



1-2014

Fatherhood in Brazil, Bangladesh, Russia, Japan, and Australia

David W. Shwalb
Southern Utah University

Barbara J. Shwalb
Southern Utah University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/orpc>

We thank Michael E. Lamb, Ziarat Hossain, Anna Cecilia Bastos, Jennifer Utrata, Jun Nakazawa, and Bruce Smyth, for their suggestions during the preparation of this chapter. Work on this article was made possible by the support of the Psychology Department of Southern Utah University. This chapter is dedicated to Connie Merz, Becky Berman, and Lori Ullery.

Recommended Citation

Shwalb, D. W., & Shwalb, B. J. (2014). Fatherhood in Brazil, Bangladesh, Russia, Japan, and Australia. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1125>

This *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* Article is brought to you for free and open access (provided uses are educational in nature) by IACCP and ScholarWorks@GVSU. Copyright © 2014 International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology. All Rights Reserved. ISBN 978-0-9845627-0-1

Fatherhood in Brazil, Bangladesh, Russia, Japan, and Australia

Abstract

This article illustrates that the roles of fathers are highly variable and context-dependent. Research data from five diverse societies (Brazil, Bangladesh, Russia, Japan, and Australia) show that fathers, fathering, and fatherhood differ within societies according to eight types of contextual influence. Examples are provided of each contextual factor: (1) geographical location (e.g., dispersion of fathers across huge land masses in Russia and Australia; impact of dense populations in Japan and Bangladesh); (2) long-term historical legacies (centuries of patriarchy in Brazil) and short-term historical events (fall of communism in Russia); (3) family characteristics (joint, extended families of Bangladesh; small Japanese families); (4) economic factors (high standards of living in Australia and Japan); (5) work-related conditions (long work hours in Australia; level of encouragement for paternal work leave); (6) societal norms and values (social expectations for Russian fathers to be disengaged and uninvolved); (7) ethnic groupings (homogeneity of Japanese; impact of Islam on Bengali fathers); and (8) patterns of immigration and emigration (emigration from Bangladesh; immigration to Brazil).

It is possible to identify general differences in fathers between the five societies, but fathering diversity within societies make it clear that over-generalizations about fathering anywhere are dangerous. Although the quantity and quality of fathering research is improving in all five of the societies, we still need to know more about how fathering behavior varies within and between societies, and the mechanisms (e.g., through socialization, economic contexts, etc.) by which cultures influence fathers and vice versa. Opportunities abound for future psychological research on fathers and families in cultural context.

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Introduction

Socialization and childrearing have been studied often by cross-cultural psychologists and developmental psychologists for well over half a century. As a result, excellent data are available about cultural influences on family life and child development (Georgas, Berry, Fons, van de Vijver, & Kagitçibasi, 2007; Harkness & Super, 2002; Kagitçibasi, 2007; Tudge, 2008; Whiting & Whiting, 1975). Within this literature, however, most international studies on socialization and parenting have focused on mother-child relations and paid much little attention to the father's role. This article presents information about fathers (called the "forgotten contributors to child development" by Lamb, 1975), with an emphasis on diversity within five societies: Brazil, Bangladesh, Russia, Japan, and Australia.



Barbara and David Shwalb

In *Fathers in Cultural Context (FICC)*, Shwalb, Shwalb, & Lamb, (2013), experts on fifteen societies or regions wrote about fathers (biological and 'social'), fathering (their behavior), and fatherhood (conceptualizations of their roles). *FICC* concluded with five general statements, specifically that (1) cultural and historical change and continuity are important influences on fathers; (2) the quality and quantity of fathering research, and enthusiasm for active fathering, vary between societies; (3) social policies and laws relevant to fathering are extensive in some societies but rare in others; (4) diversity of fathering is universal within societies; and (5) economic and employment conditions comprise an important influence on fathering. The conclusion about diversity underscored Tudge's (2008) observation that

"...researchers interested in cultural issues have paid too little attention to heterogeneity within societies...cross-societal research should always recognize the within-society heterogeneity that is a function of social class, race, ethnicity, and so on..." (p. 17).

Most of the society-wide or regional generalizations about fathers made by the chapter contributors in *FICC* were tentative and cautious, given the limited research data on fathering in most societies and also because the chapter writers knew that fathers are highly diverse within their societies. After reconsidering the issue of diversity, we wrote a postscript to *FICC* as a follow-up handbook chapter (Shwalb & Shwalb, in press) and categorized eight main sources of within-society variability among fathers:

1. Geography – spatial location of the father; features of the physical environment
2. History – long-term or short-term
3. Family characteristics – family structure and size; marital or residential status
4. Economic factors –at the family and societal level
5. Employment/work conditions – employment patterns, work hours, leave policies
6. Norms, values and beliefs – ideology, value system, role expectations
7. Ethnicity – language, culture, country of origin, religion
8. Immigration/emigration – rural-to-urban or international; generation since immigration.

This article provides evidence of variability in fathers, fathering, and fatherhood in a subset of five of the fifteen societies discussed in *FICC* (2013). There were three considerations in the selection of the five societies:

- (1) their original inclusion in *FICC* as based on geographical balance and existence of empirical research data;
- (2) exclusion of data on fathering in China, India, Central/East Africa, and the Caribbean, which we have recently highlighted elsewhere (see Shwalb & Shwalb, in press); and
- (3) substantial evidence of within-society fathering diversity.

The five portrayals of fathers are presented below in size order of national population: Brazil (201 million), Bangladesh (164MM), Russia (142MM), Japan (127MM), and Australia (22MM). Of these five, there is a deep and broad fathering literature only for the Japanese, although sufficient information about fathers was available from all five societies to compose chapters in *FICC*.

Throughout this article we use the term “society” (organized communities that may equate with a culture, nation, or both) to describe Brazil, Bangladesh, Russia, Japan, and Australia, rather than “nation” (a geo-political entity). “Society” also seemed the more appropriate focus here than “culture” (a pattern of beliefs and behavior common to a social group and transmitted between or within generations ‘non-biologically’ - Hewlett, 2000), because most of the research reported was not concerned with aspects of cultural construction or transmission. Fathers in the five societies selected for review here do not represent fathers worldwide, and diversity of men within each society makes it impossible to claim that we have represented all fathers within any of these societies.

This article aims to contribute to an understanding of fathering by providing evidence of diversity, and hopefully it will encourage other researchers to add to the knowledge base on fathering diversity, which has improved but still is neither broad nor deep for most societies. Biological anthropologist Sarah Hrdy (2009) concluded in *Mothers and Others* that

“...nurturing responses in human fathers are extremely facultative --- that is, situation-dependent and expressed only under certain conditions. This generalization holds true whether we consider provisioning or the observable intimacies between father and child.” (p. 161)

This paper illustrates that fathers are facultative and that variability is a hallmark of fatherhood; future research is required, however, to determine empirically whether fathering is more situation-dependent or variable than mothering.

Brazil

Fathering behavior in Brazil, a society covering half the land mass of South America, apparently depends on several contextual variables, most notably social class, region, and historical or demographic change. Bastos, Volkmer-Pontes, Brasileiro, and Serra (2013) analyzed fathering and fatherhood, and noted that social science research on Brazilian fathers was rare and that English-language publications on fathering were even rarer. Indeed, they described Brazilian fathers as “just beginning to talk about their right to fathering as a life experience” (p. 230). Although it was thus difficult to generalize about these men, Bastos and her colleagues were able to assert that a legacy of patriarchy, father absence, and social class divisions (with historical antecedents in slavery and colonialism) still has a strong impact on definitions of Brazilian manhood and fatherhood. Ana Cecilia Bastos (personal communication, January 29, 2013) also commented that the Brazilian media still tend to negatively stereotype low-income fathers as violent and absent. For example, poverty is seen as a cause of rising numbers of separations of Brazilian families, which is similar to the situation described below in relation to fathering in post-Soviet Russia.

Additionally, multiple value systems (e.g., patriarchal vs. egalitarian) compete within Brazil and the varied roles fathers play is reflective of an era of transition between traditional and modern family life. Bastos et al. (2013) described three diverse and competing models of Brazilian fatherhood. They called the first model the ‘father-as-worker,’ whereby men taught their children skills and values related to work. The second model of ‘father-as-provider’ was said to be more common in lower SES groups. Their third model was labeled ‘father-as-guardian and protector.’ Particularly in low-SES families, a strict division of labor between fathers and mothers was said to reflect the legacy of patriarchy in that many fathers are rigid and strict, befitting their role as representatives of the harsh outside world.

Auxiliadora Dessen and Torres (2011) stressed the influence of living in distinct locales on Brazilian families, in their comparisons of parents in five ‘regional cultures.’ We presume that this geographical factor has an important bearing on fatherhood within Brazil. For example, Auxiliadora Dessen and Torres demonstrated that family size, gendered division of labor within the family, and notions of fatherhood (in the context of patriarchy, lack of family bonds, etc.) were a product not only of history and ethnicity, but also of

region and geography. On the other hand, Bastos et al. (2013, p. 229), in describing fathers in Brazil as “complex and diverse,” asserted that fathering variability associated with men’s SES and educational background outweighed regional diversity.



Middle class 30 year-old architect with his 8 month-old daughter at beach at Salvador City, Bahia, in Northeastern Brazil.
Photo courtesy of Mário Vítor Bastos.

Tudge (2008) also weighed in on the question of regional vs. social class influences. He found both SES (behavior of working class vs. middle class fathers, as related to their experiences in childhood and their current workplace experiences) and regional differences among fathers in Brazil and six other countries. For example, Tudge observed that Brazilian middle class fathers were highly active with their children in Porto Alegre when compared with the six other middle class samples of his seven-culture study. Most notably, Porto Alegre was the only city in one of the seven countries he studied where middle class fathers were just as involved as mothers in four main types of activities (lessons, work, play, and conversation). However, Tudge (personal communication, February 27, 2013) cautioned that the Porto Alegre sample of active fathers was not broadly representative of Brazilian fathers. He also stressed that there are ethnic and other sub-group differences within every SES group, and diversity based on “recency of arrival in the society.”

Brazilian demographics continue to change rapidly, with an increased divorce rate, decreasing family size, later onset of parenthood, high levels of poverty, and increases in rates of women’s employment and single-parent families (e.g., 33.8% of households are headed by women; see Auxiliadora Dessen & Torres, 2011; United Nations, 2011). In the context of these changes, Bastos et al. (2013) concluded that Brazilian family types and fathers will continue to diversify. For example, the middle class includes growing numbers of involved ‘new fathers,’ but this pattern of behavior is still apparently exceptional even within the middle class. However, attitudes have recently shifted in favor of paternal involvement, and a majority of Brazilian men in one study reported that they had taken at least some time off from work after the birth of their children (International Men and

Gender Equality Survey --- IMAGES, see United Nations, 2011). In sum, the answer to the question “What are Brazilian fathers like?” depends on which model or combination of models of fathering is relevant to each man, and also depends on one’s region and social class.

Bangladesh

There is clearly a variety of family structures among Bengalis (mainly joint, extended, and nuclear families), and according to Hossain (2013), this variety of family structures leads to a multiplicity of fathering roles and behavioral patterns. Bangladesh is a complex society where facultative fathering is related to urban/rural location, SES, religion, ethnicity, and family characteristics. Hossain (2013, p. 105), based on his pioneering studies of men in Bangladesh where Bengalis are the predominant ethnic/language group, described Bengali fathers’ level of involvement with their children as “moderate” (see also Jesmin & Seward, 2011). Hossain also made three main points in a general portrayal of fathering behavior in Bangladesh. First, as in all five of the societies discussed in this article, Hossain noted that mothers were the primary caregivers for children, in both rural and urban Bengali families. Second, his data showed that fathers spent an equal amount of time with sons and daughters. Third, men’s time with children reportedly involved more play than caregiving.

In contrast to the demographics of Brazil (87% urban population), Ball and Wahedi (2010) underscored that Bangladesh is a predominantly (75%) rural society, although rural contributions to the overall Bangladesh economy are declining. Variations between rural



Two affluent, urban (Dhaka), educated fathers (banker and businessman) with their sons at a family gathering.
Courtesy of Ziarat Hossain, University of New Mexico

vs. urban fathers may overlap with SES differences, and SES may be a more important contextual influence on Bengali fathers than elsewhere because almost half the population of Bangladesh lives in poverty. Although behavioral studies of Bengali fathering are rare, Ball and Wahedi posited that rural and low SES Bangladeshi fathers may be relatively traditional in their attitudes toward gender roles in comparison to urban, educated, and higher SES fathers who are more often egalitarian within the family. Hossain (2013) also contrasted urban and rural fathers, in his observation that men in rural joint families assisted in childrearing while urban fathers in nuclear families must by necessity take on more personal childcare responsibility themselves.

Ball and Wahedi (2010) further delineated diversity in the form of four patterns of Bangladeshi fathering; these patterns both differed and overlapped with the three 'models' described above by Bastos et al. to differentiate Brazilian fathers. First, "*family fathering*" (referred to elsewhere as "social fathering") was found in extended families where the father role was not limited to the biological father. Specifically this was reported when biological fathers shared their paternal role with other men such as grandfathers, uncles, friends, etc. The second pattern, "*isolated fathering*," took place in families who migrate to another region or country to seek employment, and sometimes in families who are relocated for work. For example, Bengali fathers who migrated to Asian societies such as Malaysia or to the Middle East were able to provide more material resources to their families (Hossain, 2013). Among urban Bengali families, Ball and Wahedi indicated that isolated fathers lacked extended family members who could lend support. Long-term isolated fathering, as we will observe later, is also notable in Russian society when men are prevented from living at home with their families. In both societies, we therefore see two patterns of isolated fathering in that some fathers spent time with their children because they were isolated from other relatives, while other fathers were isolated from home because of work out of necessity (Hossain, 2013). In the third pattern, "*sibling fathering*," older boys or brothers cared for younger children because both parents had to leave home to earn income. Finally, Ball and Wahedi described a growing number of cases of "*lone fathering*," which occurred when mothers left their husbands and children behind and migrated outside Bangladesh for employment.

With regard to religious influences on fathers, Islam is the predominant religion of Bangladesh (88% of the overall population), while Hindu people comprise a substantial minority population of 10%. Because Islam is such a large majority within Bangladesh, and its scriptures provide a guide for fatherhood and family life, it is possible that religion has a relatively direct impact on fathers in Bangladesh (Hossain, 2013). In contrast, there was little in the literature on Brazilian families to suggest a pervasive religious influence on Brazilian fathers. It would be valuable to tease apart the relative influences of religion vs. ethnicity on Bengali fathers, and to compare the influences of Islam vs. minority religions on fathers in Bangladesh. Hossain's also remarked that Islamic ideology and Western values may be compatible in their encouragement of active involvement of fathers and equal treatment of sons and daughters.

Russia

Although they had little empirical research to draw on, Utrata, Ispa, and Ispa-Landa (2013) pieced together a compelling portrayal of fathers in contemporary Russia, the world's largest country with a history of over 1,000 years. As was the case in the analyses of Brazilian fathers by Bastos et al. (2013) and Bengali fathers by Hossain (2013), Utrata et al.'s portrayal was tentative, and diversity and change were key elements of Russian fatherhood. We can recount several themes based on the limited available research and commentary on Russian fathers.

First, in light of what Utrata et al. (2013, p. 298) called a historical "negative discourse" about Russian men, fathers are often seen as less than secondary parents and even perceived by many as "infantile, weak, irresponsible, and even somewhat superfluous" (p. 289). Second, traditions of father absence and psychological detachment (Utrata, 2008) are now exacerbated because many men find it difficult to find or maintain employment, and because public policies do not encourage men to be caregivers or providers. A third theme, not mentioned above for fathers in Brazil or Bangladesh, concerns men's health. Issues related to heavy drinking and smoking, heart disease, work-related injuries, and infectious diseases, are all societal problems in Russia. For example, there is a large gap between men and women in alcohol abuse rates (30% of men and 1% of women binge drink at least monthly). As a result of many health issues, Russians have one of the widest gender gaps in life expectancy in the world, as men's life expectancy began to fall from the late 1960s, and is now 62 years for men vs. 74 for women. Utrata et al. were not very optimistic about the future of Russian fatherhood, and Utrata's (2008) interviews revealed the attitude that "mothers are essential, whereas fathers are more marginal and optional..." (p. 1306). This view echoes Townsend's (2002) statement that fatherhood has become more of a matter of men's choices than a matter of constraints placed on men by women and society.

Compared with the preceding accounts from Brazil and Bangladeshi, history has been portrayed as an even greater influence on men across centuries of Russian fatherhood. Utrata et al. (2013) described two main aspects of the historical legacy of Russian fathering: (1) the negative image and reputation of men and (2) the marginalization of fathers from families and society. In the post-Soviet era from 1992, the paternal role has perhaps become even more problematic than it was during the pre-Soviet era, or during the Soviet era (1917 – 1991) when millions of women were raised in matrifocal families and millions of men died from civil wars, world war, and repression. In contemporary Russia, economic conditions that adversely impact Russian fathers include increased stress and competition due to scarcity of jobs, widening income disparities, and the lack of government financial guarantees. Social supports for child care and families have disappeared in post-Soviet Russia because the state no longer provides for or protects children, while pressure has grown on fathers to be providers despite their inability to provide. Many men now travel long distances or migrate to large cities to find work, compounding the problem of father absence and their negative influences on children and families. In addition, a near-majority of contemporary Russians reportedly

believe that men should be providers while women stay at home (in agreement with the survey statement that “A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family” in a World Health Organization report (Barker & Nascimento, 2007).



Russian fathers and mothers drink vodka at school reunion in public park (Kaluga).

Courtesy of Jennifer Utrata, University of Puget Sound

In terms of family dynamics, Mikheeva (2007) pointed out that many Russian men are weak authority figures because both men and women share the breadwinner role, in line with an ideology of free choice for both genders. For some fathers, their increased freedom of choice has had an adverse effect by allowing them to choose *not* to be involved with their families. In fact, there is often little expectation that divorced Russian fathers will pay child support or maintain contact with their children, which excuses them from responsibility to be providers. According to Mikheeva, there may now be a trend toward polarization of Russian fathering into active and inactive sub-populations, a tendency we noted earlier for Brazilian fathers. This polarization may be related to demographic trends toward smaller families, more divorces (a significantly higher rate than in the other four societies discussed in this article), and more children born outside of marriage. Tudge’s comparative study of children’s lives (2008) confirmed the tendency toward father absence and disengagement from children, which he found to be more pronounced in Russia than in six other societies (the U.S., Estonia, Finland, Korea, Kenya, and Brazil).

As we have observed, post-Soviet era nuclear families have been disrupted as more and more men and women choose to live independently of one another. Similar to families in every society discussed in this paper, there are differences between Russian fathers who live in stepfamilies or intact nuclear families, compared with non-resident fathers. For example, Kay (2007) explored the impact of family structure on Russian fathering in a study of relatively active single fathers in Western Siberia. The level of paternal

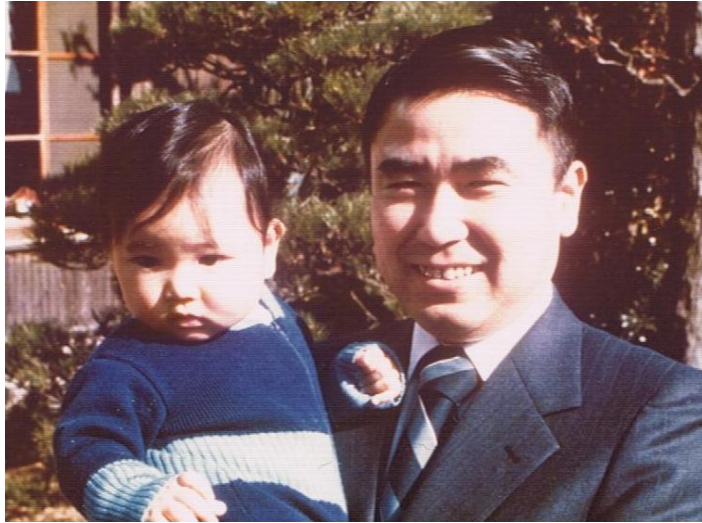
responsibility reported by these men contrasted with the above-mentioned images of contemporary Russian fathering and men as incompetent and uninvolved. One difficulty with the extremely limited research literature on Russian fathers is that it provides data from only a few localities (a problem characteristic also of the Brazilian, Bangladeshi, and Australian literatures reviewed in this article). This leads one to be especially cautious about the generality of findings on Russian fathers.

Like their counterparts in Brazil and Bangladesh, Russian fathers are diverse and their behavior is facultative. From a comparative perspective, the issues identified with regard to Russian fatherhood are sometimes similar to those found in many industrialized societies: differences between generations of fathers, polarization of fathers into active vs. marginalized sub-populations, and family life associated with increased divorce rates, low fertility rates, later age of first marriage, and childbirth/childrearing outside of marriage. At the same time, the negative effects of health-related behavior such as alcohol abuse, and the specific impact of drastic historical and social changes appear to be particularly relevant, if not unique, to an understanding of Russian fathers.

Japan

An extensive research literature on the father's role has emerged in Japan over the past three decades. Comparing our previous literature reviews on Japanese fathering between 1987 and 2013, it is apparent that Japanese fathers have changed significantly. Most recently, Nakazawa and Shwalb (2013) made three general observations about the evolving roles of Japanese fathers. First, in contrast to the traditional pre-war image of Japanese parenting that was based on the Confucian ideology of "strict father, affectionate mother," fathering in post-World War II Japan went through a phase whereby men were breadwinners and weekend fathers who spent little time with their children (Shwalb, Imaizumi, & Nakazawa, 1987). Second, over the past quarter-century attitudes have shifted toward an egalitarian mentality which implied that the father's role should extend beyond that of economic provider. Third, although mothers are still the primary caregivers in most families, the behavior of today's Japanese fathers is gradually becoming more consistent with their attitudes that men should spend more time at home and be actively involved with their children. These trends are understandable in terms in the context of changing economic, demographic, and employment conditions, and to some extent changes in beliefs and values as Japan became part of the West.

In contrast with portrayals of the four other societies, the general population of Japan has often been viewed as homogeneous by social scientists, and descriptions of Japanese fathers have not highlighted diversity (Shwalb, Nakazawa, Yamamoto, & Hyun, 2010). In addition, some of the demographic and social issues raised for Brazil, Bangladesh and Russia have not been of major concern in Japan. For example, fewer than 10% of children in Japan are born outside of marriage and only 13% of women report having experienced physical violence from a male partner. These are relatively low rates by international standards (United Nations, 2011).



Japanese salaryman (Tokyo) with his infant son in 1974.
The boy is now a professional musician.
Courtesy of David W. Shwalb

Despite such reports of relative homogeneity and lower incidence of problems that face fathers and families elsewhere, social change, globalization, and recent events may soon bring about greater diversity among Japanese fathers. First, because of its negative population growth and aging populace (by far the oldest population among the five societies discussed here, with a mean age of 44.8 years that is nearly double the mean age in Bangladesh), Japan has a growing need for immigrant labor. This will increase the size and visibility of foreigner populations that will introduce alternative views of fathers and families into Japanese society. For example, immigration from Brazil has recently gained attention, and Chinese and Korean nationals have long been important sub-groups of Japanese society (Nakazawa & Shwalb, 2013).

Second, as already mentioned, globalization and Westernization have fostered egalitarian views of childrearing, and most Japanese men increasingly place a higher value on family life than on employment. However, in the context of long-term economic recession men are pressured to work long hours, so that many remain unable to spend a satisfactory amount of time with their children or to take paternal leave. This occurs despite attitudinal shifts in favor of active father involvement. As we observed earlier for Brazilian and Russian societies, Japan may witness a polarization within its population of fathers, with some men increasingly involved at home while others become more work-centered.

Finally, as a result of the 2011 Tohoku tsunami and nuclear disaster, new economic hardships and instability may increase income disparities and contribute to SES differences in fathering, as a growing number of low-SES fathers become unable to provide for their children (Nakazawa & Shwalb, 2013).

Australia

Although the fathering literature in Australia is sparse, Smyth, Baxter, Fletcher, and Moloney (2013, p. 362) reported that nationwide surveys have made it possible to give a reasonably accurate “snapshot” of Australian fathers. Subject to numerous sources of variability, they were able therefore to make a few broad albeit tentative statements about Australian fathers.

First, Smyth et al. (2013) claimed that in demographic terms Australian fathers and families have many similarities to their counterparts in other Western societies, e.g., declining marriage rates, marriage and childbearing at a later age, decreasing family size, and increasing numbers of social fathers.



An upper middle-class father in his 30s, lakeside with children ages 2, 6, and 8 in Canberra. Owing to expansive geography and mild climate, outdoor recreation is popular with fathers.

Photo courtesy of Sue Trevenar.

Second, they claimed that the role of economic provider is still the main function of most Australian fathers, and that long work hours keep men away from their families and children, as was the case for fathers in all five societies highlighted in this paper.

Third, Smyth et al. emphasized that Australian men are diverse in terms of ethnicity. For example, they reported that 44% of the Australian population is now either foreign-born or is first generation Australian-born, with recent immigration mainly from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, referred to as “Culturally and Linguistically Diverse” (CALD --- Pe-Pua, Gendera, Katz, & O’Connor, 2010). In the past, discussions of Australian diversity focused on the Indigenous population, however. In this group which now comprises 2.5%

of the national population, children were separated from their families and fathers well into the 1970s by government and education policies that forced children to attend boarding schools, reminiscent of the experiences of families in other colonized societies including Brazil.

Finally, as was true of fathers in the other four societies reviewed here (although seldom mentioned explicitly by researchers), geography is an important contextual influence on Australian fathering in this sparsely populated but sixth largest nation in the world. For example, one in four non-resident Australian fathers lives more than 300 miles from his children, having been separated following divorce or to seek employment. Overall the issues of father absence, ethnicity, immigration, and changing family structures raised in Smyth et al.'s discussion of diversity in Australian fathering are similar to portrayals of fathers in most industrialized societies. However, Bruce Smyth (personal communication, January 29, 2013) remarked that with regard to research on within-society diversity of fathering, "The paucity of Australian information on this issue is astounding."

Commentary and Conclusions

Comparing Fathers Between Societies

Pleck (2013, xv) noted that most studies of fathers within the U.S. are "stove-piped," i.e., focused on only one sub-population with no comparisons to other sub-populations. Similarly, most studies of fathers outside the U.S. and Western Europe (including studies in the five societies considered in this article) took place in only one society and did not include comparisons with fathers in other societies. Because of this stove-piping, we cannot make direct or objective comparisons between fathers in the five societies or integrate the literature across societies. In addition, societal-level portrayals of men are subjective and tentative because each father is an individual and within-society diversity is universal and abundant.

This paper began with the five conclusions drawn by Shwalb et al. (2013) concerning (1) cultural and historical influences, (2) enthusiasm for active paternal involvement, (3) social policies and laws related to fathering, (4) intra-societal diversity, and (5) economic/employment influences. This paper showed that all five of their conclusions were salient to fathers in Brazil, Bangladesh, Russia, Japan, and Australia.

First, fathers in all five societies have adapted to cultural changes and continuities in modern eras, although unique historical legacies had a different effect on men's roles in each society. For example, Utrata et al. (2013) showed that contemporary Russian fathers still live in the shadow of a thousand year negative image of men; meanwhile, Bastos et al. (2013) indicated that Brazilian fathers are still encumbered today by the historical contexts of slavery, colonialism, and patriarchy. As psychologists we were not equipped to compare these historical influences, but it was clear that fathers in every society are a product of history.

Second, in the context of globalization and an infusion of information about Western cultural norms and beliefs, awareness of Western-style fathering involvement and fathers

as essential (Pleck, 2013) has reached all five societies, although the extent of this infiltration and men's responses to these influences varies for each society. For example, it is probably now politically correct in contemporary Japan and Australia to be an active and involved father, whereas there may be less consistent social expectations for paternal involvement in Russia, Bangladesh, or Brazil.

Third, there are laws and policies relevant to fathering in all five societies, but these are unique to each society. Specifically, there has been a progression of pro-fathering government policies in Japan for almost twenty years, whereas little is known about such initiatives in Brazil or Bangladesh, and some Russian policies (reinforcing the primacy of mothers as parents) actually appeared to discourage active fathering.

Fourth, diversity of fathers, fatherhood, and fathering are universal, but each of the five societies appeared to have a unique configuration of contextual factors that represented its particular form of diversity. Finally, the effects of employment vs. unemployment, and of economic systems and economic upturns vs. downturns were notable everywhere. For example, Japanese fathers were said to have been impacted by chronic recession since the 1990s and by the decline of the lifetime employment system. Smyth and his colleagues emphasized the long work hours of Australian fathers who struggled to meet expectations for a rising standard of living; these types of problems are quite different from the widespread poverty and unemployment faced by millions of fathers in Bangladesh, Brazil, and Russia. In sum, we can see that fathers across the five societies have faced common problems and have been subject to common influences, yet each society defines fatherhood and sets expectations for fathers within in a unique set of social contexts.

Future Research

It is of the utmost importance to strengthen the research base on fathering within individual countries, especially outside the U.S. and Western Europe (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013; Pattnaik, 2013). Notably among the five societies considered in this paper, there was an extensive and high-quality research base on fathering only for Japan, where numerous psychologists conduct research on fathers. In contrast, fathering research in Bangladesh, Russia, and Brazil typify the state of fathering research in most non-Western societies: relatively little data, relatively few researchers, and inadequate consideration of contextual or cultural influences.

Single-society investigations would clarify some of our general portrayals of fathers. For example, we know of no specific study on the effects of alcoholism and other health-related behavior on Russian fathering. Neither has there been research on the impact of the economic downturn associated with the 2011 Tohoku tsunami-earthquake disaster in Japan, although Nakazawa and Shwalb (2013) speculated that this event may affect men's roles in the near future. Likewise, there is no evidence yet of how many Brazilian men are just beginning to find their voice as fathers, as implied by Bastos et al. (2013), and no objective evidence that the influence of Islam is compatible with Western notions of active fathering as suggested by Hossain (2013). Similarly there are almost no research

data available on the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) fathers whom Smyth et al. (2013) identified as an increasingly important Australian population.

Another important direction for international fathering research will be to compare fathers between societies that share similar contextual influences. For example, a comparison of immigrant fathers would be useful between Australia and other societies where immigrants abound; likewise a comparison between emigrant Bangladeshi fathers with fathers who emigrate from other societies would be helpful. Comparative research on the impact of different religions on fatherhood would be of interest between samples in Bangladesh (Muslim vs. Hindu fathers) and Brazil (Catholic vs. Evangelical Protestant fathers). Another valuable comparison would be between unemployed/employed fathers and resident/non-resident fathers, between Russia and other societies with high rates of unemployed or non-resident fathers.

Toward a Contextual and Cultural Understanding of Fathers

This article provides ample evidence of eight major sources of fathering variability, demonstrating the need for a more contextual and ecologically-based approach to fatherhood research across and within societies (Shwalb & Shwalb, in press; Trommsdorff, 2002). But identification of several contextual variables is only a first step toward understanding how fathers function within a myriad of contexts. Further analysis of contexts alone will not be sufficient; international studies of fathers must also consider bidirectional influences between fathers and culture. Specifically, Hewlett (2000) has pointed out that fathers are both a product of culture and producers of culture. As he noted, "...culture influences what fathers do and what we expect of fathers." (personal communication, November 25, 2013). Unfortunately, most international studies of fathering by psychologists pay little or no attention to the mechanisms by which cultures influence paternal behavior and set expectations for men's roles. A genuinely cultural approach to fatherhood would focus on how it is constructed in different societies, and how cultures transmit or change fathers' roles across generations. Instead, many internationally-minded psychologists view culture as a constraint or unidirectional influence on fathers, or equate culture with nationality as an independent variable in order to make 'cross-national' comparisons. Yet it is undeniable that fathers can influence and even change their societies, and this article demonstrates the limitations of viewing fathers on a societal level.

The case of Japanese fathers, presented above, also demonstrates that men can change their cultures at the same time as societal-level ecologies constrain their behavior. Specifically, Japanese economic trends (i.e., the economic boom from the 1960s vs. the chronic recession from the 1990s) have influenced both men's attitudes and behavior. From the 1990s, as the government recognized that the cohort of sons of workaholic fathers wanted to achieve a better balance between their work and family life, it created laws and policies to promote paternal work leave. But until recently only a tiny minority of fathers took such leave, because most men felt compelled to work long hours in the context of a "lifetime employment" system that guaranteed permanent jobs in exchange for

men's prioritizing work over family life. Here, top-down government interventions were not successful in changing either societal expectations or fathers' behavior. In the current generation of young fathers, however, grassroots organizations such as "Fathering Japan" (Nakazawa, 2011) have promoted active fathering through dissemination of information on their web site, lobbying for pro-fathering legislation, conducting public fathering classes, and networking in communities nationwide. Such bottom-up activities are now having a dramatic effect on fathers' behavior and society-wide expectations for father involvement, and the lifetime employment system is losing its grip over men. Here we see that fathers' own behavior can change their culture and even overcome the ecological influences of economics and an employment system than once defined the paternal role. In this case social networking via the Internet seems to be a key mechanism of change. Meanwhile, we have observed in Korea that pro-fathering socialization takes place primarily via fathering classes held at Christian churches (Shwalb et al., 2010).

Future worldwide research on fathers must therefore pay attention to changing ecologies and cultures, and to men's role as agents of social change, as we focus on how cultures influence fathers and vice versa. It is undeniable that the international body of work on fathering has already begun to grow and mature significantly in recent years. We predict that the future of such scholarship will be challenging and promising, and that it will enrich cross-cultural understanding of socialization and childrearing in family contexts.

References

- Auxiliadora Dessen, M., & Torres, C. V. (2002). Family and socialization factors in Brazil: An overview. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 6(3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1060>
- Ball, J. & Wahedi, M.O.K. (2010). Exploring fatherhood in Bangladesh. *Childhood Education*, 86, 366-370. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2010.10523171>
- Barker, G., & Nascimento, M. (2007). *Engaging men and boys in changing gender-based inequity in health: Evidence from programme interventions*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization. Available from http://www.who.int/gender/documents/Engaging_men_boys.pdf.
- Bastos, A. C., Volkmer-Pontes, V., Brasileiro, P. G., & Serra, H. M. (2013). Fathering in Brazil: A diverse and unknown reality. In D. W. Shwalb, B. J. Shwalb, & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Fathers in cultural context*. (pp. 228-249). New York: Routledge.
- Cabrera, N. J., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. S. (Eds.) (2012). *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (2nd Edition). New York: Routledge.
- Georgas, J., Berry, J. W., van de Vijver, F. J. R., & Kagitçibasi, C. (Eds.) (2007). *Families across cultures: A 30-nation psychological study*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Harkness, S., & Super, C. M. (2002). Culture and parenting. In M. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting, Vol. 2: Biology and ecology of parenting* (pp. 253-280). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Hewlett, B. S. (2000). Culture, history, and sex: Anthropological contributions to conceptualizing father involvement. *Marriage & Family Review, 29*, 59-73. http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J002v29n02_05
- Hossain, Z. (2013). Fathers in Muslim families in Bangladesh and Malaysia. In D. W. Shwalb, B. J. Shwalb, & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Fathers in cultural context* (pp. 95-121). New York: Routledge.
- Hrdy, S. B. (2009). *Mothers and others: The evolutionary origins of mutual understanding*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jesmin, S. S., & Seward, R. R. (2011). Parental leave and fathers' involvement with children in Bangladesh: A comparison with United States. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 26*, 95-112.
- Kagitçibasi, C. (2007). *Family, self, and human development across cultures: Theory and applications* (2nd Ed). New York: Routledge.
- Kay, R. (2007). 'In our society it's as if the man is just some kind of stud': Men's experiences of fatherhood and fathers' rights in contemporary Russia. In R. Kay (Ed.), *Gender, equality and difference during and after state socialism* (pp. 125-145). Basingstoke, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Lamb, M. E. (1975). Fathers: the forgotten contributors to child development. *Human Development, 18*, 245-266.
- Mikheeva, A. (2007). Family change and new balance of family roles: The case of Siberia. *International Review of Sociology, 17*, 343-357. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03906700701357471>
- Nakazawa, J. (2011). *Factors of father's child rearing*. Tokyo, Japan: Foundation of Children's Future. (in Japanese)
- Nakazawa, J., & Shwalb, D. W. (2013). Fathering in Japan: Entering an era of involvement with children. In D. W. Shwalb, B. J. Shwalb, & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Fathers in cultural context* (pp. 42-66). New York: Routledge.
- Pattnaik, J., (Ed.) (2013). *Father involvement in young children's lives: A global analysis*. New York: Springer Science.
- Pleck, J. H. (2013). *Foreword*. In D. W. Shwalb, B. J. Shwalb, & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Fathers in cultural context* (xiv - xix). New York: Routledge.
- Pe-Pua, R., Gendera, S., Katz, I., & O'Connor, A. (2010). *Meeting the needs of Australian Muslim families: Exploring marginalisation, family issues and 'best practice' in service provision*. Sydney, Australia: University of New South Wales. Retrieved from http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/pdf_doc/meeting-needs-muslim-families.pdf
- Shwalb, D. W., Imaizumi, N., & Nakazawa, J. (1987). The modern Japanese father: Roles and problems in a changing society. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The father's role: Cross-cultural perspectives* (pp. 247 - 269). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Shwalb, D. W., Nakazawa, J., Yamamoto, T., & Hyun, J. H. (2010). Fathering in Japan, China, and Korea: Changing contexts, images, and roles. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (5th edition) (pp. 341-387). New York: Wiley.

- Shwalb, D. W., Shwalb, B. J., & Lamb, M. E. (Eds.) (2013). *Fathers in cultural context*. New York: Routledge.
- Shwalb, D. W., & Shwalb, B. J. (in press). Fathering diversity within societies. In L.A. Jensen (Ed.), *Oxford handbook of human development and culture: An interdisciplinary perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Smyth, B. M., Baxter, J. A., Fletcher, R. J., & Moloney, L. J. (2013). Fathers in Australia: A contemporary snapshot. In D. W. Shwalb, B. J. Shwalb, & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Fathers in cultural context*. (pp. 361-382). New York: Routledge.
- Townsend, N. W. (2002). *The package deal: Marriage, work and fatherhood in men's lives*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Trommsdorff, G. (2002). An eco-cultural and interpersonal relations approach to development over the life span. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 6(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1057>
- Tudge, J. (2008). *The everyday lives of young children: Culture, class and child rearing in diverse societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- United Nations (2011). *Men in families and family policy in a changing world*. United Nations Report. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/men-in-families.pdf> .
- Utrata, J. (2008). Keeping the bar low: Why Russia's nonresident fathers accept narrow fatherhood ideals. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70, 1297-1310. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00567.x>
- Utrata, J., Ispa, J. M., & Ispa-Landa, S. (2013). Men on the margins of family life: Fathers in Russia. In D. W. Shwalb, B. J. Shwalb, & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Fathers in cultural context*. (pp. 279-302). New York: Routledge.
- Whiting, B. B., & Whiting, J. W. M. (1975). *The children of six cultures: A psychocultural analysis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Recommended Web Links

- Shwalb, Shwalb, & Lamb: Fathers in Cultural Context (2013). <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9781848729483/>
- United Nations Report: Men in families and family policy in a changing world (2011). <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/men-in-families.pdf>
- Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice about Men as Fathers www.mensstudies.com/content/120394/
- Parenting for the science-minded (parentingscience.com) <http://www.parentingscience.com/>
- Fathering Japan (a non-profit organization that promotes active fathering) <http://www.fathering.jp/english/>

Discussion Questions

1. This article began with a list of eight sources of variability in fathers within societies. What are some examples of these eight sources that apply to fathers in each of the five societies highlighted in this article?
2. Choose two societies (of the five discussed in this article) between which fathers seem to be the most different by comparison, and choose two other societies between which you think that fathers are relatively similar. Explain these choices.
3. What are some ways in which you think that geography (location or physical setting) may influence the roles and behavior of fathers, in each of the five societies discussed in this article?
4. The authors note that there has been more research on fathers in Japan than in any of the other four societies discussed in this article, and that Japanese are said to be the most homogeneous of the five populations discussed here. In what way does such homogeneity make it easier to understand Japanese fathering, and in what way does it make it more difficult to understand Japanese fathers?
5. All five societies mentioned in this article have large populations, but Australia has by far the smallest population and would be considered by many to be the “most Western” of the five. As you study psychology and culture, what do you think you can learn from studying Western populations of fathers, compared with studying fathers in non-Western cultures?
6. Select a society of interest to you (it may be your own), and write a report on the eight main sources of within-society variability provided in this article. Are some of these sources of variability more important than others, or less important than others, in this society?

About the Authors

David W. Shwalb is a Professor in the Psychology Department at Southern Utah University. He holds a B.A. degree from Oberlin College, and an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. He was a Fulbright Dissertation Fellow at Tokyo University and has also studied at Waseda University. He is a former president of the Society for Cross-Cultural Research. Along with Barbara Shwalb, he is English Abstracts editor for the *Japanese Journal of Developmental Psychology* and the *Japanese Journal of Child Abuse & Neglect*. He is the co-author or editor (along with B. Shwalb) of three volumes: *Fathers in Cultural Context* (2013), *Applied Developmental Psychology: Theory, Practice and Research from Japan* (2005), and *Japanese Childrearing: Two Generations of Scholarship* (1996) and also three books published in Japanese.

Barbara J. Shwalb is an Instructor in the Psychology Department at Southern Utah University. She holds B.S. and M.A.T. degrees from Southeast Missouri State University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan (Combined Program in Education and Psychology). She has previously held faculty positions at the University of Utah and Nagoya University of Business & Commerce. She was a Japan Ministry of Education Fellow (at Tokyo University), and has lived in Japan for 6 years. She also co-edited (with D. Shwalb) special issues for *New Directions for Child & Adolescent Development* ("Respect and disrespect: Cultural and developmental origins"), *Evaluation in Education* ("Socialization and school achievement in Japan"), and *International Journal of Educational Research* ("Cooperative learning and cultural context: An integrative review"). The Shwalbs have published papers on human development in Japan, Korea, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, India, and the U.S.