

# Making Fathers: Masculinities and Social Change in the Ghanaian Context

Gloria Abena Ampim, Haldis Haukenes,  
and Astrid Blystad

*Framed within recent debates about hegemonic masculinity and in-depth historical and contemporary research on fatherhood and gender roles in Ghana, this article explores current ways of becoming and being a father in Ghana. Existing studies of fatherhood and masculinities in Ghana tend to present men in conjugal unions as patriarchal and dominating over their wives and children and fatherhood as related mainly to breadwinning and demonstrating sexual potency. Through observation studies, semi-structured interviews, and focus-group discussions with fathers from urban and rural contexts, this article explores multiple ways of achieving masculinity through fatherhood and ways in which new fathering ideals and expectations come to be incorporated into local gendered ideals. It suggests that alongside values of providing for their families, ideals of involved fatherhood emerge among the study participants, indicating early signs of a shift away from established sociocultural gendered expectations of hegemonic masculinity.*

## Introduction

Gendered expectations in Ghana define men as leaders and providers and women as homemakers (Adinkrah 2012, 2017; Adjei 2016; Adomako Ampofo 2001; Adomako Ampofo and Boateng 2007; Boateng et al. 2006; Lambrecht 2016; Nukunya 2016; Oheneba-Sakyi 1999). The male breadwinner ideal in Ghana, although still upheld, may not reflect the lived experiences of couples, as more and more women play large roles in providing for their families (Boni 2002; Clark 1999; Kwansa 2012; Tolhurst and Nyonator 2006).<sup>1</sup> Women are increasingly working long hours outside the home, and the separation from kin due to rural–urban migration has created a gap in kin support for childcare in urban Ghana (Badasu 2004, 2012; Oppong 1980,

2004, 2012; Wærness 2012). Little, however, is known about what has happened to fathers' roles and expectations in the household as mothers' roles have expanded. Are fathers expected to perform additional roles, and what do fathers themselves perceive about these roles? The few available Ghanaian studies discussing changes in fatherhood norms have focused solely on urban areas (Fernández-Cornejo et al. 2019; Ganle 2016; Kwansa 2012). Studying the current expectations of fathers in Ghana provides an opportunity to consider fathers' potential appropriation of new norms and a chance to look at tensions arising between new fathering norms and dominant ideals of masculinity in non-Western contexts. With views from both urban and rural fathers, we here explore current ways of becoming a father and how ideals of fatherhood intersect with constructions and enactments of masculinity. We draw on theoretical perspectives in R. W. Connell's classical works on hegemonic masculinity and works that have criticized and further developed this line of thinking in fruitful and dynamic ways.

### Hegemonic and Emergent Masculinities

Hegemonic masculinity as a conceptual framework was developed in the 1980s by Connell (1987, 1995), who defined hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (1995, 77). This theorization of hegemonic masculinity concerns relationships not only between men and women, but also among men, not all of whom enact the dominant ideal of hegemonic masculinity: those unable to live up to it may produce subordinated models, which could be aligned with femininity (Connell 1995, 78), or they may be marginalized from hegemonic masculinity by age, class, race, and ethnic affiliation (Connell 1995).

Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity has influenced much research on men, gender relations, and hierarchy in the social sciences over the past three decades. It has been subjected to substantial criticism. Postcolonial scholars have criticized it for its failure "to recognize historical and cultural situations within which several hegemonic forms of masculinity may co-exist" (Miescher 2003, 89). African gender relations have been described as a "patchwork of patriarchies, both colonial and local" (Lindsay and Miescher 2003, 3). It has been argued that precolonial African societies had multiple ways of being a man, and that, with the advent of missionaries and Western education, new ideals of masculinity were introduced into an already complex masculine world. The interaction between precolonial and colonial masculinities in turn produced multiple dominant masculinities, in a manner where none of them successfully displaced the others (Miescher 2003, 2005, 2007).

Responding to criticism, Connell and J. W. Messerschmidt (2005) called for a conceptual review that would account for other forms of gender hierarchies, with more attention paid to contexts and geographical location in

constructing masculinities. Marcia Inhorn and Emily Wentzell, picking up on this call for “theoretical reformulation,” introduced the concept of emergent masculinities in an attempt to move away from a primary focus on hierarchy and domination (2011, 803). They constructed the term on the basis of Raymond Williams’s notion of emergence (Williams 1977, quoted in Inhorn and Wentzell 2011, 803)—in other words, “new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship which are continually being created” in societies. The concept accounts for “new forms of everyday masculine practice” that accompany social change, but also acts of manhood as they change with contexts—marriage, fatherhood, employment—and over the course of life (Inhorn and Wentzell 2011, 803; see also Inhorn 2012, 31).

Involved fatherhood, defined as “an ideal of emotionally present and nurturing father” (Farstad and Stefansen 2015, 55; see also Magaraggia 2012; McGill 2014) can be described as an expression of emergent masculinities (Inhorn 2012). Ideals and practices of involved fatherhood, mostly researched in Western contexts, do not indicate a rejection of the widely held breadwinner ideal (Farstad and Stefansen 2015); rather, they represent an expansion of men’s roles in parenting to include more emotional involvement and physical caregiving. Involved fatherhood could, therefore, be seen as a form of masculinity that men enact in their marriage and family life in a manner that does not necessarily protest or oppose hegemonic ideals, but expands men’s roles to include previously defined “feminine” tasks (Inhorn and Wentzell 2011).

The notion of hegemonic masculinity helps make sense of dominant ideals emerging from the narratives of our study participants; however, the ideals are explored with the awareness that different dominant ideals may coexist, as suggested by Stephan Miescher (2003, 2005, 2007). Inhorn and Wentzell’s concept of emergent masculinities is relevant when exploring traces of new and novel elements of masculinity in participants’ narratives of being and becoming fathers.

### Fatherhood and Masculinity Studies in Ghana

A study that explores signs of potential transitions in ideals of masculinity and fatherhood will benefit from a brief historic contextualization, and we review some historical studies before we move to scholars’ analysis of the contemporary situation.

Historical studies of fatherhood and gender relations in marriages give opposing accounts for matrilineal and patrilineal societies in Ghana. The matrilineal Akan gender relations before colonialism have been presented as quite gender equal, in that women and men had fairly similar social and political responsibilities (Oppong 1980). After marriage, women remained part of their lineage, and children belonged to their mother’s lineage in a manner that is characteristic of matrilineal societies (Nyarko 2014; Oppong 1980; Rattray 1923). Fathers exercised authority over their sisters’ children, rather than over their own children. Therefore, mothers promoted

special bonding between their children and their matrikin (Nyarko 2014). Nonetheless, paternity remained a significant aspect of social life and status in the Akan matrilineal system (McCaskie 2015; Nukunya 2016).

Studies from patrilineal societies from both precolonial and colonial times show a clearer distinction of roles between men and women. A father protected his wife and provided the wife and children with a home, food, and medical care (Fortes 1949, 101; Nukunya 2016), while the wife was responsible for cooking, fetching water, and childcare (Fortes 1949, 101; Nukunya 2016). Husbands were entitled to marry more women (with the consent of their first wives) and could punish their wives physically. At the same time, a husband was expected to treat his wife with love and kindness, regularly give her gifts, and pay her debts (Nukunya 2016, 59).

Miescher's (2003) historical study from matrilineal Kwahu suggests three precolonial dominant masculinities: adult masculinity, senior masculinity, and the big-man status. Having biological children and performing the roles of a father, such as providing for a wife, children, and kin, were significant in attaining all three dominant masculine ideals (Miescher 2003, 2007). Adult masculinity was reached by marrying and performing tasks such as taking care of a wife or wives and children and providing support for external kin. Senior masculinity was achieved through an individual's conduct in society, the ability to speak well in public, to mediate conflicts, and to provide advice (Miescher 2007). Finally, the big-man status, also common in other parts of Africa, was based on wealth, number of wives, and the number of people a man supported (see also Barker and Ricardo 2005; Dover 2005; Obeng 2003).

Cocoa farming, Christian marriages (or the marriage ordinance introduced by the British in 1884), and Western education have been identified as key elements in disrupting Ghanaian social life (Nave 2016; Nukunya 2016; Oppong 1980). In colonial Asante, for example, women challenged the matrilineal inheritance system by asking for portions of their divorced or deceased husbands' estates because of their contributed labor to cocoa farming (Allman 1991, 1996). Marriage by ordinance meant, for instance, that children, rather than nephews and nieces, inherited from parents (Nukunya 2016; Oppong 1980; see also La Ferrara and Milazzo 2017). Structural-adjustment programs of the 1970s and 1980s have been found to influence men's ability to provide for their family's upkeep (Clark 1999; Overå 2007). Urbanization and the lack of kin support for childcare and domestic duties in the urban areas further increased women's burdens as mothers and wives (White et al. 2005; see also Badasu 2004, 2012; Kwansa 2012; Oppong 1980, 2012).

Moving back to the question of masculinity and fatherhood, contemporary Ghanaian studies have asserted that the ability to impregnate a woman is a key element for a man to prove his masculinity. Mary Owusu and Lawrence Bosiwah's (2015) contemporary oral historical study, conducted among Fante-speaking Akan, for example, demonstrates that Fante men first and foremost equated masculinity with the phallus and sexual

performance. Preparedness, protection, defense, authority, and common goodness were mentioned as additional symbols of masculinity (Owusu and Bosiwah 2015, 136). A study conducted in Accra with men from different ethnic backgrounds similarly revealed the centrality of biological fatherhood to masculinity (Adomako Ampofo, Okyerefo, and Pervarah 2011). Participants linked biological fatherhood to phallic competence, but more broadly to adulthood and responsibility.

Several contemporary Ghanaian studies from matrilineal and patrilineal societies have argued that Ghanaian men continue to be socialized to exercise patriarchal domination over their wives and intimate partners (Adinkrah 2012, 2017; Adjei 2016; Adomako Ampofo, Okyerefo, and Pervarah 2011; Fiaveh et al. 2015; Oheneba-Sakyi 1999). Customary Ghanaian marriage in patrilineal and matrilineal societies requires the payment of a bride price by the man to the woman's family. The bride price can involve cash or substantial material goods, including cattle, jewelry, and cloth (Adinkrah 2017, 5). It is argued that men commonly regard the payment as an act of purchase, which entitles them to ownership of their wives (Adinkrah 2017; Coe 2012).

The literature reviewed above demonstrates both changes and continuities in gender roles and ideals of masculinity. The gendered division of waged and household labor is transforming, but little is known about its potential implication for the ways in which Ghanaian men conceptualize and practice fatherhood and how current fatherhood ideals interact with pre-colonial and colonial masculinities and gender arrangements. In our study, we explore continuities and changes in ideals of fatherhood and masculinities in an urban and a rural context in Ghana. Using our research with men living in Accra and in a rural area in the Afram Plains North District, we investigate the mutual formation of fatherhood and masculinity and compare the perceptions and experiences of men from the metropolis with the views of farmers and artisans from the countryside.

## Study Context

The study was conducted in Accra, Ghana's capital, and in a village, given the pseudonym of Sakora, in the Afram Plains North, located in the Eastern Region of Ghana. According to the national population census conducted in 2010, Accra has more than four million residents (Ghana Statistical Service 2013). Its population consists of diverse ethnic groups, including Akan, Ewes, Gas, Dangme, Guan, Gurma, Dagbani, Grusi, and Mande. The 2010 census showed that the extended family structure was becoming less common in Accra, with most households consisting of spouses and biological or adopted children. Only 39 percent of the population was married; the rest were either cohabiting, single, widowed, or divorced. The fertility rate in Accra was approximately 2.5 (Ghana Statistical Service 2013).

The other study context is located in the Afram Plains North, which has a population of about 102,000 and where 86 percent of the area is rural.

The general fertility rate in the district is 4.2 (Ghana Statistical Service 2014). Although the Afram Plains is geographically located in Kwahu land, the residents of the Afram Plains North are from the Volta, Northern, Eastern, and Ashanti regions and belong to diverse ethnic groups. The community depends on farming and fishing; 70 percent of the labor force is engaged in skilled agriculture, forestry, and fishery (Ghana Statistical Service 2014).

Monogamy, polygamy, and informal conjugal unions are all widespread in Sakora. Informal conjugal unions often result from the not uncommon scenario of a young girl becoming pregnant out of wedlock. Because these unions are initiated at a young and economically unstable age, the partners in question often do not live together, not even after the child is born, and these unions easily break up; however, the general norm is that married couples should live together in privately owned (small) houses.

## Study Participants and Methods

This article forms part of a larger ongoing qualitative study, which explores the links among patriarchy, gender relations, and male involvement in maternal and infant healthcare. For the broader study, the first author conducted interviews and held focus-group discussions with mothers and health workers, in addition to engaging with expectant fathers. This paper focuses only on the fathers and is based on interviews, a focus-group discussion, and observation.

### Study Participants

In Accra, study participants were recruited through the maternity unit and child-welfare clinic of a key government hospital in Accra. In Sakora, participants were recruited with the assistance of health-service providers at the Community Health-Based Planning Services compound, where the midwife and nurses introduced the first author to expectant mothers in the community. Partners of these mothers were subsequently recruited for interviews. Participants for the focus group were recruited by the first author. The initial criterion for inclusion in the study was being a first-time expectant parent living together with one's spouse. The criterion worked well in Accra. In Sakora, however, many first-time expectant mothers and sometimes fathers were teenagers who lived apart from their partners. Thus, with the exception of one participant, expectant fathers recruited in Sakora already had children.

The Accra fathers (eleven) were aged between twenty-eight and thirty-nine and had education levels ranging from the completion of junior high school to tertiary school. All participants in Accra were living with their partners, expecting a child, and living in a nuclear family structure. All the Accra fathers and their partners worked outside the home, either in the informal sector as traders and artisans, or in the formal sector as teachers, sales personnel, or civil-service administrators.

The Sakora fathers (twelve) were aged between twenty-one and forty-eight, and educational backgrounds ranged from the completion of primary school to senior high school. With the exception of one expectant father, who lived separately from his partner, all participants lived with their partners in nuclear family structures. The men worked as farmers. Two participants supplemented farming with the provision of motorcycle transport services.

Participants in Accra and Sakora came from either of the patrilineal and matrilineal groups that constitute the two main lineage systems. They represented four main ethnic groups: matrilineal Akan (Kwahu, Fante) and patrilineal Ewe, Dagbani, and Guan.

### Data Collection

The data gathering for this study began with observation, conducted over a seven-month period at the selected hospital in Accra to learn about men's interactions during antenatal, postnatal, and child-welfare services at the clinic. The first author observed daily activities at the maternity unit and child-welfare clinic of the selected hospital and visited couples in their homes to observe their activities and household arrangements. Participants in Accra were recruited during observation at the hospital.

Observation was conducted for one month in Sakora to learn about fathers' everyday life and practices, as suggested by Paul Atkinson and Lesley Pugsley (2005). In Sakora, the first author visited couples' homes daily, participated in communal meetings, and stayed with women at the market. Men were engaged in informal conversations in the evenings, when they had returned from the farm and were relaxing under trees by the roadside. These interactions provided insights into practical daily activities of men and women in the village.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven fathers in Accra and six fathers in Sakora. The researcher encouraged fathers to tell their own stories about fatherhood and masculine ideals. Additionally, one focus-group discussion was conducted with six fathers in Sakora to learn about their perceptions and understandings of fatherhood and the expected roles of fathers and to gain insights into current fathering practices as expressed in the group. Interviews and discussions were conducted in English and Twi. In Sakora, the interviews took place in the home of participants, while the focus-group discussion took place at the community square. In Accra, interviews took place at the hospital, at participants' homes, and at other meeting places in the city.

### Data Analysis

All interviews were audio recorded. Audios were transcribed and stored in a QSR NVivo software database. Data were analyzed thematically, based on Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's (2006) six phases of analysis. Themes

were generated from latent meaning, assumptions, and conceptualizations of the data, and from questions such as “When does fatherhood begin?,” “What are the most important roles of fathers?,” and “What makes a good father?”

### Ethical Considerations

The study team obtained research clearance from the Norwegian Institute for Data Protection (53570/3/ASF) and ethical clearance from the Ethical Review Committee of the College of Health Sciences, University of Ghana, Legon (CHS-Et/M.6–P1.12/2017–2018). Additionally, the authors sought permission from the selected hospital in Accra and from the Afram Plains North District Health Directorate. Written or oral informed consent was obtained from all participants after the purpose of the study had been thoroughly explained (Kvale and Brinkman 2009). Data were anonymized upon transcription and saved on a password-protected computer.

### Study Limitations

The study is limited regarding the different categories of men that were recruited from the two study sites. It was easier to recruit first-time expectant fathers in Accra than in Sakora. Indeed, with one exception, all participants in Sakora had already had the experience of fathering. Although the topics covered in the focus-group discussion and interviews were the same, participants in Sakora at times responded based on their own experiences of fatherhood, while participants in Accra responded based on their expectations and general knowledge.

Fathers from Accra were recruited at the hospital because of the aim of the larger project—to explore fathers’ experiences of maternal- and infant-welfare services. Men do not commonly participate in antenatal care, and therefore it is possible that the men who participated were not representative of “ordinary” Ghanaian men; however, these men were not from a particular or singular social background, but were artisans and retailers, with only two of them working in the formal sector as sales and marketing officers.

Another limitation concerns the type of material that forms the basis of our study. This is a qualitative study, which by its nature is explorative and in depth, but limited in scale and scope. Our data consist primarily of (expectant) fathers’ narratives, their reflections on fathering ideals, and their accounts of their own behavior in the family, with limited observation in the family setting. These narratives do not equal practices: what (expectant) fathers say they (will) do may be far from how they actually perform their roles in daily life. Hence, the study is indicative of changes at a normative level only.

## Fatherhood in Accra and Sakora

Fathers who participated in this study seemed to phrase their notions about masculinities and fatherhood ideals in terms regarding different stages of the life course. These views were irrespective of their ethnicity or lineage, and hence the findings are organized according to the stages that the men narrated. The stages involve perceptions about becoming a father and being a father.

### Becoming a Father

#### *Transitioning from Boyhood to Adulthood*

In both Accra and Sakora, behaving like a responsible adult man was mentioned as the first step toward fatherhood. It was argued that once a young man began considering fathering a child, he started to prepare financially and abstained from behaviors such as promiscuity and excessive drinking. Entering into this stage often implied marriage or cohabitation with a chosen female partner. Eddie, a twenty-eight-year-old man who had been cohabiting with his girlfriend in Accra for ten years, was expecting their first child and spoke about his transition to becoming a father:

As a man when you get to a certain age, you should be careful and think about the future. For instance, if you are eighteen years old, and you have about four girlfriends, you do not need to be told that it is not a good thing. Because if they all get pregnant, how will you be able to take care of all of them and the kids that come? A father is one that can sit down and think about the future and plan well how to execute his responsibilities.

Kojo was twenty-seven years old. He lived in Sakora with his wife and two children. He ended formal education after junior high school, traveled to the mining regions of Ghana, and worked as a laborer for a few years. He made some money at a young age and later returned to his village, where he kept multiple sexual partners and spent his money with friends. He was now working as a farmer and a motorcycle transport service provider. He talked about his transition to adulthood in the following way:

You know, sometimes when you get to a certain stage in your life, you know that there is a need to change some things in your life. One such change is marriage. Upon a good thought, you would know that the money would have been used to do something productive if you have a wife, so it is a motivation in disguise.

Kojo's narrative highlights marriage as an important marker in a boy's journey to adulthood, ensuring a more productive use of resources. Sometimes, advice from men's own fathers is important in the decision to marry. Kojo continued:

I spent a lot of money before, wasted it on women, wasting money on drinks, and having fun with friends. Because of that lifestyle, I could not stay with only one woman. I even have a child with one woman I did not marry. I used to change women. However, luckily for me, my father called me and advised me to get a wife. I thought about it. We stayed together for about four years, though, before we married.

Elorm was a thirty-year-old artist who lived in Accra with his eighteen-year-old fiancée. They were expecting their first child. According to Elorm, his father advised him to delay pregnancy until he was economically independent:

He [father] told me as a man if you do not have your own room and job, you should not think about a woman because when you try and impregnate someone's child [someone = the girl's parents] and you are not ready to take care of her, you will be humiliated.

For participants in this study, the first step toward attaining adult masculinity is thus economic and social preparedness, followed by the stage of marriage or cohabitation. Boys are expected to learn the rules in preparation for each stage and become competent. If they do not prepare adequately, they may fail and experience humiliation, as several participants indicated.

### *Fatherhood as Providing for Partners and Kin*

A widespread idea among our study participants was that adult males might practice fatherhood before becoming a father—by providing for their wives, kin members, and other children in the community. This notion of fatherhood was more evident in narratives from Accra than in those from Sakora. Many young men in Sakora became biological fathers before they reached what can be called responsible adulthood. Meanwhile in Accra, men mostly aimed to achieve the status of a solid provider before biologically fathering children. According to Elorm:

I think fatherhood starts when you start taking care of your woman. Because if you can take care of your woman, it means you can take care of your children, too. If you cannot care [provide] for someone, then you are not a father. There are men, but those who wake up and take care of others are those who deserve to be called fathers.

Joseph was a thirty-two-year-old sales officer who was cohabiting with his fiancée, and they were expecting their first child. He shared similar views about how “fathering” his partner motivated the pregnancy:

Fatherhood starts from the stage where the couple is living together. Because the woman must see that you can take care of her child. So if you show care for the lady while living together, she becomes comfortable to allow you to even impregnate her. There are many women who get pregnant and abort it because they don't want the man to be the father of their child. For instance, she wanted to get pregnant with me earlier, but I insisted that my religion does not accept that you would get pregnant before getting married. Even when she got pregnant, I wanted us to abort it, but she insisted that she wanted to bear my child because she had seen a fatherly figure in me. So it starts from there, fatherhood starts from there.

Similarly, thirty-year-old Eric, a marketing officer who lived in Accra and had been married to his wife for two years, thought fatherhood began when a man began providing for his partner. He spoke about “fathering” a wife, in the sense of taking care of her:

When I met her, everything that I feel a man should or a father should do for a wife, I did them. You support her and provide the basic needs for a wife. As you are a father, even though you do not have a child, you are somehow fathering the woman. So you have to do what she wants. Not everything though, but the things that you think are reasonable.

The above cases indicate the strong links among being a responsible provider, fatherhood, and masculine ideals. Performing the roles of a responsible father before initiating biological fatherhood contributes to shaping a solid masculine identity. As one participant stated, this separates men from fathers. Based on these views, adult masculinity and fatherhood shape each other through the same process: qualities expected of adult males are also expected of a father; however, masculinity is perceived to be incomplete until men “father their own blood,” as narratives from the next section indicate.

### *Biological Fatherhood*

According to the study participants in both Accra and Sakora, having biological children is decisive in reaching adult masculinity. This expectation was formulated most strongly by participants in Sakora, where young men commonly become fathers before they can provide for the woman and child. As a group of men unanimously communicated in a focus-group discussion in Sakora, “barima ni nea nu tuo apaye.” (A man is one whose gun [penis]

has burst or fired.) In earlier days in Sakora, the bodies of men who had died without having biological children were castrated before the burial and were not given burial ceremonies like men who had had children. Although this practice has long since been discontinued, the underlying cultural ideals still resonate with young men. Peers and community members still sometimes stigmatize men who do not have biological children. According to some participants, having a child transforms boys into adult males and permits their participation in male activities in the community. Kojo said:

I am young, but due to the fact that I have a wife and a child, I can be called a man. If men are called, I will join them, because I qualify.

Kwabena Yeboah had lived in Sakora for more than ten years. He had been married for seven years and was expecting his third child. He thought the community persuaded young people to have children:

Well, as for this place, when you grow up and you do not have a child, people start talking about you. Most of the men get into marriage because of children and the pressure from people in the community.

Kweku was twenty-one and the youngest male participant in this study. Whereas all other fathers in Sakora who participated in this study were living with their partners and had children, Kweku was a young expectant father who did not live with his pregnant girlfriend. He is an example of young men who become fathers before reaching what is perceived to be responsible adulthood and do not have the ability to provide for others. He said:

People will ask why the man doesn't have a child at his age, but they do not ask men who have children why they have the children, so it is something the community expects from men.

Some fathers in Accra expressed similar views. Martin was a thirty-eight-year-old man who managed his own mechanical shop in Accra and was expecting his first child. He said that caring for others does not give you the same respect as caring for your own child:

People would think you are not a man or potent or something, so it is good to be a father. If you are alone without a child in the community, you will not be regarded and respected like someone who has a child. As soon as they know that you do not have a child and you don't look after anyone, you won't be respected. [ . . . ] Even if you take care of someone's child, they will still insult you because you do not have your own blood.

Having your own biological children, or your own blood, was also associated with sexual performance, as Eric mentioned:

If you are a man, as they say, and you cannot fire, a whole lot of things come into people's minds. People will say "this man is not a man," but when you have a child, fine, then you are classified as a man.

Narratives of fathers in Accra suggest that infertility and impotency among men are stigmatized conditions and that men prove their sexual potency by having biological children, which may also be a sign of being a strong provider. Providing and caring for someone else's child, kin, and partner signifies good fathering abilities, but it generates more respect when a man cares for his own biological child.

The journey toward becoming a father, according to our participants, can be categorized into three key stages or levels: preparedness and marriage, ability to care for partners and kin, and biological fatherhood. At each of these stages, men perform tasks and play roles that enhance their masculinity. Men who cannot perform at all three levels risk having their masculinity questioned, as with men who cannot have biological children. The next section explores notions of a good father and what is expected of a man who has transitioned into "real" fatherhood and has his own children.

## Being a Father

Similarly to becoming a father, *being* a father comes with expectations of breadwinning. This was a persistent and strong component of the narratives that participants shared in both Accra and Sakora. As heads of households, fathers are expected to provide, protect, and lead their partners and children; however, that is not always enough to be considered a good father. Our material suggests that men are increasingly expected to share housework, care for their children, and at times spend "quality time" with their partners and children.

### *A Good Father Is a Breadwinner*

Participants in both Sakora and Accra emphasized that a good father should care for and provide food, shelter, school, and medical fees for his wife and children. The inability to do so could bring shame to his nuclear family, as indicated in the quote below by Musa:

A good father is the one who takes good care of his wife and children. Since we are farmers here, we usually do not give daily money for upkeep, but we make sure that at least the money for meat or fish is given to the woman. A good father must be able to do this. When the woman is not feeling well,

he should be able to give her money to go to the hospital. A good father should also pay the school fees of his children. Some men do not do that. Women who are married to such men are teased in the society.

This quotation signals that a man may not be able to provide sufficiently all the time and that this may lead to his wife's stigmatization. Some participants said that effective communication between couples could protect a man's inability to provide and avoid stigma. They maintained that the couple can agree that the woman becomes the main breadwinner without making it known to the children and extended family members. It was also mentioned that some men may hide their inability to provide because of fear that their authority and the respect they wield from their partners, children, and kin will diminish. This concern illustrates the frailty of masculinity and how a failure to provide may lead to the loss of status and bring shame to the family.

### *A Good Father Pursues Equality and Love*

Fathers in this study emphasized equal partnership as an integral element in current conjugal unions and that paying the bride price does not mean owning the wife. Nanasei, for example, had been married for more than fifteen years in Sakora and was one of the elders of the community. He said that equality and the pursuit of peace are increasingly becoming an integral aspect of conjugal relations today:

In the olden days, they considered bride price a form of transaction so that men would treat the women with disrespect. Now, things have changed. We are all equal. We live in peace and respect both parties in the family.

Kwakye has been married for more than ten years and has three children. He is one of the fathers in Sakora who openly performed duties described as feminine, such as fetching water from the pipe station by carrying a pan on his head instead of using a gallon. Also, he prepared dinner for the family and took his children to the clinic when they were unwell. He said:

Getting married to a woman does not mean you have bought her from her family or she becomes your maidservant. You should serve each other. When the baby is crying while the woman is doing something, you should take the baby and play with him.

Although not as explicitly as Kwakye, other fathers also talked about supporting their wives with household chores and childcare as part of the current aim for equality in the home. Kwabena Yeboah said:

A good father will not let the wife do everything at home with the excuse of being busy or going to work. A good father will support his wife at home and help with the house chores. Even though he works, he will not let the woman do everything at home.

Although men assisted their partners in domestic work and spoke about equality between the spouses, this was practiced mostly in the private sphere. In public, most men in Sakora reported that they disliked walking with their partners and openly showing love. They reported that men who openly showed signs of love were called weak and that people could even accuse women in such relationships of bewitching their husbands. Thus, men were often said to express love to their wives and support with housework and childcare when out of sight of others. For example, one participant shared that he usually carries firewood for his wife from the farm but does not bring it to town. He leaves it at the outskirts of town for his wife to carry home, so that community members do not see him. During community gatherings, we observed that men sat in front, while women sat at the back, where they merely listened and did not speak. These narratives of our study participants, and our observations, tell about the difference in gender ideals and practice in public and private life. It seems that emerging men's gender roles, such as support with household and care work, are likelier to be displayed only in private.

Participants in Accra did not bring up the stigmatization of showing love openly to their partners, but mentioned that men could be stigmatized for performing housework in an urban context; nevertheless, they claimed that this should not prevent men from performing housework. They asserted that performing household and care work is about love and understanding between partners, which should override stigma. This implies that a gender-related stigma of showing affection persists also in Accra, but seemingly not to the same extent as in Sakora. Compared to Accra, Sakora is small, a community where residents know each other. Hence, rumors about men's conduct will easily spread to family, friends, and neighbors. Although rumors will surely spread in Accra also, they may not travel the same distance as in Sakora.

Narratives of fathers in Accra (more than in Sakora), moreover, focused on faithfulness. Eddie was a twenty-eight-year-old man who cohabited with his partner in Accra. They were expecting their first child:

As a good father, it is best to have all your children with one woman. You should not make your wife sad by cheating on her.

Maintaining multiple sexual partners and polygamy have customarily been identified as masculine definers in Ghana; however, participants from Accra said that they do not consider maintaining multiple wives or sexual partners,

because it may hurt their partners. Other participants in Accra talked about demonstrating emotional and physical involvement in the lives of their partners and children. Joseph said:

You have to feel for the woman, consider her as your mother or your sister. Consider how you would treat them if she were them.

Martin added:

If you don't love the mother [of the child], it means you don't love your child. You have to love and care for the mother before the child. You have to love both of them equally. It is not possible to love the child and not love your wife.

Eric added:

Fatherhood now is becoming something like a family thing, because more men are supporting their wives. Like the way I come to the antenatal, the way I walk with her—we go to places during the weekends; we spend time together.

The use of the term *family thing* to describe fatherhood is indeed indicative of the nuclear family structure that has gradually replaced the extended family in Accra. Fathering in this sense is perceived to be more related to the immediate, nuclear, rather than to the extended, family. The description also refers to living separately from the extended family and making independent decisions on how to manage the home.

Participants in Sakora did not mention love, emotional care, or spending time with their wives and children as aspects of being a father, although they stressed mutual respect and equal partnerships. They also did not mention faithfulness or having children with only one woman, perhaps due to the widespread occurrence of polygamy in the Afram Plains. Sakora is a rural community, where providing material resources is likely to be valued more strongly than other aspects of fathering. Moreover, fathers in Sakora spent a lot of the daytime with their partners, and sometimes also with their children, working on the farm. Fathers in Accra were separated from their families for long hours during the week, and the separation seemed to call for allocating particular time for their partners and children.

## Discussion

Our study found that fatherhood is central to adult masculinity and can be attained at three different stages. In the first stage, boys transition into adulthood through socioeconomic preparedness and marriage. In the second,

young men provide for partners and kin. Finally, men achieve adulthood through fatherhood by having and caring for their own biological children. The expectations of adult males described by study participants are consistent with Miescher's (2003) description of adult masculinity in precolonial Kwahu. From participants' narratives, adult masculinity appeared as the dominant masculine ideal, resonating with the concept of hegemonic masculinity in Connell's theory. As we have seen, biological fatherhood is also a central element of adult masculinity. In fact, as Miescher (2007) indicates, a childless man in Kwahu could not become a respected adult. Similarly, participants in this study who provide for kin and partners but do not have biological children may be stigmatized as impotent or infertile—which can in turn undermine other masculine gains, such as the ability to provide. For some participants in Sakora, having biological children, even if they cannot provide for them, is enough to attain adult manhood (see also Owusu and Bosiwah 2015).

Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Michael Okyerefo, and Michael Pervarah (2011) have argued that phallic competence is a marker that men can provide for someone. Similarly, our study participants in Accra also said that having their own biological offspring proves that they are real men because it shows their ability to provide. The concept of masculinity as the ability to provide is widespread in Ghana, as other recent studies have shown (Lambrecht 2016; Nukunya 2016; Nyarko 2014). Fathering biological children thus provides a vital site for engaging adult masculinity understood as hegemonic masculinity. Biological fatherhood is important for the continuity of the family lineage in Ghana, irrespective of ethnicity or system of inheritance (Adomako Ampofo, Okyerefo, and Pervarah 2011; Nukunya 2016).

The desire to father one's "own blood" forms part of a central status change for men, as they have contributed to the continuity of the family lineage in a manifest manner in both patrilineal and matrilineal societies. It has been argued that marital unions in Ghana are becoming stronger than lineage ties (Nukunya 2016; Oppong 1980, 2012). Men's responses about biological fatherhood in this study did not indicate differences according to ethnic or lineage affiliation. All participants' narratives show that it is important for men to have their own biological children and provide for their nuclear families.

In addition to having biological children and providing for them, our participants said it was acceptable for fathers to perform caregiving and housework. This acceptance was linked to notions of love and equality. In Accra, men emphasized love for their partners, while in Sakora, men emphasized the ideals of equal partnership in the conjugal union. Additionally, most spouses of fathers who participated in this study from Sakora and Accra were engaged in economic activities outside the home. The women's working situation is therefore likely to play a role in men's acceptance of male performance of caregiving and housework, as many studies have shown (Atobrah and Adomako Ampofo 2016; Boni 2002; Clark 1999; Ganle 2016; Kwansa 2012). Men's acceptance of caregiving and performance of

housework is indicative of involved fatherhood as described by G. R. Farstad and K. Stefansen (2015; see also Magaraggia 2012; McGill 2014).

Unlike in some studies, our participants argued that the payment of bride price is not a justification for subordinating women, and they expressed an interest in pursuing equality in conjugal unions (Adinkrah 2017; Coe 2012). Men also expressed an interest in pursuing peace, harmony, and companionate relationships with their partners. An example is their acceptance of performing roles previously defined as feminine in pursuit of love and conjugal happiness. Another significant indication of a move toward involved fatherhood in our study is the expectation that fathers will spend time with their nuclear families. These new expectations of fathers are indicative of emergent masculinities (Inhorn and Wentzell 2011).

Inhorn and Wentzell's (2011) notion of emergent masculinity indicates a social transformation of masculinity that is happening gradually, in a soft and often nonconflictual way. Emergent masculinities do not necessarily replace existing ones, but are gradually incorporated into patterns of everyday life. This is how adult masculinity seems to be expanding, according to our participants' narratives; however, incorporating new ideals is not completely without friction. Adopting elements of involved fatherhood could endanger masculinity, especially in Sakora, as it requires the (semi)public performance of feminine roles. Men talked about equality in conjugal relations, yet displayed hierarchical gender orders in public.

A recent study conducted among university students in Accra found that men who take paternity leave are stigmatized (Fernández-Cornejo et al. 2019); however, our study participants from Accra said they could perform household chores and care work publicly and seek permission for paternity leave. Indeed, participants from Accra had taken leave from work to participate in antenatal care, but the possibility of performing supposedly feminine tasks is linked to a context in which they are separated from their families and kin and so will not feel the disapproval of significant others (see also Overå 2007).

Elements of emergent masculinities were encountered in the narratives from both study settings. In becoming and being a father, participants in this study have not limited their perceived gender and fatherhood ideals to a singular pattern. In conjugal unions, many fathers found it acceptable to engage in practices that would promote companionship and maintain the quality of their relationship and families. In public, the same men, however, could be observed engaging in practices that are more consistent with hegemonic masculinity in Ghana to avoid stigma for themselves—but also, sometimes, for their wives.

The narratives of study participants suggest that adult masculinity is expanding to include involved fatherhood. As elements of involved fatherhood gradually enter young people's gendered expectations, hegemonic masculinities in the form of patriarchy, viewed as the rule of the husband and father (Wærness 2012), could be weakened. While some men feel they are free to expand adult masculinity by incorporating elements of involved

fatherhood, others feel they are constrained by stigma. Although involved fatherhood could spark some tensions in the community for men, emergent masculinities are nonthreatening and do not make a notion of adult masculinity based on having biological children and the ability to provide for them disappear.

## NOTE

1. See also Atobrah and Adomako Ampofo 2016; Avotri and Walters 1999; Oppong 2004, 2012; Quinsumbing, Hallman, and Ruel 2007; Waterhouse, Hill, and Hinde 2017.

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## INTERVIEWS

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- Eddie. 2017. Interview by Gloria Abena Ampim, July 24, 2017. Accra.
- Eric. 2017. Interview by Gloria Abena Ampim, July 25, 2017. Accra.
- Kwabena Yeboah. 2017. Interview by Gloria Abena Ampim, August 16, 2017. Sakora, Afram Plains.
- Kweku. 2017. Interview by Gloria Abena Ampim, August 23, 2017. Sakora, Afram Plains.
- Kojo. 2017. Discussion led by Gloria Abena Ampim, August 24, 2017. Sakora, Afram Plains.
- Nanasei. 2017. Discussion led by Gloria Abena Ampim, August 24, 2017. Sakora, Afram Plains.
- Kwakye. 2017. Discussion led by Gloria Abena Ampim, August 24, 2017. Sakora, Afram Plains.

Joseph. 2017. Interview by Gloria Abena Ampim, September 1, 2017. Accra.

Martin. 2017. Interview by Gloria Abena Ampim, September 12, 2017. Accra.

Musa. 2017. Interview by Gloria Abena Ampim, August 10, 2017. Sakora, Afram Plains.

GLORIA ABENA AMPIM is a PhD candidate in the Department of Health Promotion and Development, University of Bergen, Norway. Her research focuses on male involvement in maternal and infant healthcare in Ghana and the ways in which such involvement could influence gender relations. She has competencies in international development program implementation, gender analysis, and sexual and reproductive health and rights of Ghanaian youths.

HALDIS HAUKANES is a social anthropologist and professor in the Department of Health Promotion and Development, University of Bergen, Norway. Haukanes has done research and published broadly on diverse issues related to social transformation processes in East Central Europe and on gender, development, and reproduction in African contexts and in Europe. Haukanes is the coeditor of several books, including *Parenting after the Century of the Child: Travelling Ideals, Institutional Negotiations and Local Responses* (with Tajana Thelen; Ashgate, 2010) and *Intimacy and Mobility in the Era of Hardening Borders: Gender, Reproduction, Regulation* (with Frances Pine; Manchester University Press, forthcoming).

ASTRID BLYSTAD is a social anthropologist and professor in the Centre for International Health at the Department of Global Public Health and Primary Care, University of Bergen, Norway. She has carried out long-term ethnographic fieldwork in several East African countries, focusing on global health policy, reproductive health topics, and East African pastoralism. She has published extensively on the intersection of anthropology, social science, and global public health. She has been the principle investigator of a number of externally funded research initiatives, the most recent being the Research Council of Norway-funded project *Competing Discourses Impacting Girls' and Women's Rights: Fertility Control and Safe Abortion in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Zambia*.