made it unique. Men said that they played more physically with the children, or devoted more time to the children’s leisure time activities, but admitted that this was something that both parents could do. Thus identifying aspects of fatherhood that were not socially constructed was difficult for them when they thought about their parenting.

Despite this, it is commonly assumed that young boys need “male role models”—especially young boys who grow up with only their mother. Research shows that the term “male role model” lacks clarity and has different meanings in different contexts (Johansson 2006). A traditional male stereotype of this kind is often characterized by norms, discipline, courage, physical activity and heterosexuality—a manliness that young boys are considered to need to be able to grow up and take themselves out of “the female world of childhood.” This viewpoint is linked to ideas of gender differences, where “maleness” is invested with values that seem absent in “femaleness.” Sometimes an opposite view of maleness is considered, which views the male as equal, emotionally sensitive, and relationship-oriented. In this discussion, men and women are seen as being alike, a perspective that challenges rather than reinforces the traditional view of gender (Johansson 2006).

Concluding Discussion
The picture of the research base on Swedish fathers presented above shows how fatherhood has become increasingly visible over recent decades, not least in the public and political debate. For more than forty years, Sweden has been implementing an active family policy that has produced positive conditions for parents, both men and women, to combine work and family life. It has also led to an increasing number of fathers’ using longer periods of parental leave and sharing responsibility for their children and the family in the context of everyday life. There are also a large number of arenas in Swedish society in which fathers are becoming increasingly visible together with their children, dropping them off and collecting them from the nursery, at the cinema, at the park, pushing the pram in town, in cafés, shops, out in the woods, at work, and during the children’s leisure time activities. The mass media are continuously presenting reports about progress or setbacks in the area of gender equality, and there are now lifestyle magazines specifically for fathers. There is thus no doubt that today’s Swedish fathers are receiving a great deal of discursive support from their environment to develop a fathering role that is both more caring and more in line with gender equality ideals.

It would be incorrect to argue that these transformed conditions have replaced all the preceding fundamental traditions and structures associated with fatherhood. Society still contains a great many norms, power structures, and values that influence the behavior of both women and men in the context of their parenting. Women continue, for example, to take the primary responsibility for both children and housework in the majority of families, and it is rarer for men to have long-term strategies to adapt their working lives to fit their family lives. It thus seems that within the framework of the modern context of fatherhood, there are a range of contradictory expectations and structures that serve to both facilitate and obstruct change toward a greater degree of gender equality.
The Swedish example also shows how positive welfare state conditions are an important means of supporting fathers, they not being by themselves sufficient to produce rapid change in their attitudes and behaviors toward investment in family life. Ensuring that working life is family-friendly is at least as important, to enable fathers to, in time, become more visible at their workplaces.

Notes


2. Obligatory leave after birth.

3. Obligatory leave before or after birth, with or without compensation.

4. Six weeks in the public sector.

5. As of July 1, 2011, the father’s quota in Norway has been extended to twelve weeks.

6. Five days of father’s quota = a week.

7. With full compensation/reduced reimbursement.

8. With 100% or 80% reimbursement.

9. 390 days (seven days = week). To this, in certain municipalities, can be added the opportunity to receive a childcare allowance until the child turns 3 years old. Municipalities can themselves decide whether they wish to provide childcare allowances; generally, conservative-led municipalities have done so.

10. In the industrial sector.

11. The father receives five bonus weeks if he uses two weeks of the shared portion of parental leave.
12. One might as well call at least six of these weeks “maternity leave,” because the mother is not allowed to work.

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- https://eng.si.se/areas-of-operation/events-and-projects/equality-and-society-issues/
- www.scb.se/Statistik/_Publikationer/LE0201_2013B14_BR_X10BR1401ENG.pdf
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