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The Dad Dilemma: Navigating the complexities of contemporary fathering

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

- As is the practice of Flinders University we begin acknowledging the Indigenous peoples of this country. In particular we acknowledge the Kurna peoples, the traditional owners of the lands and waters of the region on which Flinders University main campus is located.
- We pay tribute to their physical and spiritual connection to the land, waters and community enduring now as it has been throughout time. We pay our respects to them, their culture and to Elders, past, present and emerging.

Contemporary fathering

- Fathering has evolved considerably in the past few decades
- Impact of social norms and expectations
- Increase in fathers who are emotionally engaged in the lives of children



What does this mean/why does this matter?

- There is increasing evidence on the importance of fathers' having strong emotional and social relationships with their children
- However, fathers can often face barriers or challenges to fostering strong relationships with their children
- For example: increased work-family conflict, changing social role expectations, and increased pressure regarding their competence as parents
- We need to encourage/support men to take on this opportunity to be involved

My research

1. Hunter, S.C., Riggs, D. W. & Feo, R. (2019). Australian news media constructions and categorisations of primary caregiving fathers. *Discourse and Society*, 1-14.
2. Hunter, S.C. (2018). Book review: Staying attached: Fathers and children in troubled times. *Men and Masculinities*, 21(3), 443-449. doi:10.1177/1097184X18774101
3. Hunter, S.C., Riggs, D.W., & Augoustinos, M. (2017). Hegemonic masculinity versus a caring masculinity: Implications for understanding primary caregiving fathers. *Soc Personal Psychol Compass*, 11, 1-9. doi:10.1111/spc3.12307
4. Hunter, S.C., Riggs, D.W., & Augoustinos, M. (2017). Constructions of primary caregiving fathers in popular parenting texts. *Men and Masculinities*, 1-20 doi: 10.1177/1097184X17730593
5. Hunter, S.C., Augoustinos, M. & Riggs, D.W. (2017). Ideological dilemmas in accounts of primary caregiving fathers in Australian news media. *Discourse, Context and Media*, 20, 116-123. doi: org/10.1016/j.dcm.2017.09.005
6. Hunter, S.C.. & Riggs, D.W. (2015). Hegemonic masculinities and heteronormativities in contemporary books on fathering and raising boys. *Boyhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 8(1), 110-129. doi: 10.3167/bhs.2015.080107

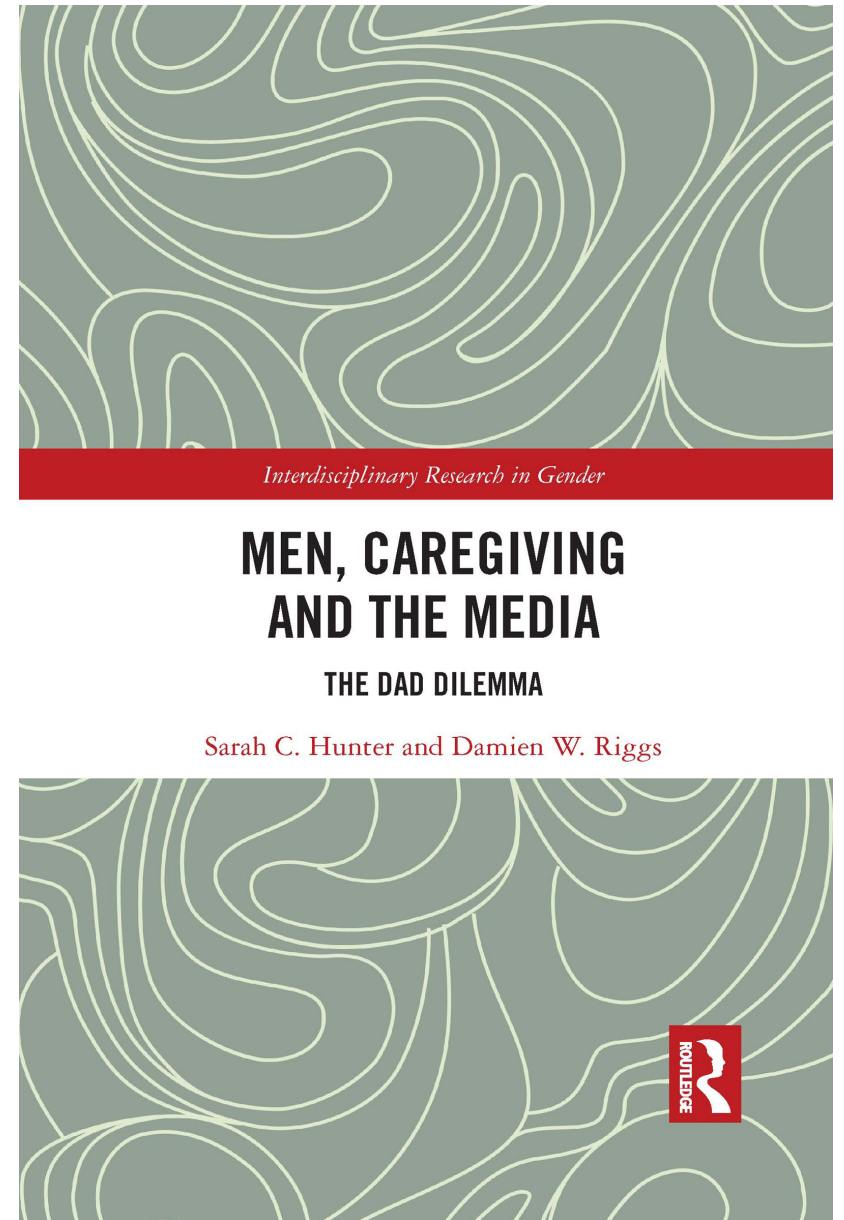
My research

- What is the relationship between gender and unpaid carework?
- How do masculinities impact upon men in their fathering role?
- Are the changes we are seeing in fathering roles reflect changes in masculinities?
- How does the media shape and reflect our understandings of fathering?



How did I end up here?

- My honours project: Parenting books and raising boys
 - Parenting books relied heavily on traditional notions of masculinity and what it means to be a boy when providing advice to parents on raising boys
- My PhD: Primary caregiving fathers and the media
 - I had high hopes that focusing on fathers who had taken on the primary caregiving role would be less reliant on traditional notions of masculinity and outdated expectations of men



What is the dad dilemma?

- Social change and the introduction of new social norms are frequently inconsistent and contradictory
- Theorisations of fathering do not reflect fathers' actual experiences, which translates to contradictory and unhelpful expectations around what it means to be a father
- My research is demonstrating that fathers are faced with competing expectations and demands:
 - On one hand they are expected to be more involved in the lives of their children
 - However,
 - They are still held to the unrealistic expectations of the stoic, rational, inexpressive masculine man

Where to next?

- Fathers are taking on evolved roles and responsibilities, however, they remain restricted regarding societal understandings of gender and carework
- More research is needed to understand and learn from fathers who are resisting traditional norms
- We need social norms and social policy to reflect the actual lives and experiences of fathers from various backgrounds
- My research endeavours to identify how we can better support fathers in Australia to be involved in the lives of their children in ways that suit their family context





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