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June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019

VR3V16002, HHP3V15002  
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Honours thesis

2018-2019, block 4

8684 words

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## Involvement as a sign of evolvement: a discourse analysis of the representation of a ‘new’ fatherhood in IKEA Sweden’s 2018 *Where Life Happens* campaign

*Objective.* Using IKEA Sweden’s WHERE LIFE HAPPENS campaign, this research explores how a notion of ‘new’ fatherhood falls in line with the ideal of egalitarian parenthood, and how this fatherhood is represented in Swedish advertisement. *Methods.* This research is based on a theoretically motivated, realistically approached discourse analysis on a selection of three advertisements within this campaign, analyzing the manner of representation of fatherhood. *Results.* The fathers portrayed in the WHERE LIFE HAPPENS campaign represent the ‘new father’ commonly accepted in contemporary Sweden, namely a father who is responsible, involved and nurturing and who takes on domestic responsibilities. *Conclusion.* The contemporary notions of fatherhood and egalitarian parenthood currently prevailing in Sweden are evident in IKEA Sweden’s WHERE LIFE HAPPENS campaign to an extent that they suggest the advertisements to mirror Sweden’s reality.

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## **Pillars of an honours education**

### *Academic depth, interdisciplinary breadth and social context*

This thesis aims to dive deeply into the process of creation and the perpetuation of ‘gender’, approaching gender roles as social constructs. Bringing gender theory in contact with social ideals of parenthood throughout the years and theory on the media representation of stereotypes associated with these gender stereotypes, I will explore the idea that a ‘new’ contemporary fatherhood has managed to surface in Sweden. In identifying this contemporary fatherhood, I will attempt to disclose how this new fatherhood relates itself to common family dynamics and notions surrounding gender. I will also uncover the influence the Swedish parental leave policy has had on this evolvement of Swedish contemporary fatherhood. This is the social pillar of my honours thesis, for the Swedish parental leave policy is to be considered exemplary to other Western countries, such as the USA, who have not yet managed to update their parental leave policy to an extent that it enables egalitarian parenting, even though this equal model has proven to be exceptionally beneficial to both parents and children involved.

### *Positioning this research in the humanities*

This research will touch upon selected theories from both the media and the gender department. Employing approaches and theories from these respective disciplines will assist me in creating a thorough, compendious research frame that is of additional value to the humanities on a general note.

## Introduction

Fatherhood, however approached, is a concept based in a social structure. Social structures are dependent on context, and thus, different ideas and ideals of ‘the father’ have existed through and changed with time. Ever since mothers entered the workforce in large numbers, the idea of equally balanced parenthood has been within reach. Where providing for their families used to be the number one priority for many men, contemporary men are rethinking this traditional notion of fatherhood, and shifting their priorities to the bond with their children. However, it still has a long way to go. While often both mothers and fathers are employed and financially support their family, women are still expected to stay home when a child is born; or at least cut down their work hours. Social structures such as gender roles are restricting both parents in this situation, tying the mother to the role of sole responsible caretaker of the child(ren), and the father to that of the financially responsible breadwinner.

The model of egalitarian parenting is not as much based on equality as it is on equity. It is not about the father and mother being assigned strictly the same amount of hours to spend on laundry or dishes on a weekly basis, for example. It is about two parents who support each other where necessary; parents who alternate chores and tasks, and share in childcare. But most importantly, egalitarian parenting exists upon a shared sense of responsibility. Neither parents should bare predominant responsibilities, nor for financial support, nor for childcare and housework.<sup>1</sup> This model only roots in countries where fathers have the right to paternity leave, and are actively encouraged to take advantage of it, which is the situation in Nordic countries.

In addition to allowing mothers and fathers the opportunity to be flexible in their division of parental tasks, this egalitarian model proposes even more benefits for all three parties involved; the father, the mother and the child. By spending time as the sole caretaker, the father experiences increased happiness and mental well-being, as well as positive development of his father-child relationship.<sup>2,3</sup> Not only does the relationship between the

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<sup>1</sup> Lucas Forsberg, “Negotiating involved fatherhood: Household work, childcare and spending time with children,” *Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies* 2, no. 2 (2007): 115.

<sup>2</sup> B. Brandth and E. Kvande, “Fathers on Leave Alone in Norway: Changes and Continuities,” in *Comparative Perspectives on Work–Life Balance and Gender Equality: Fathers on Leave Alone*, ed. O’Brien, M., Wall, K. (London: Springer, 2017): 29-44.

<sup>3</sup> K. Wilson and M. Prior, “Father Involvement: The Importance of Paternal Solo Care,” *Early Child Development and Care* 180, no. 10 (September 2009): 1391-1405.

father and child improve, the relationship between father and mother benefits too.<sup>4</sup> According to McBride and Mills, the stability as well as the quality of the parental relationship is positively impacted by more parental involvement from the father;<sup>5</sup> mothers who take on a major share of routine housework, such as grocery shopping, laundry, etc., are more likely to experience dissatisfaction and depression.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is important for the father to not only involve himself in qualitative childcare, but also in routine housework. The third party to benefit from an egalitarian parenting model is the child. A co-parenting dynamic has proven to provide many benefits for children in later life. Álfgeir Logi Kristjánsson and Inga Dóra Sigfúsdóttir concluded that children who grow up in a household where both father and mother are present achieve more in terms of an academic career. They are set to do better in university than children who grew up with an absent father.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, children with more involved fathers show increased self-esteem, self-confidence and more developed problem-solving skills.<sup>8</sup>

However, social attitudes toward mother- and fatherhood are restricting parents to traditional notions of motherhood and fatherhood, keeping them from shifting into this model of egalitarian parenting. According to Risman, social gender structures are the main reason men are not as involved with their children and the household. Cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity pressure the father to adhere to traditional notions.<sup>9</sup> For example, on the work floor, fathers, far more often than mothers, reported meeting negative attitudes from employers and colleagues towards their possible use of paternal leave.<sup>10</sup> Sundström and Duvander state that sharing parental duties is a bargaining and adjustment process,<sup>11</sup> consisting of the adjustment the mother has to endure in regards to the father's new role as parent, and the bargaining process the father has to undergo at work, where he has to find a

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<sup>4</sup> Helen Norman, Mark Elliot, and Colette Fargan, "Does Father's Involvement in Childcare and Housework Affect Couples' Relationship Stability?\*" *Social Science Quarterly* 99 (September 2018): 1603.

<sup>5</sup> Brent McBride and Gail Mills, "A Comparison of Mother and Father Involvement with Their Preschool Age Children," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 8 (1993): 457-77.

<sup>6</sup> Norman et al., "Does Father's," 1600.

<sup>7</sup> Álfgeir Logi Kristjánsson and Inga Dóra Sigfúsdóttir, "The Role of Parental Support, Parental Monitoring, and Time Spent With Parents in Adolescent Academic Achievement in Iceland: A Structural Model of Gender Differences," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 53, no. 5 (October 2009).

<sup>8</sup> F.M. Deutsch, J.B. Lussier, and L.J. Servis, "Husbands at home: predictors of paternal participation in childcare and housework," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 65 (1993): 1154-1166.

<sup>9</sup> Marianne Sundström, and Ann-Zofie E. Duvander, "Gender Division of Childcare among New Parents in Sweden," *European Sociological Review* 18, no. 4 (December 2002): 434.

<sup>10</sup> Sundström & Duvander, "Gender Division," 437.

<sup>11</sup> Sundström & Duvander, "Gender Division," 443.

balance between the amount of parental leave he takes and the possibly negative response from his employer and colleagues.

For egalitarian parenting to stand a chance in contemporary society and in order to stimulate fathers to get acquainted with the egalitarian parenting model, social attitudes towards gender roles must be reconsidered and deconstructed.

## Research question

As one of Swedish biggest and most well-known brands, IKEA manages to keep coming up with refreshing and spot-on campaigns. One of their latest successes is titled *Where Life Happens*. This 2018 campaign, produced by Åkestam Holst for IKEA Sweden<sup>12</sup>, features a number of commercials that employ product placement in the most unsuspected ways, while simultaneously engaging in social matters. Through a series of short video advertisements, the campaign addresses taboos and difficult topics such as children of divorce and struggles with puberty, that are very much existent within Swedish families, but hardly ever portrayed rawly in popular media.

By not focusing on how perfect families should be, but on how they should be the best they can be in that moment, the *Where Life Happens* campaign manages to create space for imperfection and realness in regard to parenting in Swedish society. The portrayal of fatherhood in these advertisements offers us a perspective on modern parenting that Sweden has managed to realize through policy and social acceptance.

This research will assess a small part of the discourse around the fluidity of gender roles in shared parenting. I will dive into the depictions of fathers and fatherhood in Sweden that can be found in advertising, to find out to what degree this representation has been influenced or inspired by the innovative transformation of parental role division in Sweden. I will use IKEA Sweden's previously mentioned *Where Life Happens* campaign to do so. My research question is as follows: 'how is the emancipation of parental role division in Sweden evident in the representation of fatherhood embedded in IKEA Sweden's *Where Life Happens* campaign?'

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<sup>12</sup> IKEA Sweden. "Where Life Happens." *Advertisement*, Åkestam Holst. 2018.

### *Sub-questions*

Three of the Where Life Happens advertisements stood out for their depiction of fathers and the relationship to their children, namely Every Other Week, Idol and A Good Listener. Further details on the plot of these videos can be found in the appendix. Putting the father in primary caretaking positions, the Where Life Happens campaign addresses situations in which parenting tasks are not strictly reserved for the male or female parent. In light of socially situating these advertisements, I would like to acknowledge that all three of these videos feature white, straight, middle-class families. I am aware that the results of this analysis do not necessarily apply to families that do not fall under this category.

In order to investigate the representation of fatherhood in Swedish advertisement, I will use three sub-questions, the first being ‘what are the prevailing contemporary ideas of fatherhood and masculinity in Sweden that urged the development of the currently well-developed state of the Swedish parental leave policy?’ This first sub-question will attend to the contextualization of Sweden’s prevailing notions of contemporary fatherhood, addressing the current Swedish parental leave policy and giving an insight into how ideas of masculinities and fatherhood have developed in Sweden over the years.

Secondly, I will formulate an answer to the question ‘how are traditional gender roles reinforced by the media’s use of stereotypes?’ This requires a detailed theoretical framework dedicated to the concept of gender as a social construct and media’s role in representation through stereotypes. In addition to these topics, I will also dive into notions of fatherhood and masculinity, both traditional and contemporary.

The third and final sub-question will address which parental roles and tasks the fathers in the advertisements are assigned, building on the theoretical framework. What do these fatherly duties represent in terms of gender performativity? This sub-question will be used as a starting point to analyzing all three advertisements, for each of these three scenarios depict a different relationship between the father and the child. Therefore, the set of tasks and expectations set for the fathers varies too. In *A Good Listener*, I will assess the father in a single parent-role, in *Every Other Week*, in a co-parenting role, and in *Idolen*, in a fatherly role independent from another parent.



## Contextualizing fatherhood in Sweden

According to Lucas Forsberg, the dominant ideal, or the ‘norm’, of contemporary fatherhood in Sweden, is that of the active, engaged father. A fatherhood where men invest in the relationship with their children, and in which they take responsibility for childcare as well as household work; a child-centered and involved fatherhood, with a strive towards a gender-equal balance.<sup>13</sup> Swedish fathers attempt to adhere to this norm, both due to the social desire to belong and due to the fact that adhering to this norm helps them understand themselves as moral beings, as they have attached themselves to the norm to such an extent that their existence depends on it. As a result, this norm has gained hegemonic status in all social groups in Sweden.<sup>14</sup>

The Swedish parental leave policy can be held responsible for pushing Sweden to adjust its societal norm to this extent. Sweden’s parental leave policy not only provides the mother with paid maternity leave, but also the father with paid paternity leave. Employers are willing to participate in this policy, because all parental benefits are paid out of general taxes.<sup>15</sup> Parents get 480 days of parental leave per child, which is approximately 16 months, and they get bonus days for twins. Of these 480 days, 90 are reserved *per parent* on a ‘use it or lose it’-basis. This means they are non-transferable, unless the situation concerns a single parent. This way, Sweden not only gives parents plenty of opportunity to divide the leave equally; they reward families that do and punish those who do not. During parental leave, parents get paid up to about 80-90% of their last salaries in the first 390 days and the flat rate of 60 SEK a day per parent thereafter, which equals about €6,- per day. Part of the leave can be saved and used up until the child’s eighth birthday. It is also possible to take the leave on a part-time basis. The parents also get 120 days of ‘child sick leave’ per child per year. Last but not least, parents get a ‘barnbidrag’, a monthly child allowance of about €60,- per child. According to Victor Harju, spokesman for Sweden’s Ministry for Social Affairs, the Swedish Government is currently working on an updated version of the policy to include homosexual partners as well.

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<sup>13</sup> Forsberg, “Negotiating,” 109-126.

<sup>14</sup> Forsberg, “Negotiating,” 110.

<sup>15</sup> Sundström & Duvander, “Gender Division,” 436.

The question ‘what are the prevailing contemporary ideas of fatherhood and masculinity in Sweden that urged the development of the currently well-developed state of the Swedish parental leave policy?’ in itself entails a paradoxical element. Did the contemporary notions of fatherhood and masculinity precede the Swedish parental leave policy, or was it the parental leave policy that motivated the Swedes to emancipate their ideals? The discourse surrounding contemporary fatherhood has been of great influence on Swedish men, according to Lucas Forsberg.<sup>16</sup> Talking about and representing it in the media has managed to assist Sweden in the process of opening up to ‘new’ fatherhood. In modern day Sweden, fathers do not have to be financially responsible for their family, because the Swedish parental leave policy allows them to earn enough money and spend time with their children simultaneously. This provides room for the fathers to invest in the relationship with their children by spending time with them, and for the fathers to experience the responsibilities of housework and childcare. Since it was the parental leave policy that urged Swedish fathers to deprioritize work and become more involved, it is safe to hold the parental leave policy at least partly responsible for the widespread adoption of contemporary fatherhood ideas in Swedish society.

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<sup>16</sup> Forsberg, “Negotiating,” 111.

## Theoretical framework

### *Gender as a social construct*

At the base of this research lies the feminist discourse surrounding the matter of gender versus sex; the first regarded as a social construct, the latter as a matter of biological fact. Many feminist theorists, such as Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, have attempted to popularize the idea that sex and gender should be considered separable, as according to them, ‘gender’ is the cultural meaning we attach to the ‘sex’ we are assigned at birth. In her book *Gender Troubles*, Butler offers the idea that gender roles are merely the social constructions we are persuaded to adhere to. Butler’s assumption is inspired by Simone de Beauvoir’s publication of *The Second Sex*, in which she distinguishes being female from being a woman.<sup>17</sup> From De Beauvoir’s perspective, you are born female, but you become a woman through society. After being assigned a sex at birth, we are instructed to perform the corresponding gender from a young age by authority figures, family and peers.<sup>18</sup> By adhering to these social structures and adopting them as the norm, we unawaresly pass the rules of gender along to our peers and our kin. Paraphrasing Butler, gender is thus a construction that conceals its own origin,<sup>19</sup> for participants in this structure do not realize they are also the creator of it.

Gender divisions continue to exist because they help us feel like we belong, but they originated as the result of a certain social power dynamic.<sup>20</sup> At the heart of this social power dynamic lies the process of ‘othering’. According to Richard Dyer, ‘othering’ alludes to any action by which a group classifies another group or individual as different and not belonging.<sup>21</sup> Lena Gunnarsson refers to these two groups as the Dominant and the Constitutive Other.<sup>22</sup> In considering the male gender the Dominant, the female gender automatically becomes the Other, or as De Beauvoir phrased it, the ‘second class citizen’<sup>23</sup>. Luce Irigaray<sup>24,25</sup>, Judith

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<sup>17</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (New York: Knopf, 1953).

<sup>18</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Troubles* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519-531.

<sup>20</sup> Rosalind Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman’s Choice: The State, Sexuality, and Reproductive Freedom* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990): pagenumber.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Dyer, “The Role of Stereotypes” in *Media Studies*, ed. Marris, Paul, Thornham, Sue. (Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Lena Gunnarsson, “The Dominant and its Constitutive Other: Feminist Theorizations of Love, Power and Gendered Selves,” *Journal of Critical Realism* 15, no. 1 (2016): 1-20.

<sup>23</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.

<sup>24</sup> Marianna Leite, “(M)Othering: Feminist Motherhood, Neoliberal Discourses and the Other,” *Studies in the Maternal* 5, no. 2 (2013): 4.

Butler, and Laura Mulvey recognize this schism too, identifying the term ‘woman’ in patriarchal culture as a mere signifier for the male other. Mulvey claims that due to their position of the Other, women are not makers of meaning, but simply bearers of meaning in support of men<sup>26</sup>, for the Dominant needs an Other in order to be considered dominant. Butler points out the schism to shine light on the inadequacy of the whole structure of representation based on this ‘us/them’-dynamic. Women are (falsely) considered the Other, because society frames them, using gender.<sup>27</sup>

### *Parents as exemplary figures*

Building on the notion of gender as a social construct, Elizabeth Hatfield paraphrases Erving Goffman<sup>28</sup> and Julia Wood<sup>29</sup> in addressing the prominent roles parents play in the social enforcement of these gender roles. According to Hatfield, “children observe their parents performing gender in different ways and experience different treatment and expectations than their opposite gender siblings. These experiences are incorporated into children’s frameworks of understanding about the world (Goffman, 1997). Part of learning includes being socialized into gendered parenting behaviors. Parents serve as children’s primary sex role models and demonstrate masculinity, femininity, fatherhood and motherhood (Wood, 2013.)”<sup>30</sup>

Since, in accordance to this theory of performativity, gender is something we adopt from our peers and authority figures, (young, impressionable) children first seek to copy their parents’ exemplary parental behavior. Unaware that the information they obtain from this relationship is gendered, children use this to create an understanding of what is expected of them socially, and they develop a gender in social accordance to the social construction surrounding their sex. Whether consciously or unconsciously, parental role division and the display of a gender-based division of household tasks can consequently push children into a confining social narrative based on their sex, concealed as their ‘gender’. To make sure the

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<sup>25</sup> Margaret Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Film: Psychology, Society, and Ideology* (1999): 834.

<sup>27</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Erving Goffman, “Frame Analysis of Gender,” in *The Goffman Reader*, ed. Goffman, E., Lemert, C., and Branaman, A. (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> Julia Wood, *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender and Culture* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Fish Hatfield, “Valuing Work, Valuing Family: A Comparison of ‘Balance’ Discourse Targeting Mothers and Fathers,” in *Gender in a Transitional Era: Changes and Challenges*, ed. Martinez, Amanda R., Miller, Lucy J. (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015).

next generation grows up fluid in their gender and their possible parenthood, parents should practice and showcase the right parental dynamics.

### *Parental dynamics*

In an attempt to study the interrelation between parental dynamics and the (re)production of cultural norms surrounding gender, Lucas Forsberg distinguishes three different household strategies for modern dual-earner families: delegating, alternating, and multi-tasking.<sup>31</sup>

Delegating is understood to be a parenting dynamic consisting of responsible parents and parties that the parents delegate tasks to when they are not able to fulfill the task themselves. These parties can refer to either persons, such as relatives, or institutions, such as daycare centers and pre-schools. Although this strategy strongly assists parents in their busy lives, the main downside of it is the lack of room for quality time. By outsourcing mundane or routine elements of their child's care, parents might be considered not 'involved' enough.

Alternating, also known as the 'every-other-time principle'<sup>32</sup>, refers to a gender equity-based approach to parental dynamics. Ideally, parents compromise equally, in order to find a fair balance between a career and childcare for them both. However, in practice, women still end up doing more household work and taking more responsibility for the child(ren) than fathers. Although *time* invested in this dynamic may be equal for both parents, the mother ends up with the overhand of the *responsibility*.

The third household strategy Forsberg addresses is multitasking; parents engaging simultaneously in household practices, childcare and quality time, for example by cooking together with the children. Although this strategy proves to be time-efficient, it also decreases the parents' experience of involvement with their children.<sup>33</sup>

However popular these household strategies seem to be in discourse, they are somehow not as popular in practice. While in discourse the norm surrounding parenting is that of dual-earner/dual-carer, practically, it is more often a manager-helper relationship.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Lucas Forsberg, "Managing Time and Childcare in Dual-Earner Families: Unforeseen Consequences of Household Strategies," *Acta Sociologica* 52, no. 2 (2009): 163.

<sup>32</sup> Forsberg, "Managing."

<sup>33</sup> Forsberg, "Managing," 169.

<sup>34</sup> Forsberg, "Negotiating," 115.

This manager-helper dynamic holds the mother as the responsible manager of childcare, housework, and a job, and meanwhile the father as mere helper within the family.

A solution to this unequal but frequently implemented family dynamic, is the enforcement of paternal leave. Erin Rehel's research on paternity leave has shown that fathers who take paternity leave, which (temporarily) sets them as the primary caregiver, show potential corresponding to an equal parenting balance.<sup>35</sup> Fathers who take on domestic responsibility facilitate a 'co-parenting' dynamic, because both father and mother have shared similar social experiences. Paternal leave forces fathers into a position of responsibility, and lowers the threshold to the position of co-manager.

Not only do fathers who take on the role of prominent caregiver develop a sense of responsibility suitable for a co-parenting dynamic, they also prove to be *better* at household management. Barclay and Lupton claim men who settled in a responsible domestic role in collaboration with their partner before they became fathers to be more 'advanced' at household management once children entered the equation. These fathers were also less likely to regard domestic labor work as gendered, which led to less resentment between partners with regard to the division of domestic responsibilities.<sup>36</sup>

However, while contemporary fathers believe household tasks should nowadays be divided equally between partners, practice shows it is more a division based on equity. Contemporary fathers still make a distinction between *feminine* and *masculine* tasks.<sup>37</sup> Considered *feminine* domestic tasks, are cleaning, tidying up, ironing, cooking, grocery shopping, childcare, laundry, etc. Considered *masculine* domestics tasks are in-home improvements, such as (non-recreational) painting or making repairs and keeping up the garden, for example by mowing the lawn. The explanation for this unbalanced division in quantity lies in the fact that the majority of the traditional father's family-related duties, almost all related to financial responsibility, were located outside the domestic sphere.

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<sup>35</sup> Erin M. Rehel, "When Dad Stays Home Too: Paternity Leave, Gender and Parenting," *Gender & Society* 28, no. 1 (February 2014): 110-132.

<sup>36</sup> L. Barclay and D. Lupton, *Constructing Fatherhood: Discourses and Experiences* (London: SAGE, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Williams, "What is Fatherhood? Searching for the Reflexive Father," *Sociology* 42, no. 3 (June 2008): 497.

### *Housework, childcare, and quality time*

Within household management, there is a distinction to be made between household work, childcare and quality time. According to Forsberg, housework refers to chores in and around the home, childcare refers to the care of the child's physical and mental well-being, and quality time can refer to many leisure activities, as long as they entail a parent and child spending time together without an ulterior motive.<sup>38</sup>

In 'Negotiating involved fatherhood: Household work, childcare and spending time with children' Forsberg identifies these three types of tasks parents perform on a daily basis while raising children in several Swedish middle-class families, and categorizes them in what he calls traditionally masculine or traditionally feminine tasks. Forsberg noticed that while women commonly take on the routine tasks, such as laundry and cooking, tasks that concern technology or renovation, such as taking care of the car, or fixing a bicycle, are often considered more masculine.<sup>39</sup> Norman et al. add to this that because of the sense of responsibility mothers are saddled with, they tend to spend a lot of their free time on non-flexible tasks. Norman et al. mention these mothers to be in charge of a 'Sisyphean job'; "a job that needs to be done over and over again."<sup>40</sup> And while mothers take routine housework and childcare for their account, men tend to invest their free time in the flexible element of childcare and housework. They play and talk with their children, and take on more nonroutine household tasks, such as gardening.<sup>41</sup> These masculine tasks, unlike the feminine tasks, may have a long-term influence on the child's development.

### *Theory of representation*

As concluded before, gender is a social construct society continuously perpetuates. We outline roles for children to grow into and we correct our peers when they stray from the paths of the strict gender roles society has assigned to men and women. In addition to social expectancies that pressure us into adhering to these traditional gender roles, media has a hand in this pressure too. Which social groups, and in which way they are represented in the media

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<sup>38</sup> Forsberg, "Negotiating," 114.

<sup>39</sup> Forsberg, "Negotiating," 115.

<sup>40</sup> Sundström & Duvander, "Gender Division," 434.

<sup>41</sup> Norman et al., "Does Father's," 1602.

carries meaning;<sup>42</sup> thus the way media reinforces gender roles is through the representation of gender fluidity, or the lack thereof. The dominant presence of middle-aged, career oriented men in media, for example, carries meaning, just as the absence of middle-aged, career oriented women does.

In representing genders, media often relies on stereotypes. A ‘stereotype’ —term coined by Walter Lippmann<sup>43</sup>— refers to a simplified image of a particular type of person or social group. This image is based on an apparent consensus amongst a dominant social group. While Lippmann argued that stereotypes are not inherently negative or harmful, but simply a method for societies to make sense of the ‘buzzing’ world, Richard Dyer addresses the fact that stereotyping, however well-intended, is a form of othering.<sup>44</sup>

When othering concerns gender in particular, it is referred to as patriarchal othering. In media, patriarchal othering by means of stereotyping is most visible in the reinforcement of the idea that there are certain preserves, considered respectively male or female.<sup>45</sup> By representing women solely in ‘feminine’ contexts like in the beauty salon or the supermarket, and men only in ‘masculine’ settings, such as the office or a pub, creative media fortifies the socially dominant stereotypes of genders. Within these gendered contexts, stereotypical men and women tend to adhere to stereotypically masculine or feminine activities and behaviour. These stereotypes occur regularly in advertisement, film, television, and music videos.

### *Common male stereotypes*

Julia Wood agrees that media portrays men and women in stereotypical ways that sustain the social structures surrounding gender.<sup>46</sup> In “Gendered Media”, she states “men are presented as hard, tough, independent, sexually aggressive, unafraid, violent, totally in control of all emotions, and -above all- *in no way feminine*,” which is in line with Jean Twenge’s finding that while women “increasingly endorsed masculine traits over time, men consistently disavowed feminine traits.”<sup>47</sup> While media gradually encourage and convince women to adopt masculine traits in an attempt at empowerment, men who welcome feminine traits are

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<sup>42</sup> Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: SAGE, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan, 1956).

<sup>44</sup> Dyer, “The Role.”

<sup>45</sup> Dyer, “The Role.”

<sup>46</sup> Wood, *Gendered Lives*.

<sup>47</sup> Jean Marie Twenge, “Changes in Masculine and Feminine Traits Over Time: A Meta-analysis,” *Sex Roles* 36 (March 1997): 305-25.



socially penalized. The ground of this schism could lie in the perspective society has on gender hierarchy. With masculinity regarded as superior to femininity, men who embrace feminine traits are considered to be devaluing themselves. Social structures are strongly specific about what it means to be ‘a man’, and they make notions of masculinity particularly resistant to change.<sup>48</sup>

Stereotypes are regularly used tools in the world of advertisements. An example of an advertisement that features strongly gendered stereotypes, is the commercial ‘Date’, by car brand Mercedes-Benz, that aired in 2016<sup>49</sup>. In this short video advertisement, we see a man and a woman, separately getting ready for a date. While the woman focuses on beautifying herself by taking a shower, using face cream, and putting on lipstick and a red dress, the man is shown busy washing his car, which also happens to be red. The movements the woman makes are mimicked in the ways the man cleans and polishes his car. When the man goes to meet the woman for the date, she disapprovingly looks at his rugged outfit, consisting of a simple shirt, jeans and dirty shoes. However, when he shows her his car, all is good again between them. This indicates the woman has a high sensitivity for material possessions, shallowing her character. It also confirms the woman in a passive role, for her beauty is only there to be looked at by the man, who does in his turn not have to worry about the way he looks. The man is dominant in this situation, and because of his connection to his car and his ‘rough’ clothing, he is in no way feminine. By creating and promoting an advertisement that represents stereotypes to the extent ‘Date’ does, Mercedes-Benz contributes to the media’s enforcement of traditional gender roles.

### *Fatherhood through the years*

The pre-current traditional models of fatherhood in connection to specific time periods or *epochs*, showcased in Williams’ article ‘What is Fatherhood?’<sup>50</sup> and based on Lamb’s<sup>51</sup> and Pleck’s<sup>52</sup> ideas are that of the ‘distant breadwinner’, the ‘sex-role model’ and the new,

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<sup>48</sup> S. Banchevsky & B. Park, “The ‘New Father’: Dynamic Stereotypes of Fathers,” *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 17, no. 1 (January 2015): 2.

<sup>49</sup> Mercedes-Benz, “Date,” Genuine Car Care Products, *When It Really Matters* (April 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Williams, “What is Fatherhood?”

<sup>51</sup> M.E. Lamb, “Introduction: The Emergent American Father,” in *The Father Role: A Cross-cultural Perspective*, ed. M.E. Lamb. (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1987), 1-26.

<sup>52</sup> J.H. Pleck, “American Fathering in a Historical Perspective,” in *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*, ed. Kimmel, M.S. (Newbury Park, California: SAGE, 1987), 83-97.

‘nurturing father’. The distant breadwinner is understood to be the career oriented, hard-handed father who is financially responsible for his family. The breadwinner is considered the common understanding of the ‘traditional father’, as he is tough, distant and absent in the child’s personal life. The ‘sex-role model’ refers to the father whose primary function was considered showing young men how to function as a male in society and family life. The new, ‘nurturing father’ is judged on their presence, as well as their involvement with their children, as on their performance of the tasks fathers were concerned with in previous epochs.<sup>53</sup>

Assigning the different notions of fatherhood to time periods does not imply these notions do not exceed their categories. On the contrary, elements of these ‘old-fashioned’ notions are evident throughout all categories. For example, the idea of the father as the main breadwinner of the family is still an ideal many modern fathers feel aligned to.<sup>54</sup> Elements of these older notions of fatherhood are sorted through by new families and either approved or condemned to be included in this new ideal of fatherhood that is evolving from contemporary society. The ‘new’ father is not as much a totally new concept as it is an improved version of older notions, with shifted priorities and responsibilities. Substantially responsible for this shift are modern mothers. With modern mothers entering the workforce in overwhelming numbers, and rejecting the traditional notion of stay-at-home motherhood, fathers are forced to adjust their parenting style as well. Partners need to find new ways to arrange domestic responsibilities, now that financial responsibilities have shifted. Re-prioritizing life in a contemporary partnership requires a rethinking of tradition, and therefore contributes to rethinking the traditional notions of parenthood.

The contemporary father is considered to be a reflexive father; one who continuously learns from previous generations, while introspectively analyzing his functioning as an involved father in relation to his family.<sup>55</sup> This paternal reflexivity can be credited with masculinity opening up into a multiplicity of masculinities. Contemporary fathers do not have to submit to a certain, strictly outlined masculinity, but instead have the opportunity to select aspects from different masculinities that they feel aligned to, in order to create their own sense of masculinity. The traditional masculinity that encouraged men to be tough,

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<sup>53</sup> Williams, “What is Fatherhood?,” 489.

<sup>54</sup> Williams, “What is Fatherhood?”

<sup>55</sup> Williams, “What is Fatherhood?”

non-emotional and most importantly, dominant is no longer the default masculinity. This traditional notion of masculinity came with burdens, such as “anxieties about sexual performance, estrangement from emotions, and poor relations with fathers.”<sup>56</sup> As contemporary men no longer have to comply with the traditional notion of non-emotional and inexpressive masculinity, the assortment of masculinities currently existing has helped men overcome this stigma of emotional expression. This has assisted fathers in better articulating their love and support for their children.<sup>57</sup>

Reflexivity in fatherhood has paved the way for a contemporary fatherhood that is child-centred and predominantly about involvement. The new father is socially expected to no longer prioritize his career over his child, and to instead invest his time and effort into maintaining the physical and mental well-being of his child.<sup>58</sup> He does this by taking explicit ‘quality time’; time devoted to building or maintaining a bond between father and child, without an ulterior motive in regards to childcare or housework.<sup>59</sup> In addition to spending quality time with his child, the ‘new’ father also invests more time in housework and childcare by taking on a more active role in household dynamics. The nurture of the child is no longer solely reliant on mothers,<sup>60</sup> since parenthood is slowly evolving into dynamics that are more egalitarian and based on codependence, where the father and mother take on equal responsibilities of housework and childcare. I say ‘slowly evolving’ here, because while self-proclaimed ‘new’ fathers claim they are more open to negotiation over household tasks than their fathers were<sup>61</sup> and fathers’ involvement in the household has certainly increased, fathers still show to take on less than 50% of household work and childcare<sup>62</sup> and the tasks they do take on are more ‘fun’, and rewarding in the long run than the tasks mothers account for.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Sean Nixon, “Exhibiting Masculinity,” ed. Evans, J., Hall, S., and Nixon, S. (London: SAGE, 2013), 294.

<sup>57</sup> Williams, “What is Fatherhood?,” 498.

<sup>58</sup> Williams, “What is Fatherhood?”

<sup>59</sup> Forsberg, “Negotiating,” 111.

<sup>60</sup> Nancy Dowd, *Redefining Fatherhood* (New York: NYU Press, 2000): 213.

<sup>61</sup> Williams, “What is Fatherhood?,” 490.

<sup>62</sup> Forsberg, “Negotiating,” 110.

<sup>63</sup> Norman et al., “Does Father’s,” 1602.

## Methodological framework

In order to compare notions of fatherhood in Swedish advertising to those present in theories of representation and gender performativity, I will perform a discourse analysis on three advertisements of IKEA's *Where Life Happens* campaign, namely *Every Other Week*, *Idol* and *A Good Listener*. I will approach this discourse analysis realistically, which means I will perform the analysis assuming the content of the videos mirror reality. In this discourse analysis, I will examine how the three advertisements mentioned above illustrate a certain truth in regards to common Swedish conceptions surrounding contemporary fatherhood. By using a predetermined set of codes, I will attempt to identify moments in the advertisement in which the fathers break with 'traditional fatherhood' and signify belonging to a 'new fatherhood'.

These 'codes' are a set of concepts and notions I will look for specifically in the videos, and they will be based on the theoretical framework I elaborated on previously. Having concepts as points of reference will assist me in making observations that are directly relevant to my research. As the main concepts of this research are representation of gender roles, signs of gender performativity, and notions of fatherhood, I will use these as starting points for the analysis. It is important to emphasize that, within the categories of codes, there is a certain hierarchy. Taking note of *cinematography* and *word choice* in the videos will assist me in identifying the *emotions* and *affections* expressed by the characters, which in turn will aid me in recognizing the *representation of stereotypes* in the videos. These stereotypes will serve as signifiers of a compliance of the fathers in the videos to 'traditional fatherhood'.

In the analysis, I will be entertaining a moral-philosophical approach. A moral-philosophical approach entails the idea that objects of analysis should be interpreted as products of society that reflect a certain moral lesson<sup>64</sup>. In the case of this research, this means assuming the *Where Life Happens* campaign is a moral lesson from IKEA Sweden to their viewers to open up to the possibility of a 'new' fatherhood.

During the discourse analysis, I will keep the sub-question 'how are fathers and their domestic responsibilities represented in the videos in terms of gender performativity?' in mind in order to circle back to the theoretical framework.

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<sup>64</sup> Christopher P. Jacobs, *Film Theory and Approaches to Criticism, or, What Did that Movie Mean?* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

## *Codes by category*

### *Representation of stereotypes*

This category functions to pinpoint which stereotypes are used to portray the fathers in the advertisements. In this discourse analysis, the ‘traditional father’ will refer to the financially responsible, male breadwinner of the family, who is emotionally tough, absent and not particularly concerned with his child’s personal life. The ‘new’ father refers to a nurturer, who is present, takes on domestic responsibilities and is involved with his child’s well-being.

A traditional division of domestic chores will also be taking into account while exploring stereotypes in the videos. Feminine domestic tasks are: *cleaning, tidying up, ironing, cooking, grocery shopping, childcare, and laundry*. Masculine domestic tasks are: *technology related chores and in-home improvements, such as (non-recreational) painting, making repairs, and keeping up the garden*.

#### Feminine domestic tasks

Cleaning

Tidying up

Ironing

Cooking

Grocery shopping

Childcare

Laundry

#### Masculine domestic tasks

Non-recreational painting

Making repairs

Keeping up the garden

Technology related chores

### Representation of stereotypes/breaking with stereotypes

Traditional fatherhood

New fatherhood

### *Emotions and affection*

Since traditional masculinity entertained the idea that expression of emotions was not designated for men, and this was strongly intertwined with the understanding of the traditional father, taking note of emotions and affections displayed in the videos will aid in identifying signs that the fathers in these advertisements identify with new fatherhood more than traditional fatherhood.

### Display of emotion

(*negative*: sadness, anger, shock; *positive*: happiness, admiration, understanding)

Child showing positive emotion

Child showing negative emotion

Father showing positive emotion

Father showing negative emotion

### Display of affection

Physical affection

Verbal affection

### Display of trust

### *Word choice*

The choice of words can give a sense of the level of familiarity between two characters.

### Use of words

(taking into account these advertisements are in Swedish, with English subtitles)

Far            (*father*)

Pap            (*dad*)

Pappa         (*daddy*)

### Dialogue between the child and the father

### *Cinematography*

Analyzing shots can expose vulnerability and closeness (close-ups) or composure and disconnection (full and long shots).

### Camera distance (from the father)

Close-up

Full shot

Long shot

## ***Where Life Happens: a discourse analysis***

### ‘Every Other Week’

Every Other Week tells the story of a child who is the son of two divorced parents. When the parents divorced, the mother stayed in their house in the suburbs and the father moved to an apartment in the city. Therefore, the boy’s room in his mother’s house is the one the boy is familiar with. His father comes to pick him up to show him his new room at his father’s new place. The boy seems very nervous while they are underway, but when he opens the door to his new room, he discovers it’s identical to his old room. All he has to do is put down the markers he brought from his other home and the new room is complete. This familiarity helps the boy feel relieved and at ease at this new place that has yet to become his new home.

The main theme in Every Other week is familiar environments. By showing nervousness, the boy emphasizes the scariness of the transition between old, well-known, and safe environments to new, unknown places. Showcasing an obvious parallel between the old room (1.1) and the new room (1.2) and between the old house and the new apartment reinforces this theme throughout the video.

One *close-up* in Every Other Week features the moment father and son are in the car (2.2). They are heading away from the familiar house, towards the father’s new place in the city. While the boy looks nervous, rubbing his hands together as a tic, the father looks a little smug. This shot is notable for two reasons. Firstly, it is notable because it shifts the video from a single into a plural narrative. The viewer does not only get to experience the boy’s emotions, but also gets an insight into the father’s train of thought. The viewer realizes this smug look must mean the father has a solution to his son’s worries in mind. Secondly, the *close-up* reveals a moment of connection between son and father. While the father registers his son’s nervousness, he is confident he knows his son well enough to know how to make him feel at ease again later on. This suggests the father is concerned with the emotional experience of the boy, which is an aspect belonging to contemporary fatherhood more than to traditional fatherhood, for the traditional father was not particularly emotionally connected to his child.

The connection between son and father is further brought into picture through small gestures, such as a pat on the head and cooperatively pushing an elevator button. These



gestures reveal a bond between son and father, based on a sense of trust and familiarity. A *long shot* of father and son together (2.1) later in the video re-establishes this bond, by suggesting son and father are a united front. The boy might be in an all new environment, but he still has the connection with his father he can rely on to help him feel safe.

The title *Every Other Week* suggests the father and son to spend time together every other week. Because of their divorce, the parents entertain a parental dynamic based on alternating. Due to this dynamic, and the parents' separate living situation, the father in *Every Other Week* can be assumed to be partially responsible for his child, as well financially as domestically. In the periods of time father and son live together, the father is fully responsible for his son. The father has to take on *all* domestic responsibilities, such as cooking, laundry, in-home improvements and spending quality time. Much of the housework the father is thus responsible for, is traditionally considered a feminine responsibility. This actively taking responsibility of the child's nurture suggests the father in *Every Other Week* does not flawlessly comply with the idea of traditional fatherhood. In taking on (partial) financial responsibility and being the breadwinner to his child, the father does adhere to this traditional standard of fathering and masculinity. However, the father breaks with tradition in his level of overall responsibility for the child. Another way the father breaks with traditional fatherhood is by providing his child with care on a personal level. By recreating his son's room perfectly, the father shows he is aware of and involved in his son's interests and emotional well-being. He also dares to address the emotions of his son and his own, instead of being tough, distant and emotionally constipated.



1.1



1.2



2.1



2.2

## ‘Idolen’

The father in *Idolen* lives together with his son, multi-tasking parenting and working. He spends most of his time occupied by his job and while it is clear there is a loving connection that goes both ways, the child is not the priority to the father. The father’s main priority is work. Although father and son undertake fun activities together, such as going fishing, spending time in the garden, and simply spending (seemingly) meaningless time together at the dinner table, the father constantly lets himself get pulled away by phone calls from work. Everytime the son and father seem to be connecting, there is a *full shot*, followed by either a *medium shot* or a *close-up*, portraying the gaining of closeness. But then the father’s phone rings and the video cuts to a *full shot* again, disrupting the illusion of gaining closeness and instead, suggesting distance.

In the second part of the video, the father re-organized his priorities when, through an indirect insight from his son, the father realizes prioritizing work over his connection to his son has led the son to see the father as non-detachable from his phone. This moment of this realization is shot in a *close-up*, in order to emphasize the father’s experience of shock (3.1). In this particular moment, the father shows a lot of emotion, demonstrating he is not as emotionally constipated as traditional fathers were expected to be. After, the realization, the father immediately tries to right the situation by putting his phone down somewhere out of reach and asking his son if he can join him in playing his video game. The son’s response is pure joy, for all he wants is to spend some quality time with his father. Two more *close-ups* accompany this shift in the father’s priorities; one where he puts his phone away (3.2) and one where the father pats his son on the head (3.3).

Important themes in *Idolen* are the setting of priorities, and quality time. The video practically consists of two phases: the first, in which the father’s priorities lie with his job, and the second, in which the father prioritizes his child. The second theme of quality time intertwines with the setting of these priorities, for it rightfully implies that time is not equal to quality time if priorities are not in the right place. In phase one, the father and son spend a fair amount of time together. However, the father is constantly occupied by work during. In this phase of the video, the father leans more towards the traditional fatherhood, which is, although the father provides for his child, not child-centered. In phase two, the father physically puts his phone away in order to devote his time to not only being with, but

genuinely connecting to his son. Only then does the time they spend together count towards quality time, as the father is prioritizing his son over work and really investing in his son's mental well-being. Turning time into quality time shows the father has evolved into a father that is concerned with involvement.

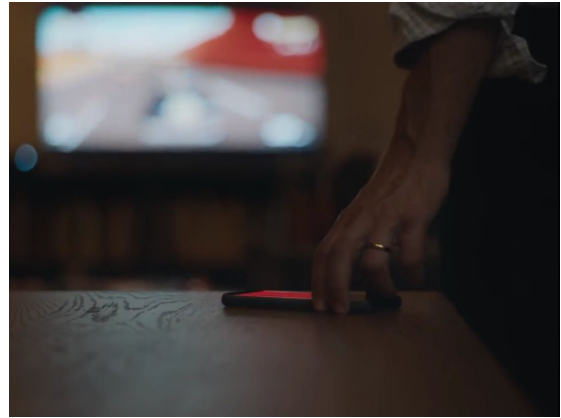
This split between phase one, in which the father adheres to a lot of traditional fatherly qualities, and phase two, in which the father recenters his fatherhood on the child, is accompanied by a moment of reflexivity. Reflexivity is a trait rightfully credited to contemporary fatherhood.

Idolen features a father wearing a wedding ring, and a female figure features in the son's drawings, but the viewer does not get to see an actual mother. Therefore, it is uncertain if the domestic chores performed in Idolen are executed by the father or by someone else. If we assume the father to be a single parent, this would mean he is solely responsible for the child, as well financially as domestically. While in phase one, the father is shown to be taking care of shelter, laundry and luxury items (drawing utensils, video games), he does not show particular interest in bonding with his son. The housework the father is shown to perform consists of as well feminine (laundry) as masculine chores (providing luxury items). Since it is possible the father is a single parent, it is expected of the father to take on these chores.

In the second phase of the video, the father does show interest in his son, in the form of quality time. By putting off work and spending quality time together, the father proves he wants to get involved with his son and reach a deeper level of connection. In phase two, the father is no longer simply being a parent, he is actively parenting. In line with the moral-philosophical approach, this video in particular can be interpreted as a direct moral lesson, from IKEA Sweden to its customers. By showing the pitfalls of being a busy father and basing parenting style on the ability to multitask, they guide the viewer in shaping their understanding of a contemporary, involved fatherhood.



3.1



3.2



3.3

## ‘A Good Listener’

A Good Listener is about the connection between a father and his teenage daughter. The daughter is experiencing a difficult time and is constantly angry, annoyed, or sad. Everytime she comes home, she locks herself away in a room right away, before her father even has a chance to ask her about her day. However, the father does not give up, and he patiently sits outside her door every time, listening to her talk about her struggles. There is a significant *close-up* (4.1) when the daughter comes home and her father is waiting for her on the stairs, but instead of confronting him, she runs into the closet and the *close-up* cuts into a *full shot* (4.2) again, illustrating a failed attempt to connect from the father’s side. Many *full shots* of both father and daughter are used to show them as two disconnected individuals, until there is another *close-up* of the father (4.3) when the daughter comes home for the third time, locks herself in the bathroom, and begins talking. This time the father talks back and she realizes he has always been there, and time has come to open up to him. This moment is captured in a *close-up* of the father. Their situation evolves from one where she yells at him to go away, into a situation where she vents to him, but he does not respond, into a situation where she talks, and he finally responds by telling her it will all be okay. The transition from monologue into dialogue symbolizes a connection in repair.

In the beginning of the video the father and daughter are not particularly close; the girl did not feel connected enough to her father to share her struggles with him. This seems similar to the classic father-daughter relationship frequently represented in film and television. This classic relationship is based on a schism between the child who does not feel understood and the father who is disinterested in the (futile) struggles of his teenage daughter, and is a classic trait to fatherhood as traditionally represented in many television shows such as *Married... With Children* and *That’s 70s Show*, or films like *What Women Want*.<sup>65</sup> However, the fact that in ‘A Good Listener’ the father does show interest in the daughter’s everyday troubles, and the occurrence of a reconnection between father and daughter in the end of the video indicate differently. The father most certainly is invested in his daughter’s life and emotional well-being. He hereby breaks with a traditional stereotype of fatherhood

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<sup>65</sup> Erica Scharrer, “From Wise to Foolish: The Portrayal of the Sitcom Father, 1950s-1990s,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 45, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 26.

inherent to films and television shows as mentioned above, for he is not a distant, uncommunicative father.

The father in *A Good Listener* invests a fair amount of time in listening to his daughter venting to him about the daily struggles of a teenage daughter, which indicates the father has his daughter's social and mental well-being as a priority. This involvement proves the father in *A Good Listener* to be a contemporary father. His parenting style is child-centered, he invests time in the connection he has to his daughter, he is not emotionally constipated, and since he is a single parent, he is highly domestically responsible. However, the fact that the only domestic task we see the father perform in *A Good Listener* is non-recreational painting, which is considered a masculine domestic task, indicates that the representation of the father in the video is not yet completely emancipated.



4.1



4.2



4.3

## Conclusion

Contemporary parenthood is not just about spending time with the child, allowing the mother a more prominent role as financial contributor, or helping in the household. It is about taking a fair share of the responsibility for all three. The 'new' father is devoted to working towards a gender egalitarian parenting dynamic, in which mother and father take equal responsibility for housework and childcare, all while balancing careers and child involvement. Contemporary fatherhood is about prioritizing quality time with your children and creating space for an *involved* fatherhood. This involvement is expressed in forms of quality time, nurture, reflexivity and child-centeredness. The analysis of the three videos confirm that the most notable and significant element of contemporary fatherhood is *involvement*, whether this comes in the form of emotional connection, prioritizing your child over work, or investing time in your child's mental well being.

In *Every Other Week*, the father proves he is involved in his son's life, by showing he knows how to make his son feel safe in new, scary environments. His ability to recreate the son's old room in his new apartment, along with the displays of physical affection between father and son, make of *Every Other Week* an excellent example of modern fatherhood.

In *Idolen*, the father experiences as well traditional as contemporary fatherhood. At first, the father is shown to possess traits of traditional fatherhood by prioritizing his job over spending quality time with his child. However, when he realizes this leaves no possibility for him to connect to his son, he re-organizes his priorities and decides to put his child's needs first. In this second phase, he shows signs of a transition into contemporary fatherhood.

In *A Good Listener*, the father invests a fair amount of time in listening to his daughter venting to him about the daily struggles of a teenage daughter. Making himself available to his daughter for daily conversation indicates the father has his daughter's social and mental well-being as a priority. His parenting style is very child-centered.

In all three advertisements, the fathers bear a remarkably close connection to the typical notion of contemporary fatherhood. The fathers are involved in their children's life, take time to invest effort into nurturing them, and they make sure to reserve quality time for them to spend together. In regards to housework the fathers still have some development to



undergo, for they do not take on (many) typically *feminine* household chores in the videos. But even though the fathers in the campaign may not flawlessly suit the notion of contemporary fatherhood that literature suggests, the fathers in the campaign still bear a resemblance to the ‘new’ father big enough to be considered significant of a newly surfaced fatherhood.

The similarities between the reality of Swedish fathers and the fathers portrayed in this Swedish campaign suggests that these two exert influence on each other. In Sweden, it is common for fathers take time off work to provide nurture and care for their children. The Swedish parental leave policy encourages them to prioritize quality time with their children and to invest in their child’s mental well-being on a daily basis. The fathers represented in IKEA Sweden’s *Where Life Happens* campaign have shown to harness a significantly similar amount traits that belong to contemporary fatherhood. The emancipation of parental role division in Sweden is evident in the representation of fatherhood embedded in IKEA Sweden’s *Where Life Happens* campaign through the presence of *involvement* as an element essential to successful contemporary fatherhood.

#### *Positioning this research in the humanities*

In identifying traits that belong to a contemporary fatherhood, this research has laid bare the influence of media on society and vice versa, and has provided a theoretical and analytical framework that enables future research in regards to combined gender and media theory, and that. The media representation of social structures is a deep, yet broad topic that concerns a major share of research performed within the humanities.

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