

Father Involvement of Joe Warr as a Widowed Single Father in *The Boys Are Back* (2009): Lamb's Fatherhood Theory

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ABSTRACT

Father involvement plays an essential role in supporting children's emotional, social, and psychological development, particularly in widowed single-parent families where fathers assume full parenting responsibilities after the death of a spouse. This study aims to analyze how Joe Warr demonstrates father involvement as a widowed single father in *The Boys Are Back* (2009) through the dimensions of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method. The primary data consisted of selected dialogues, visual scenes, body movements, and other forms of nonverbal communication from the film. The data were collected through repeated observation, identification of relevant scenes and dialogues, categorization based on Michael E. Lamb's Fatherhood Theory, and organization into analytical tables. The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis based on the three dimensions of father involvement proposed by Michael E. Lamb (1981): engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. The findings reveal that Joe Warr demonstrates all three dimensions throughout the film. Among them, engagement emerges as the most dominant dimension, reflected in his active participation in his children's daily activities, emotional communication, shared experiences, and continuous efforts to strengthen the father-child relationship. Accessibility and responsibility are also evident through Joe's consistent physical and emotional presence and his commitment to ensuring his children's well-being. The study concludes that father involvement extends beyond financial support and is fundamentally reflected through emotional presence, accessibility, and long-term parental commitment in the context of widowed single fatherhood.

KEYWORDS: Fatherhood, Michael E. Lamb, Single Parent, *The Boys Are Back*

INTRODUCTION

Father involvement is an important aspect of parenting because a father's role extends beyond financial provision. Fathers contribute to children's cognitive, emotional, and social development through their participation in parenting and everyday family life. Palkovitz (2014) explains that father involvement includes various forms of participation that support children's development and family relationships. Similarly, McWayne et al. (2013) found that positive father involvement is associated with children's early learning and development. Thus, father involvement encompasses not only material support but also fathers' interaction, availability, and commitment to their children.

Michael E. Lamb (1981) conceptualizes father involvement through three dimensions: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. Engagement refers to a father's direct interaction with his child through activities and other forms of interaction. Accessibility concerns the father's physical and emotional availability, while responsibility refers to the father's commitment to ensuring the child's needs and well-being. Lamb's framework shows that father involvement involves both direct interaction and the broader commitment to children's care. This view is also supported by Pleck (2010), who emphasizes that paternal involvement involves fathers' direct engagement with children as well as their responsibility for children's well-being.

The importance of father involvement becomes particularly significant in single-parent families, where one parent assumes responsibilities commonly shared by two parents. Single parenthood may result from divorce, separation, or the death of a spouse (Cairney et al., 2003). Golombok (2015) explains that single-parent families require one parent to manage caregiving, decision-making, and emotional support. In addition, Cabrera et al. (2000) emphasize that father involvement should be understood through fathers' active participation in children's lives rather than solely through their provider role. For widowed single

fathers, these responsibilities may become more demanding because they must adapt to the loss of a spouse while continuing to meet their children's physical, emotional, and developmental needs.

The experience of widowed single fatherhood is portrayed in *The Boys Are Back* (2009), directed by Scott Hicks and adapted from Simon Carr's memoir. The film follows Joe Warr, a sports journalist who becomes a widowed father after the death of his wife, Katy. He raises his young son, Artie, while attempting to rebuild his relationship with his older son, Harry. Throughout the film, Joe faces challenges in adapting to single parenthood and managing his responsibilities as a father. His experiences are represented through communication with his children, participation in their daily activities, physical and emotional presence, and efforts to maintain their well-being.

Joe Warr's experiences provide a relevant context for examining father involvement through Lamb's framework. His interactions with Artie and Harry illustrate different forms of paternal involvement, including spending time with his children, communicating with them, remaining available, and responding to their needs. Therefore, this study focuses on Joe Warr's father involvement in *The Boys Are Back* (2009) through Lamb's three dimensions of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. The analysis examines selected dialogues, visual scenes, actions, body movements, and other nonverbal expressions to illustrate how Joe develops his involvement and commitment as a widowed single father.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an approach that explores and understands the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human phenomenon through the interpretation of textual and visual data. This approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth analysis of father involvement as portrayed by Joe Warr in *The Boys Are Back* (2009) based on Michael E. Lamb's Fatherhood Theory.

The primary data were obtained from *The Boys Are Back* (2009), directed by Scott Hicks. The data consisted of selected dialogues, visual scenes, body movements, facial expressions, and other forms of nonverbal communication that reflect the three dimensions of father involvement: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. The data were collected through repeated observation of the film, followed by the identification of relevant scenes and dialogues. The selected data were then categorized according to the dimensions of father involvement proposed by Michael E. Lamb (1981) and organized into analytical tables to facilitate systematic analysis. The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis following Creswell's (2014) approach, which involves organizing, interpreting, and describing qualitative data to identify meaningful patterns. Each selected scene and dialogue was interpreted based on Michael E. Lamb's Fatherhood Theory to explain how Joe Warr demonstrates engagement, accessibility, and responsibility as a widowed single father. The findings were then presented descriptively to provide a comprehensive understanding of father involvement portrayed in the film.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The findings of this study are presented through selected data from the film *The Boys Are Back* (2009), which illustrate Joe Warr's father involvement based on Michael E. Lamb's three dimensions: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. Each data is presented with its context and analyzed to explain how Joe demonstrates father involvement as a widowed single father.

1. Engagement

Engagement is reflected in Joe Warr's direct involvement in his children's activities and his efforts to establish emotional connections with them. The following data illustrate how Joe demonstrates engagement as a father.

Data 1

Joe: "Hey, cheeky bum, come up here and shit with me. Now, you see that puddle? You drive, okay? Let's go" (Scott Hicks, 00:34:56)

At this point, Joe is driving with Artie and invites him to sit on his lap and pretend to drive. Joe then

deliberately drives through a puddle, creating a large splash and making the experience enjoyable for his son. The scene shows Joe actively participating in Artie's play and creating a shared moment between them. This scene demonstrates engagement because Joe directly interacts with Artie through play and shared activity. According to Lamb (1981), engagement refers to a father's direct involvement in activities with his child. Joe's willingness to participate in Artie's imaginative play and create an enjoyable experience shows his active involvement and strengthens their emotional connection.

Data 2

Joe: "We need to spend some time together" (Scott Hicks, 00:19:29)

At this point, Joe discusses with Artie's grandmother his decision to take Artie to live with him. He explains that he wants to be more present in his son's life, as shown in his statement, "We need to spend some time together." His decision reflects his desire to strengthen his relationship with Artie through more direct interaction and shared time.

This scene demonstrates engagement because Joe emphasizes spending time and building an emotional connection with his child rather than focusing on discipline or material needs. According to Lamb (1981), engagement refers to a father's direct involvement and interaction with his child. Joe's intention to spend more time with Artie shows his willingness to become more actively involved in his son's life.

Data 3

Joe: "Bea, I left my other boy when he was six to be with Katy.

I need to know how to talk to him. I need to know how to comfort him if he needs it" (Scott Hicks, 00:19:39)

During this conversation, Joe is involved in a tense discussion with Bea, Artie's grandmother, who questions his decision to raise Artie on his own. Rather than responding defensively, Joe reflects on his past and admits that he once left his other son when he was young. He explains that he does not want to repeat the same mistake and expresses his intention to communicate better with Artie and provide emotional support when needed. This moment shows Joe's desire to become more emotionally present in his child's life.

This scene is categorized as engagement because Joe emphasizes the importance of communication and emotional connection with his child. According to Lamb (1981), engagement refers to direct father-child interaction that supports emotional bonding. Joe's willingness to improve communication and respond to Artie's emotional needs demonstrates his active involvement beyond physical presence.

2. Accessibility

Accessibility is demonstrated through Joe Warr's physical and emotional availability to his children. The following data show how Joe remains present and available for his children in different situations.

Data 4

Joe: "I'm really sorry....I've been a bit stressed about work. I'm sorry."
(Scott Hicks 01:09:46)

After a long period of separation, Joe personally comes to the airport to pick up his eldest son, Harry. He welcomes him warmly and embraces him, showing his willingness to reconnect and rebuild their relationship. His presence at the airport demonstrates that Joe makes himself physically and emotionally available to his child.

This scene is categorized as accessibility because Joe is physically present and available when Harry returns to his life. According to Lamb (1981), accessibility refers to a father's availability and physical presence when the child needs him. Joe's decision to meet Harry at the airport and warmly welcome him reflects his willingness to remain accessible and strengthen their relationship.

Data 5



(Scott Hicks 00:28:40)

In this scene, Joe accompanies Artie to school and remains beside him throughout the journey. Although the activity is simple, Joe's presence demonstrates his consistent availability and involvement in his child's everyday life. By accompanying Artie to school, Joe provides support and ensures that his child can carry out his daily activities with his father's presence.

This scene is categorized as accessibility because Joe makes himself physically available to his child in an ordinary daily situation. According to Lamb (1981), accessibility refers to a father's physical and emotional availability to his child when needed. Joe's participation in Artie's morning routine reflects his willingness to be present and accessible in his child's everyday life.

Data 6



(Scott Hicks, 00:41:14)

In this scene, Joe arrives at the airport to meet his eldest child after a period of separation. He approaches and warmly embraces his child, showing his willingness to reconnect and be present in his life. His physical presence and warm reception demonstrate that Joe is emotionally open and available to rebuild their relationship.

This scene is categorized as accessibility because Joe makes himself physically and emotionally available to his child. According to Lamb (1981), accessibility refers to a father's availability and physical presence when the child needs him. Joe's decision to meet his child at the airport reflects his willingness to remain accessible and strengthen their relationship.

3. Responsibility

Responsibility is reflected in Joe Warr's commitment to fulfilling his children's needs and making decisions for their well-being. The following data demonstrate how Joe carries out his responsibilities as a widowed single father.

Data 7

Joe: *"The housework has come a big shock, I have to admit. The cooking, the cleaning, the ironing,*

the shopping” (Scott Hicks 00:56:22)

In this scene, Joe reflects on the challenges of managing the household on his own. He mentions responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, ironing, and shopping, which he finds difficult and overwhelming. His statement shows his awareness of the practical responsibilities he must undertake to maintain his family’s daily life.

This scene is categorized as responsibility because Joe recognizes and accepts the duties required to care for his children and manage the household. According to Lamb (1981), responsibility refers to a father’s commitment to ensuring that his children’s needs are met and that family life is properly managed. Joe’s acknowledgment of these household duties demonstrates his growing awareness of and commitment to his responsibilities as a father.

Data 8

Harry: “I didn’t feel safe there.”

Joe: “That won’t happen again. Whatever you decide, I promise, I’ll be a better father to you from now on.” (Scott Hicks 01:31:23)

During this conversation, Joe and Harry discuss Harry’s past experience of feeling unsafe. Joe listens to his son and responds by reassuring him that such a situation will not happen again. He also expresses his intention to become a better father, showing his willingness to acknowledge and address his son’s emotional needs.

This interaction is categorized as responsibility because Joe recognizes his role in ensuring Harry’s emotional security and well-being. According to Lamb (1981), responsibility involves a father’s commitment to meeting his child’s needs and supporting their well-being. Joe’s response demonstrates his willingness to acknowledge past shortcomings and take responsibility for creating a safer and more supportive relationship with his son.

Data 9

Joe: “I’m really sorry about what happened. I should never have left you guys alone. It was wrong.” (Scott Hicks 01:24:40)

Following the incident, Joe engages in a serious conversation about leaving his children alone. He openly apologizes and acknowledges that his decision was wrong without making excuses or shifting blame. His willingness to admit the mistake reflects his awareness of his responsibilities and obligations as a father.

This scene is categorized as responsibility because Joe recognizes his duty to protect and care for his children. According to Lamb (1981), responsibility refers to a father’s commitment to ensuring his children’s needs and safety. By acknowledging his mistake, Joe demonstrates moral awareness and his willingness to take responsibility for his actions as a father.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Joe Warr demonstrates all three dimensions of father involvement proposed by Michael E. Lamb (1981), namely engagement, accessibility, and responsibility, in his role as a widowed single father in *The Boys Are Back* (2009). The findings show that engagement is the most dominant dimension, as Joe is actively involved in his children’s daily activities, communicates with them, shares meaningful experiences, and makes efforts to strengthen their emotional relationships. Accessibility is demonstrated through his consistent physical and emotional availability, while responsibility is reflected in his commitment to meeting his children’s needs, managing family life, acknowledging his mistakes, and ensuring their well-being.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Joe’s father involvement extends beyond providing material needs. His fatherhood is represented through active participation, emotional presence, availability, and long-term responsibility. As a widowed single father, Joe gradually adapts to the demands of parenting and becomes more emotionally involved in his children’s lives. Therefore, the film portrays father involvement as a continuous process in which a father’s presence, emotional connection, and commitment play an important role in supporting the well-being of his children.

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