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Movie and Television Fathers: A Positive Reflection of Positive Changes

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**Movie and Television Fathers:
A Positive Reflection of Positive Changes**

*A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Liberal Studies*

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Introduction

And thus we see how natural freedom and subjection to parents may consist together, and are both founded on the same principle. A child is free by his father's title, by his father's understanding, which is to govern him till he hath it of his own.¹

Hollywood producers and writers, through the media of both television and film, have mined the institution of the family for storylines that easily connect to the viewing public. Over the decades, because of their influence over the popular culture, television and film have demanded to be analyzed for their effects on the consumer and whether they have added any other value to our society above simply entertainment value. From the 1950s through the 1980s, depictions of fathers on television and in movies have varied with the times. In addition, these depictions of fathers have implanted on the public psyche during times when the institution of fatherhood experienced changes because of other impacts of society. The affect that these depictions of fathers have had on society will be examined through obtaining an understanding of the historical father, a review of what some observers of the family have deemed the best traits of fathers, and finally, through an examination of film and television portrayals of fathers over the decades from approximately 1950 to 1980.

The films and television shows examined include some of the more iconic examples of fathers depicted on screen. Obviously, some subjectivity has entered this determination, owing to the ubiquity of the movie and television content over these decades. A case will be made during the course of this examination as to why such

¹ John Locke, *Works of John Locke: Including Two Treatises of Government, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding and more* (Boston: Mobile Reference, 2009, Kindle Book version), location 3089.

choices have been made. In order to compare the fathers depicted on screen across the years, and to reflect upon what many would term the ideal constitution of the family, most of the fathers selected come from a nuclear family.² From the 1950s, the fathers from two television shows: Ward Cleaver from *Leave It to Beaver*, which aired from 1957 to 1963 and Jim Anderson from *Father Knows Best* which aired from 1954 to 1960 and three movies: Adam Trask from *East of Eden* released in 1955, Frank Stark from *Rebel Without a Cause* also released in 1955, and George Banks from *Father of the Bride* released in 1950 are examined in Chapter 3. From the 1960s, the father from one television show: Andy Taylor from *The Andy Griffith Show* which aired from 1960 to 1968 and two movies: George Banks from *Mary Poppins* released in 1964 and Atticus Finch from *To Kill a Mockingbird* released in 1962 are examined in Chapter 4. From the 1970s, the fathers from one television show: Archie Bunker from *All in the Family* which aired from 1971 to 1979 and one movie: Ted Kramer from *Kramer vs. Kramer* released in 1979 are examined in both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Finally, from the 1980s, the fathers on one television show: Heathcliff Huxtable from *The Cosby Show* which aired from 1984 to 1992 and one movie: both Gordon Gekko and Carl Fox from *Wall Street* released in 1987 are examined in Chapter 6. The specific traits and actions of these fathers are analyzed in relation to the three stages of the historical father (distant breadwinner, gender role model, and nurturer) examined in Chapter 1, how the screen father encapsulates the historical context of the time depicted, and whether the father demonstrates the traits which some experts identify as the most important traits of the father, as examined in Chapter 2.

² For the purpose of this paper, the fathers examined herein chiefly come from nuclear families.

It has been said that culture is "the set of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves."³ If this sentiment captures a truth, and film and television have a special place in the popular culture as one of the more penetrating and capable story tellers, it can be assumed that film and television can be expected to depict stories that reflect or comment on the very values of the society. Film and television are, of course, primarily created to entertain. One cannot discount the fact that the people who collaborate to create these entertainments are only successful when they can prove their ability to "plant" bodies into theater seats and ensure their employers that they can "affix" eyeballs to television screens. This interesting combination of art and commerce entwines to affect the popular imagination like almost no other cultural consumer item. Americans regularly invite certain films and television shows into their very homes and share them with their families and friends. The impact of a popular film or television series on an individual, let alone a group of individuals, is in its way, immeasurable. This impact increases exponentially when the film or television series features a family. Families are entities that any American can find familiar, and in the present day, the acceptable definition of a family is wide-reaching and diverse. Any American movie or television viewer who sees families depicted on screen can take away something of value to their own experience, even though the family depicted on screen may be quite different than that which exists in the viewer's own family.

Certain films and television programs depicting fathers have both enduring popularity and have reflected the advances in the institution of fatherhood. This has happened because of a symbiosis that has delivered positive results: popular films and

³ Donald N.S. Unger, *Men Can: The Changing Image and Reality of Fatherhood in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 162.

television shows that earn money for producers and advertisers have depicted fathers who have changed to reflect the popular example. These depictions have contributed in their way to mending the family dynamic, specifically related to the father's essential role in the family. Such family-oriented films and television shows have effectively showed fathers (and men that would become fathers) that they could be much more than a stereotype. These pages will show how these films and television programs have reflected how the institution of fatherhood has changed over time in America and how these shows and films have modeled, instructed, and encouraged fathers and future fathers to be more, deliver more and influence their children in a more positive direction. The changes in the institution of fatherhood that arose through these years from 1950 to 1980 have been reflected back to the public through these movie and television fathers. Such "reflection" has solidified and helped institutionalize the advancements in the role of the American father to its present model of a nurturer who sees great value in being responsible, accessible, and engaged with his children.

Chapter One: The Historical Father

The institution of fatherhood includes two distinct elements, “There is the culture of fatherhood (specifically shared norms, values, and beliefs surrounding men’s parenting), and there is the conduct of fatherhood (what fathers do, their parental behaviors).”⁴ This analysis of the father in the context of social change led historian Joseph Pleck to depict the history of fatherhood in America as constituting three phases: “From the early 19th to mid-20th centuries there was the father as distant breadwinner. Then, from 1940 to 1965 there was the father as gender role model. Finally, since around 1966 there has emerged the father as nurturer.”⁵ An examination of the historical American father can be effectively captured by analyzing these learned distinctions.

A complete study of the institution of fatherhood can take one back to the beginning of time and to such sources as the holy books of every faith, the teachings of Aristotle or Plato, or the thinking of the philosophers of the Enlightenment. While an effort to study fatherhood through the whole of history intrigues, it does not assist in the study of the popular culture’s affect on the father. A look into the historical fathers from the beginnings of America, however, can “set the stage”⁶ for an analysis of the effect that the popular culture of film and television has on the institution of fatherhood.

The Enlightenment thinkers who began to analyze the educational systems of the time used their love of rationality to attempt to understand the child and their relation to

⁴ Ralph LaRossa, “Fatherhood and Social Change,” *Family Relations* 37 (1988): 451.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Please forgive the use of the performing arts as an easy metaphor since this thesis will soon delve deeply into how the popular performing arts have presented the father over these periods.

the family. John Locke argues in 1693 in his treatise, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, "... that children are not rational but they have the capacity to learn reason. They are on the way to becoming adults and the deployment of tutelage and education by fathers, in particular, moves them along an appropriate trajectory."⁷ This focus by Locke on the effect of the father may arguably be just the latent patriarchy of the late seventeenth century; but in the early days of the Enlightenment, and as the work of Americans moved outside the home with the dawn of the industrial age, the institution of fatherhood dramatically changed. In contrast, the institution of motherhood in these early days of self-awareness remains relatively the same, with the mother responsible for "hearth and home." While changes in motherhood remained somewhat stagnant, the institution of fatherhood began a period of transformation after 1750 with the rise of individualism and the Enlightenment. Paternal dominance and evangelical authority as the model of fatherhood began to be challenged. As better put, "Hierarchy and order, the watchwords of older forms of paternal dominance, gave way to a growing emphasis on mutuality, companionship, and personal happiness."⁸ As the world modernized from a period of structured paternalism into one based on the rights of the individual, the role of the father also transformed from patriarch and authority figure to sometime companion and the party chiefly responsible for providing the resources for family happiness. Nevertheless, the end of patriarchy and the promise of more enlightened fathers was soon disrupted by the "...emergence of a commercial-industrial world in which increasing numbers of men became breadwinners who commuted to work while their wives

⁷ Stuart C. Aitken, *The Awkward Spaces of Fathering* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 35.

⁸ Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 11.

assumed direction of the household.”⁹ This phenomenon can be best described in these words:

Women's roles were redefined in terms of domesticity rather than production, men were labeled "breadwinners" (a masculine identity unheard of in colonial days), children were said to need time to play, and gentle maternal guidance supplanted the patriarchal authoritarianism of the past¹⁰.

Thus the father as the “Distant Breadwinner” arose.

As industrialization and burgeoning capitalism thrived, the “distant breadwinner” or “bill-paying outsider” became the norm for the American father. This new norm in fatherhood occurred owing to the majority of time spent the father spent outside the home and the only apparent role of the father in the eyes of his children: the person who brought in the money which paid the bills and provided for the family’s material needs. When fathers could not or did not find time to nurture, care for, advise and simply interact with their children, they were easily reduced to the unfortunate moniker of “breadwinner.” Because of the relative ease in determining and measuring success by the amount of resources a man could provide the family, being a good “breadwinner” became an ideal for the industrial-age father. In contrast, and because of the lack of time the father spent inside the home, the mother became the “nurturer.” The ideal family partnership in these days involved this tradeoff: man (father) would primarily work outside the home to earn the resources needed for the family to sustain itself and the woman (mother) would work inside the home to nurture and care for the emotional needs

⁹ Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 13.

¹⁰ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992, Kindle Book version), location 465.

of the children, or more succinctly, “Man the earner, woman the nurturer came to represent the ideal.”¹¹

This trend in fatherhood did not change for many years. As the middle class grew during the industrial age, families became consumers more than the producers of the early days of America. Paradoxically, men realized the worth of a closer relationship with their children but could not sacrifice the hours needed to establish this closer connection. Their power as breadwinners related directly to the money they could earn in those hours. Thus, any hour dedicated to being present in the household could reduce the earnings of the father, thus incrementally depriving him of the meaning which breadwinning gave him. This became a “zero sum” game for men. As men gained status and prestige (and money) outside the home, they equally lost the psychic rewards that could be “earned” inside the home. They traded power for sentiment.¹² Men’s worth to the family became directly tied to their earnings, and thus, tied to the vagaries of the industrial economy. In the 1920s and 30s, some middle class men who were able to solidify their financial standing began to pay greater attention to what increasingly became to be known as their “personal life.” A period of the “New Father” began to be recognized. *Parents’ Magazine* reflected this condition in almost every issue, printing testimonials from fathers who had experienced the positive effects of increased their interactions with their children with one article even featuring a group of fathers in suburban New York City who started their own Girl Scout troop.¹³

¹¹ Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 14.

¹² *Ibid*, 33.

¹³ *Ibid*, 98.

Owing to the overreliance on fathers as breadwinners, some family researchers of this time wrote of weakened family bonds. The cause of these weakened family bonds related to the “shrinkage” of father’s functions inside the home. Almost organically, the family unit recognized the limitations put on the father by his work outside the home. Work sapped the father’s energy; he did not have the natural skill and ability to nurture his young, and thus, the key parental functions were given to the mother.¹⁴ As a result, some broader thinkers about the family proposed a “New Father” with reconfigured the roles for both the father and mother of every household. Family writing during the period of absent fathers of the 1920s and 1930s stressed the need for fathers to use their precious little time with their children for nurture, not destructive discipline and punishment. Writers encouraged the middle-class father to be a “... kindly, nurturing democrat who shared rather than monopolized power.”¹⁵ While this ideal gained traction, actual results remained mixed as men simply only added to their fatherly “repertoire” those tasks they could easily manage: playmate, advisor, and weekend excursion planner. They only added direct contact with the children and did not contribute to any behind-the-scenes actions that made family life increasingly bearable.¹⁶ Many expected the New Father to advance beyond an interesting and worthwhile construct, but this change never became widespread owing to something well outside the control of the father. Essentially, the Great Depression stopped the development of the New Father dead in its tracks.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid, 92.

¹⁵ Ibid, 99.

¹⁶ Ibid, 117.

¹⁷ Ibid, 143.

As breadwinning always functioned as a primary means of a father's worth to the family and the concepts of the New Father never really told hold in the majority of households, the influence of the father to the household varied in relation to the vagaries of work being readily available. When periods of economic decline led to men being laid off from employment it adversely and directly affected these men and their perceived ability to be good fathers to their children. In some cases, charity and governmental assistance could temper the problems of unemployment or underemployment. The identity of men and fathers, however, were directly and adversely affected by these periods. Again, the "zero sum" game of fatherhood raised its ugly head and caused fathers to equate their success to the financial resources they could acquire rather than the psychic assets they could maintain or enhance. Again, the triumphs of fathers turned into a simple matter of mathematics: they were judged by what level of society they could help the family attain – lower middle class, middle class, or if extremely fortunate, high class. If they slipped down this scale, fathers failed their families.¹⁸ As a result, the Great Depression tested men who had not embraced the nuances of the New Father and whose power in the family was directly tied to their ability to provide.

The Depression had laid bare the relationship among breadwinning, fatherhood, and male identity. Men who feared for the economic well-being of their wives and children responded in a multitude of ways, but investigators were especially struck by their anger and frustration and their unsettling sense of powerlessness.¹⁹

Men's power within the family defined them. If that power connected only to the resources that he brought into the family, economics outside his control could shut this power "source" down. If the power of the father related to his example, his knowledge,

¹⁸ Ibid, 66.

¹⁹ Ibid, 159.

his self-control, his ability to care for the other needs of his children, he retained his power despite his inability to bring home cash resources. Thus, in the history of fatherhood in America, the impact of the Great Depression underlined that fathers were not served well by being simply good providers and the stereotypical “distant breadwinner.” In order for them to maintain success outside the resources they earned for the use of their families, men needed to “provide” more to their families. After the Great Depression and as the United States became drawn into a costly war, society forced the institution of fatherhood to become more than a means to feed, clothe, and house the family. It became the means for defining the gender roles of the family to meet the needs of a modernizing world. Interestingly, this institutional change already thrived in the American South, which was not as affected by the sudden changes in the industrial North. The father in the American South had retained the remnants of patriarchy but owing to the fact that they worked from the home had also a greater role in nurturing their children.

The American South came to industrialization later and maintained a chiefly agricultural economy longer and so the father retained some semblance of continued direct influence on their children on a relatively day-to-day basis. Also, in general, Southern fathers had a deeper connection to traditional patriarchy and veneration of forefathers. An interesting adjunct to industrialization of America is the fact that those fathers who did not take jobs in factories, primarily those from the American South, continued the traditions of early America when it came to the father's place in the family as figurehead and patriarch.²⁰ These men treasured and venerated their children and

²⁰ Ibid, 19.

moreover, treated the gender of each child with a different level of care. A child was not simply a mouth to feed; he or she was a burgeoning adult, with a role in their future directly tied to their gender. Southern gentlemen farmers acted as breadwinners; and also sex (or gender) role models to their young children.

In the north, the Great Depression refocused men's attention on the almighty dollar as the only way to pull themselves and their families out of destitution and despair. Some early sociologists studying the family at this time began to see the family in a more nuanced sense. Rather than the simple father as breadwinner, mother as nurturer construct, they attempted to redefine the family from such a structure to "... a unity of interacting personalities."²¹ The family did not simply require a father in one role, and the mother in another role, with both complimentary to the other and the result being the "whole is better than its parts." Instead, the family began to be understood as a more philosophical institution, and with it, the institution of fatherhood became to be considered as being much more complicated than many expected. The quality of familial interaction became more important than the quantity of resources available to the family.²²

The implications proved to be profound. The ease at which a father could measure his fulfillment of his parental role was now compromised. The introduction of the idea of the father's role in perpetuating the gender roles of American society's future men and women surely complicated the institution of fatherhood and added the factor of interdependence to the dynamic of the family. Men could not simply prove their worth as a father by providing, and thus could enhance that worth by simply working more hours.

²¹ Ibid, 93.

²² Ibid.

A balance between work and personal life emerged as important, and interdependence between the members of the family was necessary to develop children into their future roles in society. This change affected how men began to think of manhood in general and fatherhood in particular just before the Great Depression changed everything

The workplace was too unreliable to enable men to prove their manhood; in fact, it eroded their authority at home. Many men returned to the home, as fathers and modest breadwinners (instead of as economic success stories), the hope that raising their sons to be successful men they could themselves achieve some masculine redemption.²³

Fathers then, in addition to the primary breadwinners, had more esoteric responsibilities recognized as being very strongly linked to social order. Parents endeavored to raise children to fulfill societal roles and parents expected to ensure their children's entry into adulthood through their efforts. The definition of a good father, in particular, became much more expansive rather than easily reduced to the amount of money he brought into the family.

After the Great Depression and in some part owing to of its impact upon American society, it appears that the general public began to see more clearly that the family was the most important factor in maintaining social order. This importance of the family became very clear as Europe, and then America, experienced the turmoil of World War II. The war brought to the fore the image of fatherhood that America valued the most: being an active part and full participant in the nuclear family. In fact, in September 1943, hearings began in Congress regarding a bill exempting the drafting of fathers into

²³ Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 133.

the service.²⁴ Some influential organizations such as the American Legion and the Catholic Church came forward to announce their fear that drafting fathers would alter the very way of American life. These institutions and other individuals who testified in Congress thought that fathers were needed at home far more than at the front, because in their opinion, to preserve the prevailing social order required a wage earning father and stay-at-home mother. Amazingly, a Gallup poll in fall 1943 found that the great majority of Americans preferred drafting single women for noncombat jobs over drafting fathers for the same work.²⁵ While these efforts to keep fathers at home ultimately failed, one observed that

... by asserting the indispensability of fathers to family happiness, social stability, proper eugenic development, and, ultimately, the future of democracy, the debate on the drafting of fathers did reconfirm traditional assumptions about fatherhood and family life in a time of crisis.²⁶

The idea that fathers had a role above being mere providers had taken a greater hold on the collective psyche of America. As more scholarship devoted time to studying the family, it became clear that the idea of men as “distant breadwinner” was a thing of the past.

So, as fathers entered the war, sociologists and psychiatrists and observers of the popular culture began commenting on the effects of the absence of fathers on the youth of America. Typical for this somewhat unenlightened time, and due to the absence of fathers, some lamented the over-influence of mothers on their young sons, coining such

²⁴ Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 168. Of course, with politics, some other ulterior motives were at play with the introduction of this bill sponsored and spearheaded by Montana Senator Burton Wheeler. Wheeler not only did not think fathers should be drafted but he also raised the issue of the number of “loafers” and “vagrants” on the streets of America and why were they not conscripted into service.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 170.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 172.

terms as “momism” and “maternal overprotection.” So-called experts railed against mothers who did not discipline their children as the father would have and this resulted in children without the proper guidance with respect to gender roles.²⁷ In these early forays into analyzing the psychological make-up of families, hasty conclusions by “specialists” encouraged mothers with absent fathers to call upon adult men such as uncles or Boy Scout leaders to ensure that boys were given the proper guidance in their father’s absence. Any thought that the mother could positively influence the gender role of their young sons was taboo. As fathers returned from war, their burgeoning influence on the psyche of the family faltered as these men gradually and painfully readjusted to family life.

Because of the traumas of war, many studies occurred regarding the effects of war-time service on first time fathers. These studies concluded that returning fathers did not have the opportunity to bond sufficiently with their offspring and many complications ensued. These young men became suddenly responsible for instantly becoming effective breadwinners, fathers and husbands, many after seeing their friends and colleagues die. It must have been quite easy for these men to simply regress into disciplinarians, this being the easiest way for a man to display his power in the family. As the person with the most apparent outward strength and because this strength likely helped these men be successful warriors, the post-war display of impatience and intolerance towards children they hardly knew became the father’s easiest method to establish familial order. “Despite the emergence of more enlightened attitudes to fathering in the first half of the twentieth century, the most significant event of the 1940s, the war, heightened the desire for a

²⁷ Ibid, 173-4.

return to a more traditional patriarchal image."²⁸ Thus, World War II delayed any change in the institution of fatherhood and was responsible for altering the development away from fathers being exclusively linked to being a provider towards the more effective balanced role that included both provider and nurturer.

World War II solidified the role of the family in society.²⁹ The men who fought the war did nothing less than ensure the protection and security of American values. And these American values placed the father as the titular head of the two-parent household. One of the enduring images of the family during this time was Norman Rockwell's "Four Freedoms" series of illustrations for the *Saturday Evening Post* (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Norman Rockwell, *The Four Freedoms*, courtesy of Bing Images.

²⁸ Stella Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Postwar Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 1.

²⁹ Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 164.

While devastating in many respects to the family, the war effectively reestablished the importance of the father as a gender role model responsible in some direct way for the social order of American society. This importance became clearer as fathers entered the post-war period and the baby boom of the 1950s and 60s.

The post-war period represents the first period in American history when one might conjure up descriptions of fathers from that images presented on the film and television screens of the time. These images reflect a return to tradition in the households of America, a return to the father as primary breadwinner and the mother as primary caregiver. In these decades, manhood ruled supreme over the household and, in addition to the being a “distant breadwinner,” fathers continued their very influential function over the gender roles of their offspring. It surprises not, then, to learn that the 1950s saw the dawn of *Playboy* magazine as “the Bible for the beleaguered male” as men began to see themselves as more than providers for others and saw that compromising one’s manhood for the well-being of the family remained nothing less than an ideal for the family’s health.³⁰ One observer characterized the 1950s male gender role by breaking it into four basic rules:

No Sissy Stuff – never do anything then even remotely hints of the feminine.
 Be a Big Wheel – masculinity can be measured by power, wealth, success.
 Be a Sturdy Oak – show no emotion, this being emotionally reliable.
 Give ‘em Hell – always take risks.³¹

One can easily see the evolution of the father into more than a breadwinner, and more than a role model. These prescriptions of the post-war period foreshadow the next and latest development in the institution of fatherhood towards a true model of someone who

³⁰ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 167.

³¹ Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 186.

could provide their children a nurturing quality unique to their role as the father and complimentary to that of the mother. Fathers began to feel more than act, nurture more than discipline and guide and coach more than demand. While some would say that fathers simply became more like mothers, it cannot be reduced to that manner of thinking. Fathers enhanced themselves as individuals and these enhancements helped them become better fathers, they became equally responsible for family nurture and, moreover, equally benefitted from its positive results.

In early America, as the conception of children changed, the role of the mother changed to nurturer since the men of the mid-eighteenth century became the primary breadwinners. Thus, a nurturer "vacuum" was filled by the person in the household who remained "closer to the hearth," the mother.³² The role of nurturer began to define exclusively what parenting meant during this time. Fathers developed a chief responsibility for providing the family with the resources to thrive during this time then began to limit themselves to only actions that advanced their abilities as the primary breadwinners. Parenting became chiefly defined as nurturing the children (giving them a comfortable home, encouraging their education, showing them love and affection) and, as a result, the mother became defined as the most 'important' parent. Furthermore, a paradox arose as experts began to recognize that there some problems occurred when mothers became chiefly and singularly responsible for nurturing the family, and some termed this as "momism." So, unfortunately, while the thinkers of the time recognized the importance of fatherly nurture, the society had not yet decided that this importance outweighed the need for every family to have a productive "breadwinner" providing for its primary needs of home and hearth. Thus the paradox: as families became more

³² Ibid, 12.

comfortable and home life became an important benefit of this comfort, the fathers emphasized the overlying “requirement” to bring in the income to maintain the comfort of the family and, in many cases, could not benefit from the increasing emphasis on the nurture of the family. A paradox arose where the popular culture “felt” a need to limit fatherly involvement in a child’s life. These limits are defined as those that do not “intrude” on motherly duties or marginalize the mother into simply the family’s domestic help.

In some researchers’ opinions, however, this paradox does not receive support from the facts of the day. While there is "... greater involvement of fathers in child care and domestic work during the past couple of decades, research shows that mothers continue to take major responsibility for organizing, planning, and overseeing family life."³³ Rather than becoming fully invested in the idea of nurturing their children, fathers simply “added in” actions where they spent more time with the family, but did not necessarily free the mother from the stereotypical domestic chores necessary for the comfort of the family. Furthermore, while fathers felt they sacrificed more time for the good of the family, it never approached the number of hours mothers had dedicated and continued to dedicate to family nurture and care. Interestingly, while fathers thought that supplementing their family life with more “quality time” as it became to be known, the amount of time they added did not supplant the time necessary for the proper feeding and care of the children. It was not in any measurable way affecting the amount of care giving performed by the mother.³⁴ This phenomenon occurred from the 1920s through 1940s, as

³³ Glenda Wall, et al, “How Involved is Involved Fathering? An Exploration of the Contemporary Culture of Fatherhood,” *Gender & Society* 21, no. 4 (August 2007): 517.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 509.

so-called parenting experts began to write on the need for fatherly nurture in the household. It seemed that at this time both mothers and experts recognized the need to enhance the father's role, but again there was a great irony: "The same culture that called men to the home recognized that their responsibilities as breadwinners limited their capacity to nurture children."³⁵

Interestingly, the dawn of television popular culture in the 1950s may have helped men to figure out the proper balance between breadwinning and nurture. While these movie and television fathers (think Ozzie Nelson and Ward Cleaver) obviously were successful breadwinners, the stories told about these men on screen did not center on the workplace, but rather centered on their family life and their ability (or non-ability) to resolve the crises that beset the home. Obviously, these portrayals idealized their depictions of the nurturing father. There remained a distinct division of labor in the household where men were primarily breadwinners and because of this, they could not ascribe to the more mundane aspects of childcare. Rather, they took an active role as guide and family "sage."

As the 1960s and 70s redefined womanhood to include active participation in the workforce, men began to fill the void that resulted. One sociologist writes that he believes that ultimately and finally the culture of fatherhood changed because the culture of motherhood changed:

The more it became apparent that today's mothers were less involved with their children, on a day-to-day basis, than were their own mothers and grandmothers, the more important it became to ask the question: Who's minding the kids? Not appreciating the extent to which substitute parents (day-care centers, etc.) have picked up the slack for mothers, many people (scholars as well as the lay public)

³⁵ Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 129-30.

assumed that fathers must be doing a whole lot more than before and changed their beliefs to conform to this assumption.³⁶

So, the most important change in the role of the father in recent history was essentially fostered by the greatest change in the role of the mother in recent history. Some men would take the easy way out and “blame” feminism for this change in the “proper” of division of labor in the family. While feminism may have some role in these changes, they are equally shared by the recognition by most family men that a complete and happy family can include two breadwinners if it the family’s balance of labor adjusts as a result. One wrote, “Women’s work, in short, has destroyed the old assumptions about fatherhood and required new negotiations of gender relations.”³⁷ Furthermore, as men realized these new comforts of home life and the resulting benefits of adding nurture to their familial role, they demanded more flexibility in work hours, family leave, and eventually the political world responded to these demands by codifying these benefits into laws.

This “New Fatherhood” of the latter years of the twentieth century solidified and entered the imagination of the popular culture and, thereby, became an ideal for those who believed in the importance of father’s involvement in the development of their children’s personalities.³⁸ It was not without its downside, however, as it was not exactly embraced by the working class and it was somewhat limited to only those families that had two successful breadwinners. The nurturing father “status” takes more than a desire by the man to change; it also needs support and resources to thrive. It would be incorrect

³⁶ LaRossa, “Fatherhood and Social Change,” 452.

³⁷ Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 220.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 93.

to report that the Father as Nurturer has completely taken hold and become the new model for all American fathers. Its benefits have been embraced, however, and should continue to impact the growth of the institution of fatherhood into more than simple breadwinning or simply gender role modeling. Fatherhood continues to evolve and the culture continues to “report” on this evolution.

As He laid on them an obligation to nourish, preserve, and bring up their offspring, so He has laid on the children a perpetual obligation of honouring their parents ... But this is very far from giving parents a power of command over their children, or an authority to make laws and dispose as they please of their lives and liberties.³⁹

³⁹ Locke, *Works of John Locke*, location 3137-40.

Chapter Two: What Makes a More Involved Father?

It has been said that "... a characteristic of American parents is their uncertainty about how to raise children."⁴⁰ In fact, historians have traced the roots of advice giving in American culture to about 1820. Perhaps one could even say that the most advice given over this history is made to fathers and mothers and centers around how they should raise their children. The form of this advice has taken many forms from books to magazines and, certainly, film and television. Any proper historical view into the institution of fatherhood should include an examination of what these advice giving sources advocated.

As reported in Chapter One, over the years of American history, the definition of the ideal father has grown from the "distant breadwinner" to the "father as nurturer." An examination of history is certainly foremost in the understanding of the reasons and rationale behind the change in the role and meaning of fathers and, specifically, its growth towards its present form. This present "definition" of father as more "involved" or "nurturing" demands more analysis and understanding of its several aspects and varied roles. As stated, the role of parents and fathers in particular has also been discussed and debated through the years, and these debates have come from many intellectual disciplines. So, it emerges as important for an examination of the father as portrayed in the popular arts of movies and television to include a determination of fatherhood's contextual meaning from the viewpoint of sociologists, psychologists, doctors, and other professionals. While changes in American history have resulted in associated changes in fathers, changes in the understanding of the institution of fatherhood from these other

⁴⁰ Robert Winch, quoted by Jerry J. Bigner, "Parent Education in Popular Literature: 1950-1970," *The Family Coordinator* 21, no. 3 (July 1972): 313.

perspectives have also influenced these changes. This chapter endeavors to demonstrate this fact and add context to the understanding of the role of film and television, in this process of change in the institution of fatherhood towards a more positive and influential status in the American family.

A true depiction of the father on screen must also reflect the deeper meaning of father involvement. Enlightenment philosopher John Locke advocated three things a parent can do to show their “involvement” in and influence over the lives of their offspring: rewards, friendship, and shaming.⁴¹ In Locke’s thinking, parents have power and authority over children to a certain age, but that power is conditional rather than natural.⁴² One can also conclude that parents have a limit to this influence because the children eventually become their own persons at some distinct time in the future. And in *The Significance of the Father in the Destiny of the Individual*, which he revised in 1949, Jung wrote: “behind the father stands the archetype of the father, and in this pre-existent archetype lies the secret of the father's power.” The modern father, predominantly because of the institution’s patriarchal tradition, is not in the presence of children as much as the mother, and thus has acquired symbolic significance almost by default, as if psychology has needed to rationalize the absence into something important. The absent or past father models come to represent the mysterious “power” the real fathers lack.⁴³ So again, Jung points out the steep uphill battle that involved (or could one say enlightened) fathers face when trying to overcome the familial stereotypes of the ages. Advancing

⁴¹ Aitken, *The Awkward Spaces of Fathering*, 36. So glad that Locke mentioned shaming, as he is my favorite philosopher and as it was the primary parenting method modeled in my home as a child.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, 7.

forward to the time period of this study, beginning in the 1950s and proceeding to the 1970s, the popular advice giving literature "... was concerned primarily with the topics of socialization of children, parent-child relations, and developmental stages."⁴⁴ Fathers began to also be included in such popular cultural "prescriptions." In 1951, in a book entitled *Fathers Are Parents Too* had this prescription: "To be a successful father ... cooperation, friendliness, respect, understanding, and teamwork ..." were essential.⁴⁵ Interestingly, in this period of post-war economic prosperity, as men began moving into the middle management ranks at their office jobs, such bromides about how to advance in the workplace were effectively re-jiggered to be applicable to fathers who also wished to improve their "performance" in the household.

The foremost proponent for championing the role of the parent during this time was Dr. Benjamin Spock. *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care*, first published in 1945, has been revised and updated many times to conform to the changing standards of parenting over time.⁴⁶ Dr. Spock advocated for changing expectations of fathers, and he did not ignore the historical changes occurring in the institution of fatherhood, including most specifically those that occurred as the result of the changing roles of women and men in society. In fact, he included an entire section in his book on these changes and their effects. Dr. Spock summarizes his aspiration for a "great day" for fathers, when they (his emphasis):

- consider the care of their children to be as important **to them** as their jobs and careers.

⁴⁴ Bigner, "Parent Education in Popular Literature," 314.

⁴⁵ Griswold, "Fatherhood in America," 201.

⁴⁶ This particular parent owns the sixth edition of the book, updated for the 1990s. It is dog-eared and the cover is missing, proving that it has been consulted on many occasions.

- seek out jobs and work schedules that will allow them ample time to be with their wives and children.
- give first consideration, when discussing with their wives where to live, to what favors family life.
- will resist their companies' attempts to move them frequently.
- will let it be known at their workplaces that they take their parental responsibilities very seriously and may have to take time off when their children need them – just as working mothers have always done.
- will try to get other fathers at their workplaces to take the same stands.⁴⁷

Spock spoke to *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1956 and said, "Some fathers have been brought up to think that the care of babies and children is the mother's job entirely. This is the wrong idea."⁴⁸ So, long before the historical father changed, Dr. Spock promoted this change and campaigned for one effective model for "involved" fathers to adopt.

In the 1970s, a more scholarly bent in the study of the institution of fatherhood emerged. In the 1950s these studies focused on the affect on children of the absence of a father, likely due to the fact that many children had lost fathers in World War II. After exhausting this vein of research, a focusing of interest on fathers as active parents occurred as men increased their personal time.⁴⁹ This culminated in one 1987 study where with the researchers felt they had identified the "components" of successful parental involvement: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility.⁵⁰ The result of this work effectively became a caution to fathers who believed that they had reached the pinnacle of good fathering by simply being attentive to their children as suggested by Dr. Spock. Some interesting statistics resulted from these more advanced analyzes: in two-

⁴⁷ Benjamin Spock, M.D., and Michael B. Rothenberg, M.D., *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care* (New York, Pocket Books, 1992), 28-29.

⁴⁸ Dr. Benjamin Spock quoted in Bigner, "Parent Education in Popular Literature," 315-6.

⁴⁹ Sarah J. Schoppe-Sullivan, et al, "Unidimensional Versus Multidimensional Perspectives on Father Involvement," *Fathering* 2, no 2 (Spring 2004): 148.

⁵⁰ LaRossa, "Fatherhood and Social Change," 452-3.

parent families in which the mother is unemployed: fathers spend one-fifth to one-quarter as much time as mothers in an engagement status; about one-third in being accessible. In two parent families with employed mothers, the percentages rise to one-third engaged and 65% accessible. The conclusion: "As far as responsibility is concerned, mothers appear to carry over 90% of the load, regardless of whether they are employed or not."⁵¹ So, while fathers may have a model on how to become involved or nurturing fathers, it seems quite hard for it to be attained without some affect on the mothers involved.

How do these thoughts of philosophers, psychologists, and sociologists, inform the study of fathers in history, other than many great thinkers have recognized the value of studying the institution of fatherhood and how it shapes the culture at large? And that any changes in fatherhood demand facing down what the prevailing culture believes is the role of the father? A review of these thinkers demonstrates that they concur with the historical precedent and agree that that families are best served by fathers who understand the importance of both providing for the family monetarily and interactively. This interaction and its associated multiplying effects on both the children and the father himself can forever defeat the symbolic stereotypical father that Jung recognizes and help fathers achieve the goals listed by Dr. Spock or achieve a balance between the elements of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. An analysis of whether television and movies have advanced the presentation of fathers to include these specific three elements would help reveal its level of success in depicting men as more than breadwinners or gender role models, but as partners with their wives in the nurture of their children and thus have assisted in the positive advancement of the institution of fatherhood.

⁵¹ Ibid.

The practice of responsibility has perhaps been recognized by men since the ancient Greeks as the first and most essential reason for their importance to the family. Responsibility links mightily with the father's drive to be the breadwinner and is the ultimate preoccupation of most men, who are cursed with the primitive mindset to recognize and eliminate the risks associated with the physical needs of the family - food and shelter.⁵² Therefore, many ages ago, a compact resulted. Fathers would act to be most fundamentally "responsible" by accepting their role as breadwinner and they would, in turn, receive the power, prestige and joy that came from fatherhood.⁵³ Movies and television series have presented the father as responsible in many instances, most effectively through the steadfastness of Ward Cleaver or Jim Anderson in the 1950s, for two easy examples. These two programs, *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*, as discussed in the next chapter, solidly depict the fathers as the adults most responsible for the well-being of the family, certainly from the financial standpoint.⁵⁴

In the most elementary understanding of fatherhood, this dynamic where breadwinning was exchanged for power and prestige seems to be an equal and effective trade-off. The quid pro quo of the exchange of effort for prestige came quite naturally to men, and could be easily understood and adjusted as circumstances allowed. Ultimately,

⁵² From the perspective of the amateur psychologist that is the writer of this thesis, this is most interesting because men are naturally incapable of physically feeding a newborn. This role was given to the mother who can easily provide the newborn with "natural" sustenance while the man is reduced to finding "unnatural" sources of food.

⁵³ Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 48-9.

⁵⁴ *Leave It to Beaver*, Starring Jerry Mathers (1957; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD; and *Father Knows Best*, Starring Robert Young (1954; Universal City, CA: Vivendi Visual Entertainment, 2008), DVD.

this condition⁵⁵ over relied on a society that could provide equal opportunity for men seeking employment. A father could only remain “responsible” if able to provide for the family and this condition changes constantly owing to many factors, including the availability of jobs, an increase in wages, and other economic factors. In addition, the need to provide also removed the father from the home for extended periods of time, causing a disconnection from the other aspects of family life. Thus, fathers were sometimes more absent than present in the home. As noted in *Child Study of the 1920s and 30s*:

In modern city life fathers are often hardly more than visitors in the home. The result is that children are growing up with little or no masculine influence in their lives; and many fathers are anxious to find some way by which they can achieve a closer relationship with their children.⁵⁶

The industrialization of employment led men to spend more time outside the home than inside the home. The number of hours fathers had with their children was severely limited as a result. So, while a father’s ability to prove his responsibility rose, his engagement and accessibility faltered. Whenever fathers struggled to connect with their children, this adversely affected the anxiety level of the family. Paradoxically, men realized the worth of a closer relationship with their children, but due to circumstances somewhat beyond their control (and affected by historical changes) could not find the hours necessary to establish this closer connection. Still, some television and movies depicted their primarily breadwinning fathers as recognizing the value of a closer relationship with their children and its value above and beyond the impact on their

⁵⁵ I vowed I would not use the word “paradigm” in this thesis.

⁵⁶ Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 95.

working man role. The evidence for this claim can be seen in the change in Mr. Banks, the father of the children in *Mary Poppins*, as further explained in Chapter Four.

Contemporaneously with this revelation by fathers, researchers began to study this family dynamic to understand its affects on the personality development of children. One study done by a noted sociologist "...discovered a connection between father-child closeness and well-adjusted personality development."⁵⁷ Interviews with children who did not have close ties with their fathers described them as "... distant, unaffectionate, disapproving, and cruel in punishment, unreasonable and arbitrary in discipline, cold, stern, or unsympathetic."⁵⁸ So, obviously, a complete focus on responsibility by the father has a serious downside.

There are also perils associated with the simple addition of more engagement and accessibility to the father's interactions with the family and the children. In effect, more hours engaged and accessible to the children does not a better father make. In the early days of understanding the adverse affects of simple breadwinning on the family, men responded by taking on easy additional roles. Fathers simply added more play and leisure time to their interaction with the children, but did not even consider adding more "caretaking" tasks. In fact, the father simply added time with both the spouse and children, not the children exclusively, as this would force them to become more responsible for the mundane tasks of child-rearing.⁵⁹ The movies and TV of the 1950s reflect this: one did not see George Banks, the father played by Spencer Tracy in *Father*

⁵⁷ Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 105.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Wall et al, "How Involved is Involved Fathering?," 510.

of the *Bride* in the kitchen.⁶⁰ An easy solution to the over-reliance on responsibility by the father adds to his “tool chest” the role of playmate, vacation organizer, willing advice giver, and keeper of the additional ten-dollar bill when a child asks for one.⁶¹ The relatively safe economic environment of the 1950s allowed men to take time away from work to dedicate additional time to nurture, but they still seemed to do so only when called upon: skinned knees, playground bullies, learning to ride a bike. In actuality, and in the opinion of sociologists, these actions simply had the father “substitute” for the mother, and they did not rise to the level of an enhancement for either the father or the child. This took more work on the part of the father and, thus, presented a more challenging role for a parent who more easily understood responsibility.

In the 1960s, after women began to demand work outside the home for their personal and financial improvement, fathers easily added the role of “companion” to their children to support this new reality. This scenario enters the imagination quite easily: woman (mother) leaves the man (father) home with the children; woman leaves man with list of things to do and list of where items can be found in the house; woman may also make all the meals and leave them and instructions in how to cook them in writing with the man. Thus, the mother retains the responsibility for the care of the child and simply helps the father become a companion and playmate to the child. The more complete change from the father as mommy-helper to the father as truly engaged would take more time and more effort.⁶² This development comes to life in the film *Kramer vs. Kramer*,

⁶⁰ Unless, of course, the writers used the one kitchen scene for laughs as he was “trapped” there mixing cocktails for the many guests arriving for his daughter’s engagement party.

⁶¹ Somehow, although my father, George McGowan, Jr., was not a wealthy man, he always had cash in his pocket when his children asked for some.

⁶² Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 6-7.

especially the two contrasting scenes of Dustin Hoffman as Ted Kramer making breakfast for his son. In the beginning of the film, just after Ted Kramer's wife leaves him, Ted attempts to make breakfast, and the viewer can see that he treats the task as a chore. Later in the film, after Ted Kramer realizes his true role as more complete parent, the same breakfast becomes a wonderful depiction of the bond established by the father and son after their trials and tribulations caused by the "loss" of their wife/mother.⁶³ These actions and consequences are further examined in Chapter Five.

Only when men became comfortable with a stable means to maintain their responsibility over the family could they become comfortable with altering their daily existence to include what many term "quality time" with their family. At this time, which occurred most prominently and first in the 1920s and 1930s in America, middle class men began to pay greater attention to their "personal life." Thus, fathers began to examine fatherhood and how it enhanced the meaning of their life. Because the family's financial needs were being met, men had an opportunity to examine the quality of their lives. "Such concern was part of a new cultural emphasis on 'growth,' 'personality,' and the pursuit of material well-being."⁶⁴ Men began to seek out experts to assist them in enhancing their lives beyond the workplace. It seems that men knew that an element of change was needed to improve their lives as fathers, but they did not know how to achieve this change. Men of this time were simply drawn to a greater role in the family and like with traditional "breadwinning," they assumed that more time equaled more

⁶³ *Kramer vs. Kramer*, Directed by Robert Benton (1979; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2001), Amazon Instant Video.

⁶⁴ Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 91.

results. Men sought counsel rather than using their natural instincts to drive their change from chiefly responsible to engaged and accessible. A change began taking place, but it was far from a transformation.⁶⁵

Interestingly, those fathers who indeed transformed themselves into more than “breadwinner,” positively affected their ability to survive the brutality of the Great Depression. This time of great challenge in the workplace reinforced the need for fathers to be more than providers and those fathers who had embraced the period of New Fatherhood of the early twentieth century were better able to adjust to the loss of a job and still maintain a level of influence and example over their children. So, a man’s ability to add engagement and accessibility to their skills as fathers better enabled them to better react to the challenge of a lack of financial resources. The result: another paradox for the man who thought that providing for the family represented their one and only contribution to familial success.⁶⁶ Essentially, the effectiveness of individuals outside the family contrasts directly with the effectiveness of individuals inside the family. Outside the family, independence, individuality, and rational thinking are valued. Inside the family, sharing, cooperation, and non-rational sacrifices are valued.⁶⁷ How does a father best learn about these traits and put them into effective action if he wants to improve his abilities as a father? The popular culture of movies and television has been very effective at showing these traits in action, as will be shown in the following chapters.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 120-125.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 146-7.

⁶⁷ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, Kindle location 465.

Imagine the men of the Great Depression, struggling financially, feeling incapable, and almost a burden to the family because they had no role other than provider. It was not until the power of the media extended into movies (starring the most well known personalities of the day) and television (which delivered images directly into a person's home) that a delivery of information about the many aspects that made a truly great father could be made convincingly. In many cases, these popular cultural items demonstrated a new way of parenting, showing how avant garde society had become and how these changes affected families for the better. Movies and television did not present these changes in a direct way, which heightened their ability to show the real world in a more meaningful way and helped solidify the connections made. Hardly anything happens overnight, and the incremental changes made in the depiction of fathers in movies and television show the viewing public how the adjustments that occur organically inside the intimate family unit help it adjust and enhance family life for the better.⁶⁸ Television programs such as *The Cosby Show*, both extremely popular and long-running, delivered a model of parenting and, particularly, fatherhood which "... Because of its positive approach to family life and its equally positive values and standards ...” delivered with each episode a new value.⁶⁹ Additionally, these values combined and multiplied as the viewing audience saw each child grow from one stage to another over the course of the series. These changes can be described thusly:

Rudy has developed from being a totally dependent preschooler to a more self-asserting grade-schooler. Vanessa has changed from an annoying, quirky pre-teen to a charming, generally thoughtful teenager. Theo has shifted from being

⁶⁸ John W. Jordan, "Good and Bad Fathers as Moral Rhetoric in Wall Street," *Fathering* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 182.

⁶⁹ C.J. Blair. "Writing about 'The Cosby Show'" *The English Journal* 77, no. 6 (October 1988): 61.

boyishly irresponsible to being more self-reliant. Denise has grown from an overtly funky high schooler to a busy, self-directed college freshman. Sandra, who appeared very seldom originally, has matured from a predictably moody college student to a more resilient adult.⁷⁰

One will see without a doubt that these changes resulted from the involved parenting style of Heathcliff Huxtable, as further explained in Chapter Six.

Before an examination of selected examples of the popular culture of movies and television can be reviewed for its possible affects on the institution of fatherhood, it should be pointed out that Hollywood portrayals of fathers and fatherhood and their relation to the historical context of the time can be particularly complex. One cannot simply review the presentation of the family on the movie or television screen at face value. The following commentary summarizes how Hollywood presented fathers in a helpful breakdown of its periods, as follows:

the later 1940s espoused relatively radical opinions of the father, while the 1950s championed traditionalism; the 1960s and 1970s saw this traditionalism broken down, while the 1980s sought to reinstate it; and finally in the 1990s and 2000s, there has been a return to more liberal attitudes, with a further relaxation of gender divisions and a considerable broadening and redefinition of the father's image and role.⁷¹

So, Hollywood has presented the institution of fatherhood by delivering images that reinforced stereotypes and delivered content to those satisfied with the status quo. Upon viewing, some of the more popular and far-reaching films and television shows reflected additional positive changes occurring in the households of America. Hollywood producers and writers also recognize that parenting and fatherhood are easy to present as a well understood focus of American life but must be done with some nod to the

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, vii.

complications and pitfalls which can beset a family. Because of these sensitive portrayals of the good, the bad, and the ugly of family life and, in particular, fatherhood, a convincing argument occurs whereby Hollywood has contributed in some way to an advance in the “cause” of creating more involved fathers by presenting examples of fathers that combine responsibility with accessibility and engagement.

God hath made it their business to employ this care on their offspring, and hath placed in them suitable inclinations of tenderness and concern to temper this power, to apply it as His wisdom designed it, to the children's good as long as they should need to be under it.⁷²

⁷² Locke, *Works of John Locke*, location 3106.

Chapter Three: “Dad” the Friendly, Masculine Provider

No matter how you “say” it, “Dad,” “Pop,” or “Father,” the television and film fathers of the 1950s were portrayed chiefly as the stereotypical “breadwinner.” Upon some deeper examination, although they most often existed on screen arrayed in their business suit and tie, they could not be easily classified as “absent” or disengaged from their family’s life. Instead, these fathers showed true and absolute engagement with their family, and demonstrated their accessibility and responsibility for the health of their family.⁷³ Why begin with the 1950s? Two reasons: one, prior to this time, television did not predominate and filmed entertainment had not entered the home where these portrayals could more easily “take root,” and two, (generally) the films of the 1940s were preoccupied with portraying men as strong, silent types, to show the world the strength of the American male during a time of worldwide strife. Simply, the reason for not including the films of the 1940s is because the image of fathers portrayed on screen did not truly reflect the times.⁷⁴ During this time, Hollywood did not embrace the dominant thinking of the time on fatherhood, “. . . the kindly ‘new father’ image was a rarity in the 1940s. *Fort Apache*, *House of Strangers* and *The Heiress* form a potent trio of movies (all released between 1948 and 1949) which exemplify Hollywood’s bias towards strong,

⁷³ Often, the wives of these men were either absent or ciphers of the typical mother. It seems that June Cleaver of *Leave It to Beaver* lived her life either making dinner or lunch sandwiches, while Ellie Banks of the original *Father of the Bride* existed to roll her eyes at the doings of her husband as they planned their daughter’s wedding. This is a topic for another person’s thesis.

⁷⁴ Of course, there are some films of the 1940s that ran counter to this trend, including *Teresa* and *The Search*. Bruzzi felt that Hollywood’s portrayal of the father during this period was “deeply ambivalent” which is another reason for beginning this analysis in the 1950s as fathers’ roles became more “enlightened.”

authoritarian fathers."⁷⁵ Finally, the 1950s "... elevated family life to a level of sacredness never before witnessed in our history."⁷⁶

A comprehensive examination of all of the films and television shows of the 1950s would be quite an undertaking, so a selection of the more popular films and shows or those most known widely has been made to assist to make this examination worthwhile and informative.⁷⁷ Examining television fathers first, one becomes drawn to the examples of Ward Cleaver, portrayed by Hugh Beaumont, of *Leave It to Beaver* which aired from 1957 to 1963, and Jim Anderson, portrayed by Robert Young, of *Father Knows Best* which aired from 1954 to 1960. An examination of the fictional Cleaver and Anderson families is important as they show a "... model contemporary family life ... " and scholars have identified such models as having "... been viewed as important socializing agents ... " in their time.⁷⁸ These two television fathers obviously succeeded as both businessmen and good providers to their families. They were often shown at work and also shown working in the home in the evenings. They easily portrayed the value of hard work and providing for the family, as each of the family homes appeared to be well appointed and comfortable. What elevates the interest in these men and which is somewhat contrary to the historical breadwinning father of early America is the amount of satisfaction and self-development that they gain from their

⁷⁵ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, 20.

⁷⁶ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 161.

⁷⁷ In addition, the inclusion of both film and television is made to gather the perspective across the two chief forms of filmed entertainment of the day. It is acknowledged that this is not a true or comprehensive film or television study, but rather a synthesis of the presentations of the fathers in this time period using the viewpoint of the history of the father and using the portrayals chiefly known to this writer.

⁷⁸ Timothy Allen Pehlke, et al, "Does Father Still Know Best? An Inductive Thematic Analysis of Popular TV Sitcoms," *Fathering* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 115.

interactions in the home. These fathers showed nurturing qualities long before it became an important factor in the development of a well-rounded father. Interestingly, a more complete study into these fathers revealed similarities between television fathers' behavior and those that began to be seen in real-life fathers, such as interacting one-on-one, being available when needed, and looking out for the child's well being.⁷⁹ It should also be said, however, that this study also reveals that real life fathers do these things on a sufficiently smaller scale than the amount shown in movies and television.⁸⁰ No matter how broad or deep the effect, it cannot be argued that these television fathers did not reflect the positive changes occurring in the institution of fatherhood through their depiction of men struggling with conflicted feelings and showing their ability to adjust their initial reactions to the events of their families from the stereotypical reaction to better informed and nurturing actions. In an episode of *Leave it to Beaver* called "The Broken Window," after the boys break a window in their house while playing ball in the street, Ward Cleaver relates to the boys that if he had broken a window as a kid, he would be expected to pay for it. "And I would get a nice taste of the strap, as well."⁸¹ In contrast, later in the show, when the boys relate their punishment to their friend Eddie Haskell, they come to know the contrasting styles of fatherhood of their day: Eddie explains that he would have gotten it "across the puss" if he had broken a window in this house.⁸² Similarly, in an episode of *Father Knows Best* called "Father of the Year," Jim

⁷⁹ Pehlke, et al, "Does Father Still Know Best?," 135-6.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ *Leave It to Beaver*, Starring Jerry Mathers (1957; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD.

⁸² Ibid.

Anderson instructs his children against their insistence on getting involved in some questionable activities and, after these events crash down upon the kids, refrains from using these examples as fodder to demonstrate his authority and supreme knowledge of the world. Interestingly, this episode revolves around the town's call for entries into a "Father of the Year" contest and the Anderson children struggled throughout the episode to write the requisite twenty-five words needed for their nomination. The children recognize that their father deserves the honor and they recite at the end of the episode their reasoning: "We think our father Jim Anderson should be named Father of the Year because he is our guidepost on the road of life. Although we stray from paths he's marked so right, he doesn't say 'I told you so.'"⁸³

More than showing the nurturing side of fathers, these television fathers certainly formed the "gender role model" explained by historians as the dominant role of fathers from 1940 to 1965. These fathers began to balance work and life and take a greater role in instructing their children how to become a productive member of society, especially in the role that society had set aside for men and women at that time. A great example of the father as "gender role model" is found in one film father of this period, Stanley Banks, portrayed by Spencer Tracy in the 1950 film, *Father of the Bride*. In this film, the character of Stanley Banks presents as the dominant patriarchal figure of his family, but with a soft spot for his daughter Kay (as portrayed by Elizabeth Taylor). He has a firm opinion about the role of men and women in the household and demonstrates it daily. His existence as the patriarch of the family becomes tenuous as his daughter falls in love with a suitor. Rather than maintain control of his household, Stanley gets pushed aside by the

⁸³ *Father Knows Best*, Starring Robert Young (1954; Universal City, CA: Vivendi Visual Entertainment, 2008), DVD.

planning of his daughter's wedding. The involvement of the father, even as the blustering, non-committal, worry wart, reinforced the stereotype of acceptable male behavior and acceptable female behavior in the household and society in general. In fact, some believe that the wedding itself is the ultimate demonstration of the gender roles of fathers and mothers:

... it is largely because of *Father of the Bride* that the wedding, couched as a paternal as well as a young woman's, rite of passage, has become entrenched in our national culture, a defining trope of family, masculinity, and the attainment of womanhood.⁸⁴

In addition to the plans for the wedding, the bumbling father of *Father of the Bride* also becomes quite concerned about the prospects of the man entering the life of his household and, ultimately, taking the innocence of his lovely daughter. In a hilarious scene, Stanley Banks, who has insisted on getting to know the business of his daughter's fiancé to be sure he can provide for her, dominates the conversation with his opinions on the role of the man in society and expounds endlessly upon this philosophy. All the while, the gentleman suitor, who came prepared with his business records and all manner of proof of his worthiness, is reduced to the simple recipient of Banks' worldly wisdom. Ultimately, the conversation ends with no exchange of information from the suitor! Rather than actually learning about the fiancé, Banks has received satisfaction that this man is willing and able to "learn from the master" about what makes a good family man and a good provider for his daughter.⁸⁵ He establishes his satisfaction with this man, ultimately because he was not too independent and seemed to accept the admonishments

⁸⁴ Rachel Devlin, *Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 109.

⁸⁵ *Father of the Bride*, Directed by Vincente Minnelli (1950; Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers), Amazon Instant Video.

of Banks without question. Banks demonstrates how a father of the chaste 1950s would likely choose to be a true gender role model by simply lecturing the young man. Banks shows his pleasure that nothing near an exchange of ideas on this difficult subject occurred, but he feels he “did his duty” in any case.

Another more general example of how the films of the 1950s managed to link the father and daughter and portray how each individual’s role in the family influenced the other was the “bobby soxer” film genre. This genre which primarily presented the life of a 1950s adolescent girl and her associated travails and triumphs, and linked the father and daughter in an interesting way, using them as models of acceptable and appropriate behavior by men and women of the time. It showed the changing mores of the era, as fathers became more interested in what happened to their adolescent daughters, what they read, wore, who they saw socially and romantically and, in turn, showed that adolescent girls of this time valued the opinion of their father in these matters. An example of this phenomenon exists (to some degree) in the father and daughter relationship in *Father of the Bride*, although one could not classify this film as necessarily one of the bobby soxer genre. One historian summarized this symbiotic father-daughter phenomenon thusly:

The conventions that governed these films were rigid: ... the professional reputation and economic fortunes of the father are tied directly to the daughter's status in the eyes of the community; and the daughter's sexual identity is, in turn, linked to the father's professional success.⁸⁶

It should be noted that the films of the 1950s also have two fine examples of the changing nature of the relationship between the father and the son of this time period, as well. This changing nature showed the struggle of young men of this period to differentiate themselves from the conventional and establish for themselves a post-war identity

⁸⁶ Devlin, *Relative Intimacy*, 102.

distinct from their father's generation. One commenter summarizes this as an Oedipal struggle "... with a father figure the sons equivocally which to both reject and to emulate."⁸⁷ The two great examples of this are *East of Eden* and *Rebel Without a Cause* both starring James Dean as the conflicted son looking for and simultaneously rejecting any guidance from his father. These father-son relationships can be described as "... fraught, excessive and ... hysterical re-enactments of far more ambitious images of masculinity and fatherhood."⁸⁸ Yes, one can easily characterize these portrayals of family life as fraught; it seems that the expression on James Dean's face in these films was perpetually fraught. These two films have become classics, however, because they reflected the time and they did not shy away from presenting the darker side of familial dynamics. They stand in complete contrast with the portrayals on television as discussed earlier. In fact, movies such as *East of Eden* and *Rebel Without a Cause* "...expressed fears about youths whose parents had failed them."⁸⁹ In each film, the son experiences trouble *because* his father is either distant (*East of Eden*) or overly involved (*Rebel Without a Cause*). Perhaps the most iconic aspect of these two films is how the son, while being rebellious, yearns for the typical, serene and stable domestic life. In *Rebel Without a Cause*, one extended sequence involves the three principal youths of the film, James Dean as Jim Stark, Natalie Wood as Judy, and Sal Mineo as Plato, running away from their troubled homes only to "establish" a new home in an abandoned mansion with Jim

⁸⁷ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, 50-51.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 55-56.

⁸⁹ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, Kindle location 774.

as father, Judy as mother and Plato as child.⁹⁰ So, paradoxically, the film shows a "... a celebration of the nuclear family - not the ones that the three teenage waifs were given by nature but rather the alternative family that they were able to create for themselves."⁹¹ Interestingly, this reflects an observation of the period of history known as the "New Fatherhood" of the burgeoning post-war industrial age in America. During this time, breadwinning fathers, who no longer relied on their male children to assist them in their work, faced the fact that their sons were joining a "...youth culture with standards and values often at odds with those of their parents."⁹² As fathers became better breadwinners and the children were not needed to contribute to the success of the family from a resources standpoint, children became different themselves. Children sought to find and define themselves outside the home, which brought more challenges into child-rearing. These challenges certainly presented in these two films starring James Dean, as he became the period's icon for the troubled young male soul and the rebel who seeks to become more than his father. Many cite the character of Frank Stark, as portrayed by Jim Bacchus, as the stereotypical milquetoast father, domineered by his wife, and thus, repulsive to a son on the verge of young manhood. One only simply describe the scene in which Jim Bacchus greets his son, home after a trying day at a new school, while wearing a flowered apron.⁹³ Just the sight of this "man" drives his son into a type of madness.

⁹⁰ *Rebel Without a Cause*, Directed by Nicholas Ray (1955; Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers), Amazon Instant Video.

⁹¹ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 163.

⁹² Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 141.

⁹³ *Rebel Without a Cause*, Directed by Nicolas Ray, Warner Brothers.

Quite the same thing happens in *East of Eden* and does so by recalling the age old biblical story of Cain and Abel. In *East of Eden*, two brothers vie for the favorable attention of their father. One son represents “good” (Aron Trask) while the other (Cal Trask played by James Dean) represents that “not so good.” Their father, Adam, works primarily as a farmer, but is also businessman and the chairman of the local draft board. At the outset of the film, we learn that the father has been keeping a great secret, that his wife and the boys’ mother is not dead, but alive and running a brothel in an adjoining town. Being the troubled soul, Cal finds out about his mother and visits her since he has never felt that his father has loved him. Cal has always felt rebellious and acts on his tendency to prefer living life outside the boundaries that his strict father has erected for him. Adam Trask has steadfastly set an example for his sons and maintains this example through any and all trials set upon him by Cal’s behavior. Somehow, this steadfastness bothers Cal and he attempts to win his father’s affection with a get rich quick scheme involving planting beans and speculating that their price will rise with the start of the war. When this scheme succeeds, Cal believes he will win back his father’s affection by offering him his profits. To Cal’s great dismay, the ever-steady and righteous father rejects the gift. Cal is rightfully devastated and fights back by telling Aron the truth about his mother. This creates a face-off between Cal and his father

Adam Trask: Where’s Aron?

Cal Trask: I don’t know. I’m not my brother’s keeper.

Adam: Where did you go?

Cal: For a ride.

Adam: What did you quarrel about?

Cal: You.

Adam: You are angry about the money.

Cal: Nah, I'm not angry. I like it. I think it's great. I'm gonna go away and Im'ma take that money with me and start me a little business. Just like my mother did.

Adam: What do you know about your mother?

Cal: Where she is and what she is and I know why she left you. Couldn't stand it. You really didn't love her any more than you do me. 'Cause your goodness, your rightness, you never gave either one of us an inch, ever, for what you thought was right. You kept on forgivin' us, you never really loved us. I know why you didn't love me. 'Cause I'm like my mother and you never forgave yourself for having loved her.

(To Abra, Aron's fiancée)

I'm not gonna forgive him. I'm never gonna forgive him.

Adam: Where is Aron?

Cal: He's with her, with his mother. She's over there in Monterey, if you want to know. She owns one of them houses. I took Aron there tonight because I was jealous. I've been jealous all my life. Jealous, I couldn't even stand it. Tonight, I even tried to buy your love. But now I don't want it anymore. I can't use it anymore.

Abra: Don't talk to your father like that.

Cal: I don't want any kind of love anymore. It doesn't pay off. No future in it.⁹⁴

While Cal rejects his father's kind of love, he eventually comes to know that love is not given only to be reciprocated and that the "tough love" of his father has more meaning than love that is bought and sold. The characters of this film demonstrate that fatherly love and affection takes many forms and all of them lead to the deeper involvement of the father in the lives of their children. Breaking away from the "distant breadwinner" they show their children the role of a good man, a good father, and demonstrate exactly what that means through their actions.

⁹⁴ *East of Eden*. Directed by Elia Kazan. (1955; Burbank, CA. Warner Home Video). DVD.

While these television and film images of the 1950s father may conflict in tone, they no doubt reflect the culture of their times and, in fact, demonstrate the changing universe of familial relations. Fathers are becoming expected to be much more than the “distant breadwinner,” leaving the mother to do the domestic chores and model the behaviors acceptable in their children. On television, Ward Cleaver and Jim Anderson showed that the breadwinner could be more to the family, bringing home the resources for their household but also demonstrating patience and understanding while also maintaining their hold as the ultimate example of how the male should behave in modern society. On film, Stanley Banks reinforced this ideal, changing from being the incompetent and bumbling family man to become the seeming sense of reason and stable “rock” of the family during stressful times. As an alternative, and not without being equally effective in showing how fathers adjusted to the demands of the time, the 1955 films starring James Dean showed how dysfunctional families can also depict the ideal in another more sophisticated manner and, perhaps, could more effectively influence the culture of the time. In fact, one could argue that these two iconic films, by presenting the family, “warts and all,” were more influential in the long term. This is certainly reflected in the continuing popularity of these films and the iconic standing of their star through the years. The films and television shows of the 1950s established a positive beginning to the breaking down of the stereotype of fathers as simply providers who operated separate and above the realities of raising children in a modern world. The next chapter will examine whether these positive changes in the institution of fatherhood were maintained or suffered by the changes in society that presented in the 1960s and 1970s, including the

rise of woman being liberated from the household as their only place to find meaning and significance in the world.

Chapter Four: Tradition Subverted and Upended

In the early 1960s, films and television shows continued to depict fathers as the stable, unwavering positive influence on the lives of their children but with a decided quirk in their familial circumstances. Some have said that this occurrence was a reaction to the staid television programming of the 1950s where entertainment producers looked for alternatives to the typical family of four (or more) headed by the stable mother and father. The early family films produced by Disney, including *Pinocchio* and *Dumbo* from the 1940s, and *The Sword in the Stone* from the early 1960s, depicted single-parent families and were wildly popular and thematically challenging for the viewers. Writers embraced these changes in family make-up as potential fodder for new and interesting story lines and situations that would capture the attention of the public as the number of television programs expanded exponentially. One researcher explained the trend: “The television media is known to consider ongoing social changes when developing its programming content, and this preponderance of single parent male headed households may reflect what producers consider to be future trends in family structure.”⁹⁵

By the end of the decade, a radical new voice emerged which transformed the image of the family in the popular culture. During the early part of this decade, and very curiously, fathers were depicted as singlehandedly raising their children.⁹⁶ The two greatest examples of this interesting quirk in the depiction of fathers on screen are *The*

⁹⁵ Paula W. Dail and Wendy L. Way. “What Do Parents Observe about Parenting from Prime Time Television,” *Family Relations* 34, no. 4 (October 1985): 497.

⁹⁶ Some film and television titles from this period include: *My Three Sons*, *Bachelor Father*, *Family Affair*, and *The Courtship of Eddie’s Father* (both a film and a television show) which all featured single fathers raising families at the pre-dawn of the feminist era.

Andy Griffith Show on television and *To Kill a Mockingbird* on film. Both of these icons of the 1960s are set in the rural south, both feature a father raising a family as a single parent, both have fathers that are central figures and role models in their communities. These films and television shows of the early decade “...valorizes the lone father ...” making him into the “... perfect composite parent (the maternal surrogate as well) who has renounced any need for sexual attachment of a new wife because his family is all he needs.”⁹⁷ While the two fathers, Andy Taylor and Atticus Finch, of these two examples of the cultural depiction of domesticity of this time period reflect generally the same values of the fathers of the 1950s, because of their circumstances as single fathers, the “typical” becomes subverted in a subtle way. Because these two fathers have dueling responsibilities of work and family life, they are forced to include their children in their work life on some occasions. So, while they fully embrace the traditional role of the father in child-rearing, with each hiring domestic help to take care of most day-to-day child-rearing activities, they also combine the traditional with a more active role in the lives of their children. This reflects the changes occurring in the actions of fathers in the “real world” where fathers began to guide and coach their children more than demand their children change because of some unexplained edict passed down from on high.

In several episodes of *The Andy Griffith Show* and in several memorable scenes in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the father and the child are alone and discussing a situation that had occurred and the father took the role of questioner and guider to gain the child’s trust.⁹⁸ In the third season of *The Andy Griffith Show*, Andy begins courting the new town

⁹⁷ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, 85.

⁹⁸ Just close your eyes and imagine hearing Andy Griffith say these words: “I thought that maybe you and me should have ourselves a little talk ...”

nurse, Miss Peggy. This event concerns his son Opie who becomes jealous of this budding relationship. In Season 3, Episode 10 “Opie’s Rival,” Opie does all he can to ensure that his father and Miss Peggy do not get together for a date and effectively causes a spat between Andy and Peggy. As with many episodes of this show, it features a one-on-one exchange between Andy and Opie Taylor, which summarizes how Andy’s love for his son outshines all of the other events in his life:

Andy: You’re my youngster, and I love you more than anything or anybody in the whole world and nothing or nobody can ever change that. You know it’s hard for me to tell you just how much you do mean to me. You’re a part of me.

Opie: Then why do you want Peggy around so much?

Andy: Well, because she is fun to be with and she’s nice to have as a friend.

Opie: But you have a good friend, you’ve got Barney.

Andy: Well, that’s a little different. You may not understand this right now but sometime you will. You see Op, a man needs the companionship of a good woman. Someone he can be with and talk to, talk about pretty things, take to places like the picture show and dance. Can you see me taking Barney to a dance? I can’t take Barney to a dance. He’s too short.

You know sometime I might get married again. It might not be Peggy but it’ll be somebody. Somebody I like a lot, somebody I love. But nothing or nobody will ever change things between me and you. Because you’re my son and we’re buddies. Right?

Opie: Pa, can we go fishing tomorrow?⁹⁹

The next morning, Andy wakes to find Opie has gone out early and Andy wonders why since they agreed to go fishing. He walks outside and sees Opie with Miss Peggy strolling

⁹⁹ *The Andy Griffith Show*. Starring Andy Griffith. (1962; Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Television), Hulu Plus.

up to his house, both carrying fishing poles. Opie explains that if someday Miss Peggy marries his father, she needs to know how to fish properly.

There are also several instances when Atticus Finch talks one-on-one with his daughter Scout. As when he speaks to her about fighting at school and explains that no matter what she hears at school about the case of Tom Robinson, she is not to rise to any taunts by fighting. During this scene, Scout is wrapped in the protective arms of her father. Both Andy Taylor and Atticus Finch demonstrate to all viewers of the importance of the father fully engaged with his children. In these cases, as an additional comment on the need for fathers to treat their children with respect, in many cases, the child himself or herself reaches their own conclusion on how their behavior was unwarranted and wrong and the child has determined the solution to the problem using their own words. The strong example of these two fathers' engagement and accessibility substituted a better way than the traditional father who presented solutions as easy bromides or edicts handed down from the ages. One sees goodness in these fathers, goodness which manifests itself as a compromise between traditional fathering and active involvement in child care.¹⁰⁰ Their actions rose to be greater than their words; and their example, and thus, their standing in town in the eyes of their neighbors, was seen by their children as the reason for changing their behavior. These subverted depictions of father-child relations have lingered in the collective memory of every person who has watched these truly special cultural artifacts.

Since both *The Andy Griffith Show* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* continue to be aired somewhat regularly on television to this day, these positive (but certainly

¹⁰⁰ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, 88-89.

alternative to those of the 1950s) depictions of fathers are reinforced for the men of one generation and represented to other men of later generations time and time again.¹⁰¹ The example of fatherhood shown by these two men, Andy Taylor and Atticus Finch, models for any father the traits that would work to his benefit and for his children's benefit.

Another very popular film of this time period, one experienced by some families over generations, is the Disney classic, *Mary Poppins*. Upon initial consideration, one cannot imagine this film could have anything to say about the role of fathers in raising children. The film is most often recognized as a tour-de-force for its effervescent star, Julie Andrews as the title character. A closer analysis of the film shows an interesting arc in the outlook of the father of the bratty children being watched over by Mary Poppins. In one's judgment, "... the character who undergoes the most radical change over the course of the film is the father ..."¹⁰² The cinematic father, Mr. Banks, appears overwhelmed by his responsibility to his family. While certainly a fine aspect of an involved father, it eventually overcomes him. Mr. Banks' actions, though in many others eyes seem a mockery, receive some sympathy and understanding from Bert, played by Dick Van Dyke, in this scene with Mr. Banks' children, Jane and Michael:

Bert: Let's sit down. You know, begging your pardon, but the one that my heart goes out to is your father. There he is in that cold, heartless bank day after day, hemmed in by mounds of cold, heartless money. I don't like to see any living thing caged up.

Jane: Father in a cage?

Bert: They makes cages in all sizes and shapes, you know. Bank-shaped some of 'em, carpets and all.

¹⁰¹ Don Rodney Vaughn has this to say about the lingering influence of *The Andy Griffith Show*: it "...is a nostalgic American popular cultural masterpiece valid for all time."

¹⁰² Unger, *Men Can*, 114.

Jane: Father is not in trouble. We are.

Bert: Oh, sure about that, are you? Look at it this way. You've got your mother to look after you. And Mary Poppins, and Constable Jones and me. Who looks after your father? Tell me that. When something terrible happens, what does he do? Fends for himself, he does. Who does he tell about it? No one! Don't blab his troubles at home. He just pushes on at his job, uncomplaining and alone and silent.¹⁰³

Since this is a children's story, although consternation abounds when Banks loses his job and the family panics when he doesn't return home, instead of tragedy, there is change. Banks realizes that one can be both a good breadwinner and good father and neither one need suffer at the other's "hand." An interesting and informative little sub-plot regarding what a father should be exists in a major film aimed at children. The family entertainment behemoth, Disney, also embraced fathers subverting tradition and becoming more than automatons and providers. These examples reinforce the idea that the culture of the 1960s believed that fathers are integral components of a well-oiled family and successful families have a father that understands that his role extends from more than simply breadwinning into sharing the role of nurturer with the mother. This condition was a reaction due to the changes occurring in women. Unless the father expanded into more of a nurturing role, it would remain vacant as mothers began to demand more independence and engagement outside the home. In these early years of feminism, a nurturing void began to form and the more enlightened fathers chose to fill it themselves rather than allow it to be unfilled.

One can see that the early 1960s included some interesting and forward-thinking depictions of a more enlightened father. Just as interesting was the almost complete marginalization of women in these depictions. In some films and television shows, this

¹⁰³ Ibid, 118.

marginalization became rather obvious as no central female parental roles appeared on the screen at all. Somewhat funnily prescient in *Mary Poppins*, the mother is distracted by her political activity as a suffragette. One can point this fact out as an easy indicator for the coming feminist and activist age of the latter years of the 1960s and its associated affect on families and children. It remains certain, however, that the changes coming in the latter part of this decade in the women's movement certainly had an influence over the fathers of this time. In fact, this become one of the subplots of perhaps the most culturally influential television shows of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Norman Lear's *All in the Family*. By the end of the 1960s, the venerated middle-class "domestic patriarch" of the 1950s and early 1960s virtually disappeared and was replaced by a working-class blowhard, Archie Bunker.¹⁰⁴ Rather than showing the man of the family as a well-intentioned and all-knowing sage, the late 1960s introduced the aging patriarch as the butt of jokes because of their tendency to remain locked in the past and be openly hostile to the changes occurring in the present. Archie Bunker would begin many of his sentences with these words: "In my day ..." and would fight against the changes occurring all around him, including the independence of his daughter Gloria as she became involved herself in the nascent woman's movement. Thus, television programmers became somewhat obsessed with presenting the intergenerational conflicts that came to the forefront as the young people of the late 1960s and early 1970s began to push back against tradition. Hollywood embraced the dramatic and comedic possibilities of such change, often "... stressing the traditional father's maladjustment or anguish" at

¹⁰⁴ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 191.

the situation that the modern world presented them during this time.¹⁰⁵ There exists no better example of maladjustment or anguish during this period than Archie Bunker. *All in the Family* had all the “hallmarks” of a typical domestic family situation comedy. It showed a family in their home, a mother and a father with a daughter, but it turns this typical set-up on its head. The daughter is grown and married but still lives at home with her husband. The father is working class and apparently undereducated (compared to his peers in the 1950s), and most importantly, the outside world now intrudes on the insularity of the family that the television shows of the previous decade presented. One could easily argue that the outside world (in the form of race, sex, war, and politics) could be considered as one of the major “characters” on *All in the Family*. Most episodes show how the father of the family acts to resist allowing any social change to change him or his family. A fine description of Archie Bunker explains that Archie

resists anything new, alien, outside. His home is not a castle, it is a barricade ... from which he literally evicts wife-swappers, black neighbors, convicts, strangers, and un-invited relatives. But Archie also has other barricades. He uses derogatory names for 'foreigners' - Americans of Italian, Spanish, and Jewish ancestry, and blacks.¹⁰⁶

Thus, television sitcoms did more than model behavior; they began to present unconventional (and even unacceptable) behavior. This new reality took some time to catch on among viewers but ultimately, an “age of relevance” was ushered in by *All in the Family*.¹⁰⁷ Because of this new relevance, the impact of the themes presented by this program became more meaningful to those who watched it. The more realistic, the more

¹⁰⁵ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, xii.

¹⁰⁶ Ronald Berman, “Sitcoms,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 21 (Spring 1987): 13

¹⁰⁷ Ella Taylor. “From the Nelsons to the Huxtables: Genre and Family Imagery in American Network Television,” *Qualitative Sociology* 12 (Spring 1989): 19.

meaningful and the more influential it became, the more popular it became as *All in the Family* dominated ratings for another decade or so and spawned several spin-offs, including one of the first domestic sitcoms to feature African-American families, *The Jeffersons*.

An examination of some of the shows presented in the first season of *All in the Family* illustrates how this non-traditional family faces all manner of outside influences and challenges. Since the daughter of the family is a grown woman, there are not many examples of child rearing that can be used to compare to the child rearing actions of the typical historical father of this time period. One episode in particular presents, in full, the pressures put upon the family when the family discovers that Archie Bunker's daughter Gloria is pregnant. While the program producers and writers often proudly presented the liberal side of issues from Gloria and her husband, Mike Stivic, and the conservative side of issues from Archie, this episode presented both Archie and Mike concerned simply about bringing a child into the world. They are both concerned about Mike's ability to provide for a new child. Incredibly, they agreed on something as they both admit that their reaction to the news was the same. Life intrudes, however, and as the episode continues, Gloria miscarries. When Archie returns home from work to hear this news, the viewer sees another side of this blustering, ignorant, and hateful man. His capacity to love and his equal inability to express his regret are highlighted. For the first time all episode, Archie is silent. He can't say a word. Instead, Gloria speaks for him and says: "You love me." It can't get more meaningful or poignant than that.¹⁰⁸ This simple depiction of love from a very flawed father continued and, in some ways, improved upon

¹⁰⁸ *All in the Family*, Starring Carroll O'Connor (1968; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Television, 2005), DVD.

the advancing presentation of the nurturing father by movies and television that would become more ubiquitous by the end of the next decade. As a caring father, Archie Bunker gave the working class its own example of the change occurring in the middle class father, with the continuing move from the “distant breadwinner” through the period of fathers being the gender role model towards the coming model of the father as nurturer.

The beginning of this decade showed media producers mining drama, comedy, and poignancy from families headed by single-parents or being raised by someone other than a typical 1950s parent. By the end of the decade, Archie Bunker dominated the culture with his protests against any change in the status quo. The unifying theme here is change. A changing world, as the 1960s youth culture and Cold War dominated the political discourse and showed how drastically the country was shifting. At first, the media reacted by presenting slight changes in the family make-up to provide different dramatic elements from those presented in movies and TV in the 1950s. But a more dramatic change took place at the end of the decade as the most popular show on television shook the airwaves with topics formerly taboo, including the nascent war in Vietnam and other serious social issues.¹⁰⁹ It took another decade for the media to depict a true-to-life father experiencing a most drastic change in the family dynamic and one that was being experienced by thousands of men and women – divorce. This topic is analyzed in the following chapter.

¹⁰⁹ The taboos broken down included the first audible toilet flushing on television, courtesy of Archie Bunker, himself.

Chapter Five: A Turning Point in Solidifying the Changing Image of the Father: *Kramer vs. Kramer*

While the previous chapters used an entire decade to inform the subject, in one year, 1979, one film encapsulated the advancement of the institution of fatherhood from something more interactive and meaningful than the fathers who came before. This calls for this very important film to be analyzed more completely than any other film or television show of the decade, save *All in the Family*, thoroughly discussed in the previous chapter.

One could certainly raise the “specter” of two of the more acclaimed movies of the decade, *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Godfather Part II* (1974), as having a certain important influence over the institution of fatherhood for this generation. These films have been analyzed and studied for many purposes and have lingered in the American imagination for many reasons. None of these reasons, however, include their depiction of the fathers in these films. Obviously, the family dominates the story lines of both films. The Corleone family is depicted in all its glory and all its extremes. The films are operatic discourses on the immigrant families of America and their nature to strive for all that the New World could offer them. The films are also, in one person’s analysis, commentaries on the “... traumatized social/political climate of post-Vietnam, post-Watergate America.”¹¹⁰ There can be no quarrel with these important films as documents that deserve further study, but they do not depict any worthy qualities of the father beyond showing that immigrant families in America were decidedly patriarchal. Only peripherally do these films comment on the role of fathers in relation to mothers, simply

¹¹⁰ Naomi Greene, “Coppola, Cimino: The Operatics of History,” *Film Quarterly* 38, no. 2, (Winter 1984-1985), 28.

showing how men should raise up and honor the mothers of their children. All worthy traits, but in the end, in relation to the fathers depicted, it re-states the matters depicted in the films and television shows of the 1950s.

Other than *All in the Family*, television series of the 1970s were dominated by several women-oriented shows, including *Rhoda* (1974 to 1978), *One Day At A Time* (1975 to 1984), and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970 to 1977). The men depicted on these shows also fail at being adequate subject matter for any fruitful analysis of the fathers of this period. Rather than iconic portrayals of any aspect of fatherhood, many of the men shown on television in this decade appeared as parts of ensemble casts that presented stories centered on topics outside simple family dynamics, such as race relations in *Good Times* (1974 to 1979) and *The Jeffersons* (1975 to 1984) and nostalgia for periods of American history: the simpler times of *Little House on the Prairie* (1974 to 1983) and *The Waltons* (1972 to 1981) or the fun and excitement of 1950s youth culture in *Happy Days* (1974 to 1984). In fact, the women-oriented shows all depicted women

... learning to live without men. The men are either absent (Ann Romano's ex-husband), weak and childish (Ted Baxter in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*), insubstantial (Rhoda's husband Joe), asexual (Murray Slaughter in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, Dwayne Schneider in *One Day at a Time*) ...¹¹¹

Without doubt, the resounding historical and cultural phenomenon of this time that has the most direct affect on the family emerged through the effects and influence of feminism. As a reaction, Hollywood acted to "... restore the father as the basis for many film genres."¹¹² Examples of this trend include *Ordinary People*, *Author! Author!*, and

¹¹¹ Ella Taylor, *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Post-War America*, (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1991), kindle location 1274.

¹¹² Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan ... and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 235.

later in the early 1980s *Mr. Mom*, but the most influential example is the Academy Award winning *Kramer vs. Kramer*.

This one film best presented the image of the father that was predominant at the time. That this film also starred one of most successful leading men in Hollywood, Dustin Hoffman, and featured an actress who would go on to have perhaps the most successful career of any film actress, Meryl Streep, only heightened its influence above its mere popularity at the cinema house. More than popular acclaim, *Kramer vs. Kramer* exists as “... arguably the most influential and important cinematic depiction of the father.”¹¹³ The film went on to win Academy Awards in five categories, effectively branding it both a commercial and artistic success.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the film became a cultural touchstone as an example of how far men had come in their familial role. The film presents a deep and penetrating look at the ease at which men are drawn into the one-way street of “breadwinning” and how this easily defined responsibility of a father can distract a man from being much more for his family and his children. It simply and effectively showed the viewing public how its main character of Ted Kramer “... forgets the old patriarch and posits an alternative model of fatherhood.”¹¹⁵ Of course, one learns during a viewing of the film, there are many factors which cause this alternative to take root, first and foremost, the changing role of women in American society.

A short synopsis of the plot of *Kramer vs. Kramer* will assist in setting the tone for this discussion. Ted Kramer is a workaholic advertising executive who suddenly

¹¹³ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, 107.

¹¹⁴ *Kramer vs. Kramer* was named Best Picture, and won Best Adapted Screenplay. Dustin Hoffman won Best Actor, Meryl Streep won Best Supporting Actress, and Robert Benton won Best Director.

¹¹⁵ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, 108.

learns that his wife Joanna is leaving him and their young son in an attempt to “find herself.” The film depicts several moments in Ted’s work and home life as he struggles to keep an important client at work while simultaneously trying to keep up with all the aspects of raising his son Billy. The movie also includes a custody battle for the child when Joanna returns and claims that she should return to being his primary custodial parent.¹¹⁶ Better put, Ted Kramer "... starts out an insensitive workaholic, and this costs him his marriage; the dramatic arc of the movie is his evolution into a caring and sensitive parent - explicitly sacrificing professional goals in favor of taking care of his child.”¹¹⁷

Possibly what makes this film most impactful is the flawed nature of the father who depicts the alternatives made available to him and the perils of changing from what society expects of the men of its time. In one key scene in the film, just after Joanna Kramer leaves her husband and son on their own, Ted Kramer tries to maintain the routine in the household by making his son his favorite meal of French toast. The problem is that this meal was previously made by his mother, and Ted has no domestic capabilities whatsoever. The meal turns what could be a great start in his and his son’s adjustment to their new life into a disaster as the simple act of making the meal becomes increasingly frustrating for both Ted and Billy. The scene simply reminds them (and the viewer) what they are missing with the absence of a wife and mother.¹¹⁸ The film does not set this man up as a paragon of virtue, as with the portrayals of working men who

¹¹⁶ *Kramer vs. Kramer*, Directed by Robert Benton (1979; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2001), Amazon Instant Video.

¹¹⁷ Unger, *Men Can*, 124.

¹¹⁸ *Kramer vs. Kramer*, Directed by Robert Benton, Amazon Instant Video.

easily take on manly roles in the home such as Jim Anderson or Ward Cleaver of the 1950s. Instead, it shows him as a man striving to do what he sees as his duty to his family and then learning that his assumptions about what that would entail and require were all wrong. Ted Kramer thought he delivered to his family what was expected: resources to meet their material needs. He proved to be ignorant to the emotional needs of his wife, who obviously embraced some of the tenets of feminism and, at some point prior to the beginning of the film, began to feel the need to establish her own identity in the world. While the world changed around him, Ted Kramer blissfully thought he was doing his duty. He was wrong, but he learns the errors of his ways and comes to embody the advancement of the historical father from a striver centered on earning his keep outside the home to a nurturer who understands the delicate balance of both work and home life. Kramer, above all, finally becomes someone who does not compromise his family for the sake of his standing in the workplace. One cannot imagine exactly how either Jim Anderson or Ward Cleaver would have made this work, so Ted Kramer stands alone as a better example of what a father should and can be as the world around him changes. A man and father can remain steadfast in trying times and not be influenced adversely by the time's leading examples of moral compromise of his time, such as those involved in Watergate, where lying, cheating, and stealing are acceptable tools for one to use to fight against societies changing political ideals. Ted Kramer demonstrates that he does not have to denigrate others, including his wife, who in the end only wants to find her own brand of happiness in a world primarily built for the success of men. Rather than assert some type of manly right, Ted Kramer changes himself from a stereotype to a model for positive change in the institution of fatherhood.

Why does *Kramer vs. Kramer* have a unique standing in depicting the father on screen? Up to this time, fathers portrayed on screen were shown in chiefly stereotypical ways, without any insight to their deeper thoughts on family. True, the 1950s version of the film *Father of the Bride* presented the internal dialogue of the father as he dealt with the situation at hand, but for the most part, this dialogue was used for comedic purposes to show the audience the father's struggles with change and a situation that quickly proved to be out of his control. This father simply bustled his way through the problem, never once considering any fundamental change in his personality or makeup.¹¹⁹ One of the revelatory aspects of *Kramer vs. Kramer* transpires in the way in which the father is presented attempting to understand his situation as he considers how to adjust to its realities. One of these methods happens through talks with his boss at work and a neighbor who lives in his building. In this way, the viewing audience experiences his internal struggle. The viewer's experience of hearing Ted Kramer talk through his issues creates a bond with the character and reveals him as someone with whom other fathers can identify. This contrast with the typical depiction of fathers increases its "weight" because the typical depiction was described thusly

... Hollywood Dads rarely engage in conversations about their feelings or about being a father (in fact emotional inarticulacy is a common trait among Hollywood's traditional fathers). Consequentially, the father is more likely to be the focus of identification when he has been propelled into a situation that necessitates such talking, such as when he becomes the lone or the surrogate father.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ *Father of the Bride*, Directed by Vincente Minnelli (1950; Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers), Amazon Instant Video.

¹²⁰ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, xv.

So, the fact that Ted Kramer is “propelled” into his situation creates the dramatic element that captures the imagination of the viewer and allows his alteration from the workaholic to the caring parent to resonate deeper with those experiencing the film.¹²¹ True, this film also enraged some viewers, typically feminists who felt it marginalized the women characters for the sake of showing a man becoming “saintly” when compared to his “selfish” wife. This was not a film about feminism, however, but rather a film about why fathers should change and embrace their role beyond breadwinner and gender role model. While this disrupted the domain of women in the family, it was not simply a reaction to feminism but an interaction with the changes being embraced by women and which needed the support of the men in their lives.

This change in Ted Kramer has a great impact in one scene when Billy plays on a “jungle gym” at a park. While Ted discusses his new life with his neighbor, Billy falls from the jungle gym and begins to bleed profusely. Ted proceeds to scoop up his son and run at full speed to the hospital. While certainly dramatic from a cinematic standpoint, the real kicker happens when Ted reaches the hospital and the doctors begin treatment and he is told to wait in the waiting room. He refuses to leave his son wailing and crying and asserts his new parental authority: he refuses to leave his child uncomforted. The father has indeed become the nurturer.¹²²

At the time of this film’s release, the culture was experiencing feminism in full flower after the publishing of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. While this book became a call to action by women, some say that “Friedan's target was American

¹²¹ It also doesn’t hurt that Dustin Hoffman perhaps gives the performance of his career in the role of Ted Kramer. One sees his internal struggles etched on his face. As someone who shows all his internal turmoil on my face, this writer certainly related to his struggle.

¹²² *Kramer vs. Kramer*, Directed by Robert Benton, Amazon Instant Video.

men, for in talking about the discontent of the suburban housewife, the image of her oppressor became all the more clear."¹²³ Joanna Kramer was not outwardly portrayed as a feminist, but she indeed rejected society's and her husband's conclusion that she should be a "dutiful homebound mother" and substitute her happiness for that of her child while at the same time enabling her husband to achieve the highest level of success at his workplace and play his associated role as "the working but detached father."¹²⁴ While some criticized Meryl Streep's portrayal of Joanna Kramer, this film did resonate with the women in its viewing audience as well as the men. This film has an enduring influence and impact over the role of both the mother and the father and their importance to society in general. For one could easily see that turmoil in the household led to turmoil in the workplace for those parents who chose to break free of the historical role that society had expected them to play. In fact,

Kramer vs. Kramer was not simply a fantasy about how parenthood might change, about what men might be like if they were active parents; it reflected an increasingly sharp focus on the figure of the engaged father as key to a healthy society - at a time when divorce and the dual-earner household were becoming increasingly common.¹²⁵

Significantly, these themes appeared in the year's top box-office film and the winner of the highest honor given to film each year.¹²⁶ While some could and do argue that the film's portrayal of the mother is unfair, the historical impact of the depiction of

¹²³ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, 78.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Unger, *Men Can*, 129.

¹²⁶ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, 109.

the father in this film continues to reverberate. The depiction of Ted Kramer has become the model for the most important aspects of the changing father of the late 1970s.

Ted is the archetypal nurturing, post-liberation Dad; he answers fears that the father has been made redundant by feminism and he proves how significant the presence of a father is to the child's development.¹²⁷

Further, the film impacted society by including a custody battle in which the father fights for what he sees as his right to be considered equally with the mother as someone who can independently and successfully care for a young child. Ted Kramer argues for all fathers who felt that society had set mothers apart in some way as paragons of parental virtue and that the father's gender limits his role as a father. Kramer signaled for society the "...emergence of a new vision of fatherhood ..." where "masculine redemption for a failed marriage and a blind-alley career is found, as in the 1950s, in fatherhood"¹²⁸

Thus, a commercial and artistic success depicted how a man could enhance and better his role as a parent and a father. By depicting a "warts and all" portrayal of a father trying to come to terms with the fact that his true role as a father requires him to be more than a provider, this film became a touchstone for the men in the audience who could see themselves in Ted Kramer. The film did not invent this notion of the nurturing father out of whole cloth but positively reflected what was already changing in American society with the dawn of the independent woman and the entry of women into the workplace. Parenting in general and fathering in particular continued its adjustment away from the easy definitions of the 1950s and 1960s towards a "... new father ... more emotionally involved, more nurturing, and more committed to spending time with his children, during

¹²⁷ Ibid, 113.

¹²⁸ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 191.

infancy and beyond.”¹²⁹ *Kramer vs. Kramer* advanced this adjustment by dramatizing its affects, showing how our society could adjust accordingly, while still allowing men and women, father and mothers, to be equally important in the lives of their children, while also earning a keep and otherwise expressing their independence and individuality. The film did not raise the profile of the father at the expense of the mother, and rather

... both Joanna and Ted are redeemed, and they are redeemed by the same act: Both of them change; both of them rise above their own personal concerns; both of them are willing to give up their son to save their son.¹³⁰

So, a film advanced the thoughts of its viewers, revealing something about society which perhaps no other medium could do so engagingly. A true turning point in the history of fatherhood became a cultural icon with a lasting impact.

¹²⁹ Wall et al, “How Involved is Involved Fathering,” 510.

¹³⁰ Unger, *Men Can*, 128.

Chapter Six: Cosby, Gekko, and Beyond: More and Varied Fatherhood Role Models for a New Generation

In the 1980s, there was one television series and one film that captured the broad imagination of the viewing public and, more significantly, presented very much “their time.” Interestingly, each of these popular cultural items featured the subplot of a father (or father figures) attempting to control and guide his offspring to be better people. The film was *Wall Street* released in 1987 and directed by Oliver Stone. It won an Academy Award for Best Actor for Michael Douglas, in the effervescent role of Gordon Gekko. Some would say that this movie has nothing to do with fathers, but rather with how to make a buck on Wall Street. These viewers would go on to assert that the film was simply an attempt to debunk the mythology of America as the best model of a society, in contrast to the opposing ideology of communism, and thus was a backlash to Reaganite economics. A deeper examination of the movie results in an understanding of the role of both “good” and “bad” fathers in the life of a son attempting to strike out on his own. The television program was *The Cosby Show*. *Cosby* was first broadcast in 1984 and continued with great critical success and immense popularity for eight seasons. These two iconic pop culture artifacts of the 1980s demonstrate how the role of the father in post-feminist America had re-morphed into something akin a return to the 1950s with some men feeling the necessity to reassert their rightful place as the “king” of the household. Many believe that these men reasserted their position in the family as a direct response to the nascent feminism of the 1960s and 70s:

The 1980s was a time of crisis for masculinity and fatherhood, but it also proved to be a time of male resurgence as one of the notable features of the decade's films is that fatherhood, having been defined in the 1960s and 1970s through feminism

and women's issues, came once again to be defined, as it had been in the 1950s, by and for men.¹³¹

This undercurrent of male re-ascendance as head of the household was at its most basic, a backlash against the changes experienced by the example of Ted Kramer who was forced into the extreme of being both mother and father to his child. Even at a less drastic level, most men added the role of nurturing their children to their classic roles as the children's mothers left the confines of the household for their new workplace. This overreaching of fathers into the realm of the mother did not sit well with some men, including Bill Cosby himself, who thought that entertainment had strayed too far from the good example of the 1950s and especially, its iconic sitcoms such as *Father Knows Best*. Cosby explained his return to television after a successful stand-up comedy and film career as this: "I was annoyed at the direction that sitcoms had been going in: kids being ill-mannered and giving answers back to the parents ... and people seemingly not making corrections. I wanted to take the house back."¹³² This attitude reflected, at least indirectly, the ideals of the presidency of Ronald Reagan, who himself stressed a kind of return to the family values of the 1950s. American politics (and economics) of the 1980s could be characterized as a reaction to the counter-culture 1960s and 1970s and this was reflected on television and film. Bill Cosby believed that a return to "form" was necessary, having seen enough of the single parents or otherwise "dysfunctional" depictions of families on television. He reacted by giving the nation a model family: intact with strong working father but he added a wrinkle by including a strong working mother and politically and

¹³¹ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, 115.

¹³² Patrick Henry Bass and Mike Turner, "TV's Favorite Family: 25 Years Later," *Essence* 40, no. 6 (October 2009): 59. Bruzzi also makes an interesting case for this reassertion of the traditional role of the father being linked to economics. In the 1950s and the 1980s, the American economy was strong and fathers felt they had the economic might to assert their role in the family.

socially engaged children. *The Cosby Show* re-established the nuclear family as the model for depicting fathers on screen:

If ... popular shows are those that most nearly approximate dominant ideas, then it is to *The Cosby Show*, whose phenomenal success set a trend for a new wave of comedies with intact nuclear families, that one must turn to read those ideas. Like *All in the Family* a decade earlier, *The Cosby Show* has attracted an enormous amount of attention (most of it favorable) from critics and public interest groups as well as a vast and devoted audience¹³³

Hollywood also reacted (some would say overreacted) to the trends of the 1960s and 1970s and gave the public many films that “restored” the father to this rightful role. Early in the decade, one of these films was *Ordinary People*. While this film revolves around how a family deals with intense tragedy, its centerpiece remains the truly a nasty relationship between the mother and son which in some viewers estimation “... belongs, unambiguously, to 80s reaction ... the son progresses towards identification with the father, achieving this with the help of psychiatry ... the mother, redundant and inconvenient, can be expelled from the narrative”¹³⁴ This film showed the emergence of the father in a tender way, but in contrast, several other 1980s films, including *The Shining*, *The Mosquito Coast*, and *Running On Empty* showed this reassertion in manic and overbearing ways. Obviously, Hollywood reacted (or more accurately overreacted) to the changes in the household that had emerged in previous decades. The most disturbing example of this pitiful and unhelpful trend is the film *The Great Santini* which viscerally demonstrated the failure of this type of patriarchy. Unfortunately, while this film showed in several cruel ways the downside of patriarchal dominance and childhood submission,

¹³³ Taylor, *Prime-Time Families: Television Culture in Post-War America*, Kindle location 2048.

¹³⁴ Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan ... and Beyond*, 153.

there was no redemption for the son in the end as he accepts his father's shortcomings and, in fact, retains some of these "... absurd and maniacal idiosyncrasies of his deranged, deluded father" himself.¹³⁵

Fortunately for enlightened fathers everywhere, Bill Cosby came to the rescue. While he also reasserted the dominion of the father in the household, he did so as an equal with his wife and with some sensitivity to the demands placed on children in the more modern world. The parents on *The Cosby Show*, Heathcliff and Claire Huxtable, embodied successful professionals who both worked outside the home, and the show depicted the children getting into the same predicaments as the children in 1950s sitcoms. *The Cosby Show* combined these themes with a more gentle approach to the 1980s trend of the re-establishment of the dominion of the father over the household. Without doubt, Bill Cosby was the person most responsible for the content of this sitcom and he chose to go further than the easy path that some contemporary film depictions had gone. The writers and producer's respect for Cosby and his ideals led to his influence over *The Cosby Show* as a father-centered program that depicted the wife and children as also involved deeply in the advancement of the family. Some described Cosby's depiction of fathers, especially their masculinity, as "... in line with a tradition of other sitcom fathers, (which) breaks from the dominant, authoritative male of traditional television."¹³⁶ In this way, Cosby brought to mind Jim Anderson of *Father Knows Best* but took it one step further by modernizing the father and giving him both authority and good sense to use that authority wisely and in concert with his entire family, wife, and children included. In

¹³⁵ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, 104.

¹³⁶ Linda K. Fuller, *The Cosby Show: Audiences, Impact, and Implications*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1992), 140.

the episode entitled “Denise’s Friend” from the second season of the program, the entire family gathers to discuss something of great importance to Cliff Huxtable. Instead of telling the family what he expects, the family assembles to discuss the matter and land on solutions which each family member can accept.¹³⁷ This depiction may reflect similar meetings with the Anderson family on *Father Knows Best* or between Andy Taylor and Opie on *The Andy Griffith Show*, but it differs in the level of interaction and the intensity of discussion from both the perspective of the parents and the perspective of the children. Whatever bombast that Cliff Huxtable may present when he first faces a family crisis, in most cases, this reaction is followed by a more measured and mature response. Cosby allows his character to take time to understand his wife and his children before a consensus is reached. While the outcome remains certainly not democratic, as Cosby often asserts his patriarchy, depicting the process in this level of detail shows the audience how important is it for a family to work together towards compromise and solid solutions.

Cosby did this by depicting the relatively same sitcom family of previous generations, helping viewers recall this previous example, but he “...presented a father who asserted parental authority, guidelines, and the difference between permission and permissiveness. He demanded, and commanded, respect. In turn, he respected his youngsters.”¹³⁸ This return to an example of mutual respect certainly and drastically contrasted with the fatherly example of Archie Bunker in the 1970s (and later in the 1980s to Homer Simpson in *The Simpsons* or Al Bundy in *Married With Children*). More

¹³⁷ *The Cosby Show*, Starring Bill Cosby. (1984. Los Angeles, CA. Urban Works. 2005), Hulu Plus.

¹³⁸ Linda K. Fuller. *The Cosby Show: Audiences, Impact, and Implications*, 128.

than that, it solidified the model of a nurturing father by combining it with the other qualities of the father that gained respect in the 1950s and 1960s, such as steadfastness, stability, and mutual respect. Most importantly, Bill Cosby reiterated the three aspects which define the involved father: he demonstrated responsibility, accessibility, and engagement with his children. Some could say that demonstrated these things to an extreme, as he deeply involved himself in all aspects of his children's life, many times to their consternation and the viewers' pleasure. Overall, the success of *The Cosby Show* certainly shows that Cosby "got it right" and did so by taking the familiar and enhancing it for a more modern and informed time. He allowed for the modernization of the standard family sitcom to occur while he championed a "return to form." He absolutely used his considerable good will with the audience to show how a father could be a patriarch but without the historical baggage.

But, where 1950s television families took harmony for granted, indeed, took the institution of the stable nuclear family for granted, the Huxtables work strenuously and self-consciously to persuade us how well they get along. Given the troubled condition of many American families in the 1980s, *The Cosby Show* must be palpably compensatory or redemptive for many fans.¹³⁹

While *The Cosby Show* entertained the family inside the home, many of the films of the 1980s struggled to depict the relationship of father and child with anything more than the easy depiction of familial conflict and "top-down" patriarchal resolution of this conflict. This extreme patriarchy was again shown by a father of a different stripe, in a father *figure* for the ambitious stockbroker depicted by Charlie Sheen in *Wall Street* directed by Oliver Stone. This father figure was Gordon Gekko, who on the surface represented the stereotypical corporate raider of the 1980s. Gekko depicts the "distant

¹³⁹ Ella Taylor, "From the Nelsons to the Huxtables: Genre and Family Imagery in American Network Television," *Qualitative Sociology* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 25.

breadwinner” in extremis. His world is measured in monetary terms only and his success is determined through terms better used for war. Gekko does have some fatherly instincts and sees himself in the young striver, Bud Fox, and takes him under his wing to show him how to be a great man and a great success in the real world of dog-eat-dog corporate business. Meanwhile, Bud Fox also tries to show his own father Carl, a blue collar union leader for a failing airline, that his old ways are no longer meaningful in the new world Bud is experiencing. The film depicts the classic influence over a child by both a good father and a bad father, and how the child reacts to these two examples to become his own man. What makes this film influential is that it takes this trope of the father-son conflict and uses its ideology of father as villain and foil to the ambitions of the child and uses it for dramatic purposes to help the audience obtain a better and truer understanding of family dynamics and, in turn, their importance to society as a whole.¹⁴⁰ “Bud Fox’s cinematic journey reflects Stone’s own arguments about the choices fathers and sons must make to safeguard the American family and society in general.”¹⁴¹

As an example of how fathers depicted in movies and on television reflect the history of fatherhood, *Wall Street* stands as an example of a true depiction of the gender role model aspect of the mid-period American father. Gordon Gekko models how the intense desire to be successful in business and dominate both their employees and rivals mirrors the tendency of men to dominate and subjugate their women and their rivals for women’s attention. Gekko embraces the role of the masculine patriarchal stereotype and entices Bud Fox to be the same by inviting Bud Fox to witness Gekko’s takedown of his

¹⁴⁰ Jordan. "Good and Bad Fathers," *Fathering*, 194.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 181.

most bitter business rival and by providing Bud a prostitute after his first successful venture on behalf of Gekko.¹⁴² In contrast, Carl Fox, played by Charlie Sheen's real life father, Martin Sheen, is the model of a nurturing father who allows his son latitude in finding his own way, but does so with a certain level of care and true concern. He has not left his son out to make his way without help and early in the film, after a particularly bad day of trading, Bud asks his dad for a loan. Carl hesitates not at all to make the loan but does so after some gentle prodding for Bud to reconsider where he works and how he earns his keep in the world. Through these two depictions of fathers, the viewer of this film sees what one observer describes as examples of the "effective adult" and the "effective family member" and how these two aspects of the American character are built to be in conflict. Gordon Gekko, the bad father, may be the more effective adult while Carl Fox, the good father, is certainly the more effective family member. As one observer puts it, "The effective adult, at work and in public, is independent, individualistic, rational, and calculative. The effective family member, by contrast, shares, cooperates, sacrifices, and acts nonrationally."¹⁴³ This contrast between Gordon Gekko and Carl Fox gives the viewer experiencing the father-son relationships in this movie in particular a choice in determining what type of father one should emulate. Since each generation, as has been shown in previous chapters, depicts through its media a vision of fatherhood acceptable (and perhaps a bit more modern than that of the previous generation) to its time, the contrast of adulthood as centered on self or family as shown in *Wall Street* (which Oliver Stone dedicated to his own father, a lifelong stockbroker) has a

¹⁴² *Wall Street*, Directed by Oliver Stone (1987; Century City, CA: Fox), Amazon Instant Video.

¹⁴³ Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, Kindle location 1909.

greater impact than something that can be taught in a parenting manual or presented in an advice column. In other words, "... fatherly representations are understood best as productive ... arguments that renew the meaning of father in contemporary society."¹⁴⁴ Thus, understanding how media, especially popular media which capture the zeitgeist, can greatly influence its viewers and present society is very important. In the specific case of *Wall Street*, Oliver Stone presents through his film the contrasting styles of fatherhood in an effective way to help the viewer gain some greater understanding of the father and his role in greater society.

Certainly, Heathcliff Huxtable and Gordon Gekko are cultural icons of the 1980s. These two characters have a specific place in the consciousness of the American public and, in particular, the American male public. Such icons can have an immense influence on their viewership. As these two characters present the institution of fatherhood to the public, they stand in great contrast to one another. The Huxtables were a successful family, a true unit working together for the betterment of the entire family. The Gekkos were also successful in their own way, but at the expense of their family. The viewer of *Wall Street* sees just a few images of Gordon Gekko's own son Rudy, a very young boy squirmed about his home as a show to guests for just a few minutes before being swept away by his nanny. While Gekko brags of his pride for his son's talents, they are only important to him as a reflection of his own success. The viewer sees a fuller depiction of this flawed character and can determine at what cost this success comes. The good father, such as Cliff Huxtable or Carl Fox, while still a father with patriarchal tendencies for certain, wins the affection and respect of his own flawed child. These flaws are met with

¹⁴⁴ Jordan. "Good and Bad Fathers," *Fathering*, 182.

care and love, as demonstrated by these two movies and television fathers. Like other movie and television fathers of the 1980s, these fathers reassert their patriarchy but at the same time, guide and influence their charges by their example and their ability to combine all aspects of the best fathers.

Chapter Seven: The Movie and Television Father – A True Reflection for Viewers Who Are or Will Become Fathers

The act of watching movies and television is communal, and often the community which one shares this experience with is one's family. The dawn of the television as an affordable home appliance introduced a new level of entertainment and enlightenment right into the homes of each American family who could afford the device. Over the next few decades, many more devices can be counted on to deliver "content" into the home where it can deliver a shared experience to generations. Similarly, movies have a certain hold on the public and the term "movie night" exists in many homes throughout the country and in some households is sacrosanct. Obviously, the ubiquity of entertainment content can have its down-side, but in the case of the presentation of fathers over the decades from the beginning 1950s to the end of the 1980s, the positive effects of the depictions which reflected the changes occurring in the institution of fatherhood outweigh any negative effects. There are many examples of movie and television fathers who have advanced the understanding of the institution of fatherhood through their exhibition in some form of the changes occurring in the historical father. These television shows and films acted to identify for some fathers certain "prescriptions" which may have assisted them to understand how fathers were changing and adapting.

Television shows, particularly family situation comedies, deliver many different "takes" on family life and deliver them directly into the room in which most family interaction takes place (the "family" room). Both parents and children receive the messages sent by television programs and independently (and unconsciously) assess them to determine whether the information can be useful to their own experiences. Fathers could be said to benefit almost by osmosis, since "Television viewing has the potential to

influence people's understanding of the diverse ways in which fathers carry out their role in families. This in turn may have a powerful effect on how the father role is enacted and evaluated in daily family life."¹⁴⁵ To reduce the matter to stereotypes, fathers can be stubborn when it comes to actively seeking parenting advice.¹⁴⁶ So, a "delivery system" that combines "modeling" with entertainment can function to encourage certain fatherly behavior which, perhaps, some caring fathers absorb and utilize to limit their natural capacity to bungle family matters. Television and films with family themes deliver this information effectively as all viewers can, at least on some level, relate to the circumstances displayed on screen since they have a family of their own. In fact, some researchers have determined that television families can contribute to changes in behavior "... as both married and divorced individuals have cited the use of such portrayals as guides for their own behavior."¹⁴⁷

Moreover, observers and researchers into the effects of the depiction of fathers in movies and television have weighed in on the subtle effects that stories about families can have when effectively presented:

The narrative trope of communicating morality through familial relationships should not be dismissed as a dramatic convenience; rather, it should be investigated as a rhetoric that asks audiences to value a certain moral ideology supported by provocative arguments and reasoning, all of which enhance our ability to understand our own social situation.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Pehlke, et al, "Does Father Still Know Best?," 115.

¹⁴⁶ Because of this apparent stubbornness, most advice books, magazine articles, and web-sites appear to be geared towards the delivery and exchange of parenting information to and with mothers.

¹⁴⁷ Pehlke, et al, "Does Father Still Know Best?," 115.

¹⁴⁸ Jordan. "Good and Bad Fathers," 194.

Thus, using somewhat more simple language, by using familial situations in television and movies, those who produce these media are using a societal structure familiar to everyone and through the addition of drama or comedy, an alchemy occurs whereby the product becomes much more palatable and meaningful to the viewer. This is further advanced when the presentations connect to the viewers own experiences. One study of television's effect found that "... one-third of the respondents felt that television helped them to understand their personal problems and make decisions, particularly when they could identify with the situations being presented."¹⁴⁹ To some people's dismay, research has also shown that children are heavily influenced by media representations of families. The influence of original, fictional, television shows directed to children, such as those presented by the Disney Channel and Nickelodeon, can therefore assist some parents in their parental functions. When a parent acts as a television parent would, the effect compounds and reinforces itself. The children, in turn, more readily accept how their parent has acted and, simultaneously, bank this information for use when they eventually become parents, effectively compounding the affects of media depictions of fathers, mother, and families.

How do children gain information about couples and families? First and foremost, they learn by observing and participating in their own families. However, families do not exist in vacuums, and familial interactions are clearly not children's only source of information about family relationships. Media are other sources from which children gain information about their world, including couples and families.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Paula W. Dail and Wendy L. Way. "What Do Parents Observe about Parenting from Prime Time Television," 491.

¹⁵⁰ Litsa Renée Tanner, et al. "Images of Couples and Families in Disney Feature-Length Animated Films," *The American Journal of Family Therapy* 31 (2003): 355.

The impact of Disney feature-length films on the psyches of American children is a topic for another thesis, but this observation rings true for all media content delivered to children and families. One's understanding of depictions on the screen cannot be limited to a simple entertainment experience because of its ability to affect viewers deeply. The ideas and examples present on screen combine with one's knowledge and experience to inform it and, in some cases, alter it. Therefore, when fathers are depicted in quality television programs or films (as with the many examples presented in the previous chapters), they influence an "advancement" in the public understanding of the institution of fatherhood. This is not to say that movies or television single-handedly affect change. Rather when combined with some connection to and resonance with the political and historical happenings in the "real world," "... social change does occur, ideological values do shift, and television is part of this movement."¹⁵¹ One could also add that film has the same level of influence, but on a differing scale depending upon its penetration into the collective psyche of the American father.

An interesting double effect occurs with television and movie programming. The depiction of families and fathers, in particular, in these media both present a model for fatherly behavior and reflect the predominant methods used by the fathers of the time depicted. The films and television shows examined in the previous chapters are simultaneously a presentation and a commentary of the institution of fatherhood. In other words, "... as dreams can be used to gain insight into areas of the psyche that we are unwilling or unable to penetrate consciously, so popular images can be used to

¹⁵¹ John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 1990), 45.

investigate collective unconscious attitudes and feelings.”¹⁵² The previous chapters examined how the television and film depictions of fathers mirrored the changes occurring in the historical father. These changes were, in turn, solidified as our historical understanding of fathers was beamed onto large screens and small causing the viewers to reflect upon how society at large thought and felt about fathers. The images helped viewers to understand the changes in some meaningful context as the television and film depictions connected with what the viewer knew from life around them. From the 1950s image of father as the “distant breadwinner” in characters like Jim Anderson and Ward Cleaver, American viewers learned that fatherhood became more than providing for the family in monetary terms. In one person’s observation:

Television, the newly created carrier of entertainment for the whole family, rushed in quickly to give dad a boost. In such shows as *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *The Donna Reed Show*, fathers were seen as nurturing, caring, and devoted to their children.¹⁵³

In the movie dramas, especially those starring the ever-popular actor James Dean, one saw an obviously more dramatic (some would say melodramatic) depiction of what fathers who neglected to first observe and then understand and react to the needs of the children (in these cases, their quickly maturing and independence seeking sons) would or could experience. These two films, *East of Eden* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, used deeper themes and sophisticated dramatic conventions to show the constant struggle between the generations. Increasing their impact, these films presented the nascent youth culture of America just prior to its explosion. While, these depictions resonated deeply in the

¹⁵² Roger Horrocks, *Male Myths and Icons: Masculinity in Popular Culture*. (London: Macmillan Press Ltd. 1995), 1.

¹⁵³ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 163.

American psyche because of their ages old and familiar story lines, yet, they showed the potential of children when they are treated with respect and subtlety rather than patriarchy and the power of the fist. In fact, *Rebel Without a Cause* celebrated the caring nuclear family in its depiction of Jim, Judy, and Plato “creating” an idealistic family.¹⁵⁴ So, while their familiar stories were easily understood, they also advanced how fathers could remain relevant to their families beyond the standard “breadwinner” and “gender role model” – they could also become partners with their spouses in nurturing their children and caring for more than their material needs. Additionally, they showed the inherent value of the family when it operates in its typical form but with a level of care for the children above the historical norm.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, television began to supplant films as the most popular entertainment form for the American public. Moreover, some interesting subversive elements were depicted and because of their boldness they captured the interest of the public like none other before. First, in the early part of the decade, as a reaction to the 1950s image of intact families with both mom and dad actively engaged in the family, producers began to find drama by depicting non-typical family forms, typically single fathers raising kids and by the end of the decade, fathers from a more working-class background. Unfortunately, it should be said that these examples are not without their flaws, most obviously their tendency to push the role of the mother or other female parental figure into the background. It cannot be argued, however, that these newly configured single male heads of households depicted on screen did not advance the understanding and influence fathers were having on society as a whole. Two iconic portraits of single fathers in the South demonstrated very affectively that when gaps exist

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

in the family dynamic, they will be filled quickly by the children wanting to understand the world around them more completely and becoming less sheltered in the home. So, while the mothers were not available to them, the community filled in by “keeping an eye” on these children and exposing them to a level of care which was, in some way, more influential. In *The Andy Griffith Show* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* the circumstances of these single fathers forced them to allow their children some latitude in their behaviors and to act in partnership with their offspring to collectively find solutions to family issues. These depictions showed how fathers were advancing from the exclusive depiction of “distant breadwinner” towards its more ideal form of part nurturer, gender role model and, as always, breadwinner.

On television, the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s was dominated by the figure of Archie Bunker. This working class depiction of the changing moral codes of the American people rose to be much more than another example of how fathers were changing across America. This television show dominated the ratings and because of its influence changed television forever. Producers became more comfortable depicting the changing make-up of America – its different ethnicities, races and creeds. *All in the Family* did not shy away from any subject matter, yet it was, in its way, a return to the form of television families of the dawn of the television age. Mother and father, and in this instance, daughter and son-in-law, all lived under the same roof and interacted with each other on a daily basis. Its enhancement was the more unfiltered entry of the “real world” into the proceedings. This subversion of the typical form of the domestic sitcom demanded attention and this program became immensely important to the American public. Archie Bunker may not have been a role model as a father, but his power of

personality dominated his household, which made the public pay attention. He became the public's surrogate for everyone's internal tendency to not want the world to change, to want stability and easy answers. As a result, he brought the public into an age where change occurred fast and furiously, and showed America the foolishness of not reacting to these changes. For fathers, he showed that they must accept that their children will grow up, and cannot continue to refer to their daughters as "little girl" without being subjected to change without influence over such change. A father should not turn a blind eye to such things, or suffers the peril of never truly influencing their children to be ready to respond to such change. Archie Bunker was an anachronism and, thus, influential to the fathers who watched him at "work" on television in a different and more subversive way.

One of the many themes on *All in the Family* was the burgeoning independence of women in America. Archie Bunker's daughter, Gloria Stivic, demanded in a respectful and enlightened way new admiration from her father as an independent woman. This introduction of feminism into the popular medium of television was an obvious reaction to the changes occurring in America. The demands of women to be equal partners in all aspects of life led to many changes in the domestic sphere. These changes were also reflected in the movies. In fact, most relevantly for an examination of the portrayal of fathers, the late 1970s produced a film which could be deemed the fulcrum on which the changes in the American father began to finally fully embrace the model of father as nurturer approaching that of the mother. This was *Kramer vs. Kramer* which one person characterized as a film that showed that "... masculine redemption for a failed marriage

and a blind-alley career is found, as in the 1950s, in fatherhood, but this time with an ironic slap at feminism.”¹⁵⁵

The impact of *Kramer vs. Kramer* on the institution of fatherhood cannot be overstated. It has been termed the most influential depiction of the father by a Hollywood film.¹⁵⁶ It remains a “must see” for anyone who wants to learn about the role of the father in the late 1970s and how fathers reacted to the ideals of feminism in both positive and negative ways. More than that, it showed the public that fathers should demand from their employers the flexibility to be an involved father. In combination with other factors, including the return to family values espoused by President Reagan, and the increasing value placed on “quality time” by men who earned enough money for their employers to increase their leisure time accordingly, the value of men who put his fatherhood at the forefront of his identity approached becoming the norm. Once again, advancement in the institution of fatherhood was reflected back onto the public through popular media. In the case of *Kramer vs. Kramer*, the impact likely expanded from previous examples as the film was both a popular (ending the year as the highest grossing film of the year) and critical success (garnering nine Academy Award nominations and five wins, including Best Picture).

The 1980s depicted another shift in the perspective of fathers and reflected it on the television and in the movies. This shift was, essentially, a return to the family values of the 1950s and the role of the father as head of household and leader of the family unit. Bill Cosby said as much when he asked to describe his return to television on *The Cosby Show*. There was, however, no possible way for the positive advances reflected and

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 191.

¹⁵⁶ Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy*, 107.

advocated by movies and television over the prior years to not inform the changing depiction of fathers in this decade. While *Cosby* wanted a return from the countercultural elements of some of the shows from the 1960s and 70s, and an admission that the two-parent household was the best model for American families, he could not do so without acknowledging the change in fathers away from pure patriarchy and towards nurturing his children on approaching equal terms with the mother. *Cosby* showed the family dynamic as an acknowledgement that the “lunatics (i.e., the children) had taken over the asylum” and that the best way to ensure that fathers can still influence their children is to allow them an opinion and a victory when that opinion was, in his view, correct. This does imply that in this case the children overtook the parents. Cliff and Claire Huxtable led this family firmly and soundly, but with a modicum of acknowledgement that they did not have all the answers to every circumstance presented to them by their precocious kids. Thus, they earned the respect of their family (and the viewing public) rather than demanded their respect. In contrast, the biggest film of the decade, *Wall Street*, showed a man demanding respect and losing it as a result of his assumption that such a demand should be the only prerequisite for having it. What is most influential about this movie is how its depictions of almost all interpersonal relationships circle back to the familial model. It shows that families and father-son relationships are universal and, thus, ever important. It resonates because in a film depicting all that was good and bad about the 1980s, it remained a film about fathers and sons and how the relationship between the two were changing with the times.

This universal importance of families when combined with the universal interest in the best movies and television illustrates the deep impact that depictions of fathers in

the media can have on society. Over the decades analyzed here, it is quite apparent that the advances in the institution of fatherhood that occurred over the decades were reflected and advanced by certain television programs and films. These movies and TV may have also helped to instruct and inform fathers and future fathers, and have certainly given the public positive icons of the most ideal fathers. These characters shine in the memory of television and movie viewers and even more so upon deeper scholarly analysis. While movies and television can be easily dismissed as mere entertainment, their ubiquity demonstrates just how valuable they are to the American people and, in turn, the American family. These media inform and reflect society in ways that other media cannot. Since the stories presented on screen return, again and again, to the family and to fathers as important means to deliver ideas, possibilities, and influences, it is impossible to surmise that such depictions will not resonate with those men who want to become more informed and more influential members of their families. These men in turn become fathers who have seen the positive outcomes that can be achieved when fathers apply what they have learned from the storylines shown on screen in movies and television shows. There remains no doubt that the American family has benefitted from the historical change that has occurred in the role of the father in the family. The advance from the mere provider to a positive gender role model and eventually to a nurturer has been extraordinarily positive. As the fathers depicted on screen have shown these changes over the years, their portrayals have also influenced this change in American families. One becomes excited in anticipation of how future television and movie fathers will also contribute to informing and perhaps influencing fathers of all ages to never accept stereotypes and embrace and institute important historical changes in the role of

fathers, and one wonders just how such change will be depicted on the ever-changing modes of delivery of filmed entertainment.

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