


[Paternity Fatherhood](#) by Julia Evans on 10th October 2005 or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=11945)
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Paternity Fatherhood

Text was written on 10th October 2005, following a visit to the London Society by Gil Caroz, then President of the New Lacanian School.

Circulated to the NLS Agora, the Liste de débats de la NLS : 18th February 2006 :

Towards Tel-Aviv ---  PaternityFatherhood, by Julia Evans

Gil Caroz on his September 2005 visit to the London Society challenged us to distinguish between paternity and fatherhood which form the title of next year's congress in Tel Aviv. I have been inspired to revisit this work by the piece circulated by Dr. Shirley Sharon-Zisser. I, too, start with the dictionary definition, then discuss an historical example and thirdly give some current usages of the terms.

It is difficult to keep these two words apart. Fifty years ago, it was seen as old-fashioned and eccentric but it was possible to call your father, pater. The use of Dad and Mum was frowned on, as being American, of course! The dictionary uses each to define the other. Thus paternity is defined as: the quality of being a father, the relation of a father, fatherhood, patriarchal rule, paternal origin or descent. Fatherhood as: the relation of a father to a child, paternity, authority, as of a father.

From history, the example of King Henry VIII occurs to me. Now the King had few difficulties fathering bastards, however, the fathering of legitimate male heirs was problematic. Paternity became of overriding importance and drove both constitutional changes and a break with the paternal authority of the church in Rome. The reason he beheaded Ann Boleyn can be argued to be those of paternity. Ann Boleyn was accused of a close relationship with another man. The King's relationship to fatherhood was distant. He had his daughter, Elizabeth's, mother beheaded when she was two years old and then banished the child. There are letters in existence from Elizabeth's carer to the King begging for money for clothes as she had outgrown all the ones her mother had provided. As the King's daughter, she was not allowed to run around in the Tudor equivalent of a 'babygro'...

Currently, the usage of the two words is very different. I have recently seen adverts on public transport showing a picture of a winsome male baby with the question: Are you sure? There follows an invitation to use a simple procedure to be absolutely certain of paternity. The actress/model Liz Hurley had to sue her child's father for maintenance and prove paternity. Liz was not married to the father but this is a long way from Henry awarding his bastards titles to acknowledge their paternity. So, I guess paternity has become a scientific process to help win legal battle over maintenance payments.

Fatherhood has been obscured by the women's rights movement. A child, if lucky, nowadays has two carers or parents. Even if, one parent is biologically male and the other female, this is no guarantee that the roles have been separated. What does the new man do as parent? Does such a thing as fatherhood exist? There is great emphasis on fathers doing the same as mothers, so they are urged to spend quality time with their children, join in household chores and be available. Women are now wage-earners so are less dependent financially on men. Many women do not take their husband's name and their children may not use the father's surname especially after a divorce. Men, it seems are struggling for a distinct role within the family. In the UK, there are pressure groups forming for fathers to have access to their children. It is very rare for the courts to award custody to fathers in a divorce settlement. So it seems that parenthood has replaced fatherhood. If this is correct, then there is a further question of what functions of fatherhood have been lost. Certainly, giving the family status through the father's position in the world and their ability to earn is one. Being the source of discipline: 'You just wait till your father comes home' is a second. Lastly, being the source of how to decode the world, being the authority on meaning may be a third.

Julia Evans, London

Comment from a third party : 10th October 2005

Quite simply, the distinction, insofar as there is one, exists only in English usage. Paternity – with its Latin origin – is predominantly used to describe the legal relationship. Fatherhood is more likely to encompass the concept of 'what it is to be a father' (paternity would not normally convey this sense) and, in some circumstances, more simply, the biological relationship, if one is asserted.

Your Henrician example looks at the issue from the wrong end of the telescope. The overriding concern was lineal male succession at the time. He (and England) got it briefly (to be swept away by consumption) and then we had the worst and the best female rulers in succession! Such are the ironies of history.

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[The Name-of-the-Father: Psychoanalysis and Democracy : 2003 : Éric Laurent](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12077) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12077) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12077>

[How to recompose the Name-of-the-Father : 2004 : Éric Laurent](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=790) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=790) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=790>

[Three names in the inexistent seminar : 2006: Gil Caroz](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=796) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=796) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=796>

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