

WILLIAM MARSIGLIO *University of Florida*

PAUL AMATO *The Pennsylvania State University\**

RANDAL D. DAY *Brigham Young University\*\**

MICHAEL E. LAMB *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development\*\*\**

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## Scholarship on Fatherhood in the 1990s and Beyond

*Throughout the 1990s, scholars interested in fatherhood have generated a voluminous, rich, and diverse body of work. We selectively review this literature with an eye toward prominent theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues. This burgeoning literature, complemented by social policy makers' heightened interest in fathers and families, focuses on fatherhood in at least 4 key ways. First, theorists have studied fatherhood as a cultural representation that is expressed through different sociocultural processes and embedded in a larger ecological context. Second, researchers have conceptualized and examined the diverse forms of fatherhood and father involvement. Third, attempts have been made to identify the linkages between dimensions of the father-child relationship and developmental outcomes among children and fathers. Fourth, scholars have explored the father identity as part of a re-*

*ciprocal process negotiated by men, children, mothers, and other interested parties. Our review highlights research that examines the relationships between dimensions of the father-child relationship and children's well-being and development. We conclude by discussing promising avenues of scholarship for the next generation of research on fatherhood.*

### THE CONTEXT FOR SCHOLARSHIP ON FATHERHOOD

Building on the scholarly interest in fatherhood that emerged in the 1970s and 80s (Lamb, 2000), the 1990s produced a more extensive and eclectic social science literature on numerous aspects of fatherhood. Throughout the decade, interest in fatherhood grew, the number and diversity of fatherhood researchers expanded, and efforts to promote the study of fatherhood intensified. These developments, punctuated by expanding social policies targeting fathers, present us with a timely opportunity to survey the recent literature on fatherhood and suggest promising avenues for future scholarship.

The multilayered fatherhood terrain is represented by a wide range of issues, including cultural representations of and discourses about fatherhood, conceptual and empirical analyses of the diverse forms of fatherhood and father involve-

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Department of Sociology, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611 (marsig@soc.ufl.edu).

\*Department of Sociology, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16803.

\*\*Department of Marriage, Family, and Human Development, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84604.

\*\*\*National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Bethesda, MD 20892.

*Key Words: father-child relationship, fatherhood, father identity, fathering, father involvement.*

ment, linkages between dimensions of the father-child relationship and children's and fathers' well-being and development, and the social psychology of paternal identity and fathering. Given the breadth of work on these topics, our review incorporates various disciplinary perspectives on the different aspects of fatherhood and focuses largely on the fathering of children and adolescents (for discussions of fathering with adult children, see Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Snarey, 1993).

Our summary and assessment of the scholarly record on fatherhood during the past decade is informed by our recognition of the larger sociopolitical context and its role in shaping research agendas. A variety of specialized conferences and roundtables during the 1990s raised the visibility of research on fathers while accentuating its social policy implications (Marsiglio, 1998; National Center on Fathers and Families [NCOFF], 1997). Most notable among these conferences were the series of national meetings sponsored by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics in 1996–1997. Organized in response to President Clinton's 1995 executive order directing federal agencies to support fathers' positive involvement in their families while ensuring that federally funded research on children and families incorporated fathers, these multidisciplinary meetings culminated in 1998 in the publication of *Nurturing Fatherhood: Improving Data and Research on Male Fertility, Family Formation, and Fatherhood*. This document, drawing on the efforts of over 100 researchers, policy analysts, and public officials, reviewed and analyzed the state of data collection, research, and theory on a range of issues related to fatherhood. The larger federal initiative has provided an intellectual foundation and incentive for launching a new wave of research on fatherhood while sensitizing policy makers and funding agencies to its relevance.

During the past decade, scholarship on fatherhood was also encouraged when several journals, including *Families in Societies* (1993), *Journal of Family Issues* (1993 & 1994; 1999), *Demography* (1998), *Journal of Men's Studies* (1998), *Journal of Family History* (2000), and *Marriage and Family Review* (2000), devoted special issues to this topic. A number of edited volumes (Booth & Crouter, 1998; Bozett & Hanson, 1991; Daniels, 1998; Garfinkel, McLanahan, Meyer, & Seltzer, 1998; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Hood, 1993; Lamb, 1997; Marsiglio, 1995a; Shapiro, Diamond, & Greenberg, 1995) provided additional outlets for the growing body of research on fa-

therhood. The impressive activity in this area is further illustrated by the emergence, continuing efforts, or both of organizations across the country to promote research, social policy analyses, community programs, or the dissemination of information and value-based messages about fatherhood (National Center for Fathers and Families; Center on Fathers, Families, and Public Policy; National Center for Fathering; National Fatherhood Initiative; and the Fatherhood Project). In addition, the directors of major national surveys (e.g., Panel Study of Income Dynamics, National Survey of Labor Market Experience—Youth, National Survey of Adolescent Males, National Survey of Families and Households [NSFH], and National Survey of Family Growth) have recently responded to the surge of interest in fatherhood by adding questions about fathering to recent or forthcoming waves of data collection (see Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1998). Research initiatives such as these are novel and significant because they ask the fathers themselves about their family roles.

These noteworthy activities have occurred against a backdrop of fundamental shifts in family life, gender relations, men's declining wages, and increases in both women's participation in the paid labor force and men's involvement as primary nonmaternal care providers (Gerson, 1993). At the same time, heated public debates have emerged over numerous issues relevant to fatherhood, including divorce and single parenthood, "deadbeat dads" and "androgynous" fathers, welfare reform, teenage pregnancy and nonmarital childbearing, fathers' rights and responsibilities, the definition of "family," and fathers' potentially unique contributions to child development. Discussions of these issues often make reference to serious social problems assumed to arise from the diverse conditions of *fatherlessness* and *father absence* (Blankenhorn, 1995; Popenoe, 1996). Despite scholarly disagreement over the meaning of these concepts and the extent and consequences of father absence, these debates influence how the public, policy makers, and the research community frame various questions concerning fathers and families (Daniels, 1998; Griswold, 1993). Fears about the growing numbers of fathers who are disconnected from their children have inspired stakeholders to develop organized responses to particular features of fatherhood. Male-only social movements and events such as the Promise Keepers, the Million Man March on Washington, the Mythopoetic movement, and fathers' rights

groups have each wrestled with fathers' voluntary or involuntary lack of involvement with their children and, in the process, served to heighten public awareness about the meaning and relevance of fathers in children's lives (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000; Messner, 1997; Stacey, 1998).

#### PERSPECTIVES ON FATHERHOOD

An impressive body of literature appearing during the 1990s advanced the way we conceptualize and theorize aspects of fatherhood. These multidisciplinary efforts illustrate the complexity of the issues involved and, at times, the competing ways in which core questions have been framed and addressed. Without claiming to be exhaustive, we discuss briefly some of the leading perspectives that have guided the literatures that take fatherhood or fathering as their subject and emphasize where appropriate the significance of fathers' diverse life course and family circumstances.

##### *Historical Perspectives*

Our understanding of late-20th-century fatherhood has been enriched by efforts to clarify how it can be viewed as an historically varying social construction (Griswold, 1993; Jaret, 1991; LaRossa, 1997; LaRossa, Gordon, Wilson, Bairan, & Mintz, 1998; Pleck & Pleck, 1997; Stearns, 1991; see also Kimmel, 1996; Rotundo, 1993). These insightful critiques of fatherhood in the United States since the colonial era have painted a more complex image of fathering than was available earlier. Scholars have shown that within every historical epoch, a great deal of variability has always existed, with the dominant motif in any period coexisting alongside concerns about other important conceptions of fatherhood. Breadwinning has always been a concern, for example, even though moral leadership may have been emphasized in the colonial period and gender role modeling in the mid-20th century. Recent analyses have alerted us to the historical flexibility of fatherhood, the fundamental linkages between cultural images of mothering and fathering, the futility of searching for prototypical "traditional" families and fathers, and the diversity of men's family roles in previous eras (Cherlin, 1998; Lamb, 1998). At the same time, we are also reminded that our historical understanding of fatherhood is quite limited because materials are typically drawn from White middle-class sources and are seldom representative of their contempo-

raries from different ethnic, racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Although those interested in the history of fatherhood have been encouraged to study the unique historical events relevant to men from different ethnic or racial backgrounds and to focus on the unique combinations of these experiences across race and ethnicity, Burton and Snyder (1998) point out that little has been accomplished in this regard (see Griswold (1993); and Parke & Buriel (1998) for possible exceptions).

##### *Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives*

One of the more noteworthy recent developments involves attempts to refine and expand conceptualizations of father involvement to capture the range of activities that fathers can do that influence their children's lives. Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine's (1987) conceptualization identifying engagement, accessibility, and responsibility as forms of paternal involvement continued to influence fatherhood scholars in the 1990s. Building on this conceptualization, Palkovitz (1997) explicitly identified 15 general categories of paternal involvement (e.g., doing errands, planning, providing, sharing activities, teaching, thinking about children). In the process, Palkovitz extended Lamb and colleagues' notion of responsibility by calling for a more systematic and fuller treatment of the cognitive manifestations of father involvement (see also Walzer, 1998). Moreover, he delineated and discussed some of the useful continua (e.g., time invested, degree of involvement, observability, salience, directness) that researchers should take into account when examining the nature and consequences of different types of father involvement. These and other related discussions (Hawkins & Palkovitz, 1999) highlight the complex nature of father involvement and warrant further consideration.

From a social constructionist perspective, it is clear that the growing diversity of life course and residency patterns for men and children today, as well as stakeholders' vested interests in emphasizing particular images of fatherhood and paternal involvement, need to be recognized when conceptualizations of paternal involvement are broadened (Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000). In a related vein, a focus on family processes such as distance regulation (parents' tolerance for individuality and emotional connection), parental support, and flexibility provides opportunities to examine the ways men develop, negotiate, and sustain their rights,

privileges, and obligations as fathers in different types of family structures. This type of approach is consistent with an appreciation for the increasingly complex set of social, cultural, and legal forces associated with the multiple pathways to paternity, social fatherhood, and responsible fathering (Daniels, 1998; Marsiglio, 1998).

Other theorists have examined fatherhood using the concept of social capital (e.g., family and community relations that benefit children's cognitive and social development). The quality of the relationships between fathers and children (as reflected in behaviors such as paternal warmth and helping) represents one obvious example of social capital. Fathers who cooperate with and share parenting styles and values with their children's mother provide another example. Fathers also contribute to their children's development through their connections with other individuals and organizations in the community. For example, fathers build social capital when they know their children's friends and the parents of their children's friends. Social capital also is created when fathers are involved with institutions in the community, such as schools, churches, sports teams, and neighborhood organizations in which their children participate. Fathers who maintain contact with their children's teachers, coaches, employers, ministers, and neighbors help to bring about closure (or structural integration) in children's social networks. Closure makes it easier for care providers to share information about children, supervise and guide children, treat children in a consistent manner, and help children internalize a coherent set of social norms. Finally, fathers can build social capital by connecting their children to their own social networks. A father working in a factory may introduce his child to his supervisor, who may eventually hire the child. This father can also share knowledge that will help his child succeed at his tasks and fit in with his coworkers (Amato, 1998; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Furstenberg, 1998; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Hagan, MacMillan, & Wheaton, 1996; Seltzer, 1998a). Additional research is indirectly relevant to our understanding of how fathers' opportunities for contributing social capital are affected by co-parents' perspectives on shared parenting (Dienhart, 1998; Dienhart & Daly, 1997) and mothers' gatekeeping roles when fathers co-reside with (Allen & Hawkins, 1999) or live apart from their children (Braver & O'Connell, 1998). The notion of social capital is useful because it provides a conceptual linkage between the actions of fathers, children's

developmental trajectories, and the larger network of social relations within which fathers and children are embedded.

Use of the social capital concept to enrich the analysis of father involvement is consistent with a family systems or ecological perspective. Although not referring to social capital explicitly, Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson (1998) outlined a systemic ecological approach for conceptualizing the linkages between individual, interpersonal, and social factors that affect the context for so-called responsible fathering for either resident or nonresident biological fathers. This model, which focuses on several aspects of the father-child connection (including the establishment of paternity), underscores how fathering, compared with mothering, is "uniquely sensitive to contextual influences" (p. 289). In some ways, this approach parallels the multilevel scripting perspective that has been used to conceptualize fatherhood and men's involvement in the procreative realm (Marsiglio, 1995a, 1998).

Scholars' interest in responsible fathering is consistent with a recent willingness among social scientists to incorporate value-sensitive positions into their social analysis (Doherty et al., 1998), including conceptualizations of fatherhood (Blankenhorn, 1995; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Levine & Pitt, 1995; Pleck, 1997). Although these perspectives on fathering take many forms and often make contradictory assumptions about fathering, they each highlight moral positions toward fathering using value-based language.

One of the more cohesive value-directed approaches, the *generativity perspective*, emerged in response to what has been perceived as a deficit paradigm and a role-inadequacy perspective. These latter terms have been used to characterize and assail an approach that views fathering as a "*social role* that men generally perform inadequately" (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997, p. 3). Snarey (1993) borrowed the term *generativity* from the work of Erik Erikson (1982) and applied that particular psychosocial label to activities or work involving fathers. As Snarey (1993) says,

[His book]. . . is about good fathers. By good, I mean "generative" fathers: men who contribute to and renew the ongoing cycle of the generations through the care that they provide as birth fathers (biological generativity), childrearing fathers (parental generativity), and cultural fathers (societal generativity). (p. 1)

The generative-fathering framework emphasizes

es the kind of activities and work fathers do in response to the needs of their children rather than in response to the role obligations superimposed upon men by sociocultural prescriptions (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997). Generativity theorists suggest that the generative work of fathers involves a sense of responsible caring, a desire to facilitate the needs of the next generation, and attention to fostering a fit between men's activities and children's needs. Recent work based on this perspective has increasingly focused attention on how religious beliefs shape fathers' generative work (Dollahite, 1998).

Developmentalists' conceptions of father-child relationships and paternal influence patterns have also matured in the 1990s. Although these scholars had previously dealt with audiences implicitly or explicitly skeptical about the possible significance of father-child relationships, substantial consensus now exists within developmental psychology that father-child relationships can be remarkably influential (compare Lamb, 1981, with Lamb, 1997). More than ever before, developmentalists are willing to recognize the extent to which father-child relationships must be viewed in the context of a network of mutually interdependent relationships within the family, with fathers influencing these children (and vice versa) both directly, by way of these direct interactions with one another, and indirectly, by way of their impact on other significant members of their social ecologies shared by children and their fathers (e.g., Parke & Buriel, 1998). Although indirect patterns of influence (i.e., patterns of influence mediated via the behavior of third parties, such as mothers) were described by some scholars decades ago (e.g., Lewis, Feiring, & Weinraub, 1981; Lewis & Weinraub, 1976; Parke, Power, & Gottman, 1979), their significance was not universally recognized and studied until the 1990s.

Appreciation of the broader social context within which father-child relationships must be viewed is evidenced by the increasingly sophisticated observational research on the extent to which children are influenced by the quality of the interactions between their parents (Cummings & O'Reilly, 1997; Parke & Buriel, 1998). Similarly, Parke and his colleagues, among others, have described how the pattern of relationships children experience within their families affect children's behavior outside the family (e.g., their peer relationships) as well (Carson & Parke, 1996; Henggeler, Edwards, Cohen, & Summerville, 1992; Isley, O'Neil, & Parke, 1996).

Of course, the emergent concern with intrafamily dynamics and complex multidirectional patterns of influence has achieved center stage at a time when growing numbers of families deviate from the modal family type that developmentalists have typically studied (Lamb, 1999a). In recent years, developmentalists have been more willing to acknowledge the dramatic rise in the number of children being exposed to their parents' separation, being raised for part or all of their childhoods in single-parent households, or both. Likewise, they have become more aware that there are cultural and subcultural variations in the ways in which parents perceive their family roles and responsibilities and that these variations undoubtedly shape parental behavior as well as its influence on children. This diversity has not only fostered interest in parent- (including father-) child relationships in other cultures (e.g., Hewlett, 1992; Parke & Buriel, 1998) and diverse ethnic groups (Gadsden, 1999) but has also dissuaded developmentalists from offering sweeping recommendations that ignore the variability of family structures and circumstances.

Whereas developmentalists have decades of experience studying fathers, scholars who explore the subjective experiences of men as fathers using a symbolic interactionist perspective, and in some cases identity theory, are relatively new to the study of fatherhood (Armato & Marsiglio, 1998; Daly, 1995; Fox & Bruce, 1999; Futris & Pasley, 1997; Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, & Buehler, 1995; Marsiglio, 1995b, 1998; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000; Minton & Pasley, 1996). Although they have focused on different theoretical and substantive questions, these theorists have been committed to understanding how men perceive and construct their identities as fathers in diverse situations. Theorists have grown more sensitive to the co-constructed nature of men's identities and their actual fathering activities. Moreover, these theorists recognize that it is critical to understand the nature, bases, and consequences of father's commitment to their children. The recent popularity of the symbolic interactionist perspective not coincidentally comes at a time when more and more men are experiencing complex family-based life course transitions and, in the process, are struggling to make sense of poorly defined fathering roles and competing images of ideal fathering.

Informed by poststructuralist and phenomenological perspectives, other scholars have argued that fatherhood should be viewed as a

continually changing ontological state, a site of competing discourses and desires that can never be fully and neatly shaped into a single "identity" and that involves oscillation back and forth between various modes of subject positions even within the context of a single day. (Lupton & Barclay, 1997, p. 16)

These authors challenge mainstream thinking on fatherhood in several ways. Most important, they invite scholars to view the meanings and experiences associated with fatherhood as existing through specific sociocultural processes rather than as a stable identity. Although they appear too eager to discount the stable, continuous, and orderly patterns of many fathers' experiences when they evaluate identity theory, their plea for scholars to pay more attention to the emotional and subjective aspects of fathering resonates with growing numbers of scholars (Garbarino, 1996). Likewise, their call for a discourse analysis that assesses the competing sociocultural forces contributing to the construction of fatherhood is particularly timely given the recent surge in government-sponsored fatherhood initiatives and the public's keen interest in fatherhood issues.

Though brief and selective, the preceding discussion illustrates the number and breadth of theoretical lenses that have been used to view the fatherhood terrain and its many dimensions. These diverse perspectives have captured fatherhood as a cultural representation that is expressed through different sociocultural processes and embedded in a larger ecological context, as a reflection of the interpersonal processes that lead to developmental outcomes among children and fathers, and as an identity that is part of a reciprocal process negotiated by men, children, mothers, and other interested parties. An important legacy of this literature will be its role in encouraging scholars to expand their vision of fatherhood and paternal involvement while reinforcing the need to examine fathering within a systemic and ecological context.

#### METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Scholars' attempts to view fathering more broadly, coupled with the changing composition of families, have complicated efforts to study fathers in recent years. Researchers in the 1990s became more attentive to methodological issues associated with the quality of data on fathers, as evidenced by the Methodology Working Group's report for the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (1998). This report systematically as-

sessed the key methodological issues involving population identification, data collection procedures, and study designs in this area. The authors speculated that standard household surveys were most problematic because of the outdated assumption that an individual respondent from each household can provide accurate information about the entire family unit. In fact, standard household surveys clearly provide incomplete information about nonresident fathers: They underestimate the number of nonresident fathers because many men underreport children who are not living with them, and they inadequately account for men's sexual, reproductive, and union histories in many instances. The most basic of the report's many recommendations was a suggestion that resident and nonresident fathers be included in future research designs. Researchers were also encouraged to deal with undercounting and undercoverage problems by exploring strategies for augmenting current household rosters and using administrative records. These efforts may be vital for securing the participation of nonmarried fathers, particularly those with low incomes, who tend to be more loosely attached to households compared with their married, more affluent counterparts. Special sampling strategies to include fathers in jail, prison, and the military were deemed important to ensure more representative samples, especially of African American men.

Researchers also need to develop and assess survey measures that better represent fathers' diverse experiences, including the cognitive work they do as fathers, by considering new opportunities to incorporate time-diary methods into studies of fathers and children (Juster & Stafford, 1985). Likewise, A-CASI (audio, computer-assisted self-interview) technology should be considered for studies that address sensitive aspects of fathers' experiences (e.g., child support payments, physical discipline, father-child closeness). This computer-based technique enhances privacy because respondents listen to questions through a headset and then enter their responses directly into a computer. It was recently and successfully used in the 1995 National Survey of Adolescent Males, and there are plans to experiment with it in the 2001 National Survey of Family Growth interviews with men (W. Mosher, personal communication, July 8, 1998). Methodological studies based on these and other initiatives with men are especially warranted because it appears more difficult to obtain valid and complete responses about fertility and parenting from men than from wom-

en, partly because some men may misrepresent their affiliations to avoid legal action, custody requirements, and paternity connections. Some men may also fail to provide accurate reports because they anchor their time lines differently than do women, and fertility and union sequences in questionnaires have typically been designed for women respondents.

Finally, fathers' pre- and postnatal experiences should be studied using a range of observational, ethnographic, and in-depth qualitative interview approaches (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). These types of methodologies, especially when used in longitudinal studies, may play a crucial role in developing a rich understanding of the cultural context and interpersonal processes associated with how fathers construct and negotiate their self-images as fathers and are directly and indirectly involved in their children's lives. These approaches may also prove useful for survey researchers who wish to improve the substantive content and interviewing procedures associated with their closed-ended survey items.

#### *National Surveys and Fathering Measures*

Large national data sets that contain measures of parent-child interaction continue to be a valuable resource as researchers attempt to measure father involvement, predict patterns of father-child relations, and assess the impact of father involvement on children's well-being. The data sets used most frequently to study fatherhood are the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLS-Y), Michigan Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), NSFH, and National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health). (See Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 1998, for a more complete description of the relevant items in these data sets).

Two kinds of measures are generally found in these data sets: (a) a gross measure of father absence or presence at the time of the interview or in previous years and (b) some inquiry regarding broad categories of father involvement, such as communication, teaching, monitoring, feelings, planning, providing, and negative involvement (PSID—Child Development Supplement) or communication, monitoring, time-in-contact, providing for the child, affection, and negative involvement (NSFH).

The most recent large national survey to gather information about father involvement is the Add Health survey. In the first wave of this planned

longitudinal survey, data were collected about several important dimensions of adolescent-father relationships, including measures of presence and absence, communication, co-activities, teaching, and conflict.

Although large, nationally representative data sets provide us with excellent opportunities to understand fathers' family roles, these data sets have limitations. Even those data sets that specifically target family interactional variables (e.g., NSFH, Add Health, and PSID) provide few measures of the diverse theoretical constructs that have been developed in recent years. Another shortcoming is that fathers, especially nonresident ones, are underrepresented in household surveys. The PSID is one of the few data collection efforts where securing the participation of nonresident fathers was a primary objective. Finally, national surveys can develop more effective ways of asking sensitive questions about the most intimate aspects of father involvement (e.g., emotional displays, prayer).

#### *Measurement Issues*

The technical issues dealing with shared-method variance, discrepancies among respondents' reports, and the reliability of observational data deserve special comment here. Shared-method variance is present whenever researchers use the same source (fathers, mothers, children, teachers, or observers) for data on independent and dependent variables. This occurs, for example, when children report on (a) the amount of time spent with their fathers and (b) their self-esteem. Under these circumstances, shared-method variance tends to increase the correlation between variables, resulting in an overestimate of the true association. In our review of 72 studies dealing with paternal involvement and child outcomes in two-parent families conducted in the 1990s, 39 studies (54%) were based entirely on data from a single source, making it impossible to know whether the observed correlations have an objective basis or exist entirely within the minds of the informants. For this reason, studies using multiple informants are preferable to those based on a single source. However, some research questions make individuals' perceptions important in their own right, not simply as vehicles for defining some objective reality. For example, children's perceptions of their fathers may directly influence their own feelings and behavior, regardless of how other family members (including the fathers themselves) see their fathers.

Relatedly, researchers have shown that when asked to describe family processes (such as the amount of contact, affection, and conflict between fathers and children), different informants' accounts appear to be only modestly correlated. For example, Tein, Roosa, and Michaels (1994) found that correlations reflecting father-child agreement regarding paternal acceptance, rejection, and discipline ranged from .19 to .31. Similarly, Paulson, Hill, and Holmbeck (1991) found that correlations between reports of parent-child closeness by different informants ranged from .33 (between fathers and adolescent sons) to .58 (between mothers and adolescent daughters). Correlations between the reports of objective observers and family members tend to fall in the same range. Simons, Whitbeck, Melby, and Wu (1995) found that observers' ratings of parental harsh discipline correlated at .30 with children's reports and .31 with fathers' reports. Meanwhile, other studies have shown that married fathers report doing more child care than their wives acknowledge (Coltrane, 1996), whereas divorced fathers report paying more child support than their ex-wives concede (Braver, Fitzpatrick, & Bay, 1991; Braver & O'Connell, 1998; see also Seltzer & Brandreth, 1995). Finally, although there was modest but statistically significant agreement between mothers and preadolescents in violent families regarding the children's behavior problems in one study, fathers' reports were not significantly related to those of either mothers or children (Sternberg et al., 1993, 1994). On the other hand, another study found that fathers and adolescents were more likely than mothers and adolescents to agree with one another regarding the levels and types of family violence (Sternberg, Lamb, & Dawud-Noursi, 1998).

It is tempting to conclude that the lack of agreement between independent observers exists because people's views are entirely idiosyncratic and that researchers should abandon the search for descriptions of paternal behavior that are verified by different persons. But care must be taken when interpreting these seemingly modest correlations. First, these modest correlations partly reflect problems with measurement error, which attenuates the magnitude of associations. Second, it is important to recognize that a correlation of .3 between fathers' and children's ratings means that the correlation between their respective ratings and the latent, unobserved variable (e.g., father involvement) is actually .55. This is the case because the correlation of .3 is the product of the path between

the latent variable and the fathers' rating and the path between the latent variable and the child's rating (i.e.,  $.55 \times .55$ ). In this light, one gains a new respect for interrater correlations as low as .3.

Nevertheless, a pattern of positive but modest correlations between observers also suggests that measures of paternal involvement (and other dimensions of paternal behavior) have a subjective as well as an objective component. Researchers should distinguish between those phenomena that have a clear objective basis and those that are completely subjective, for instance, how children and fathers feel about each other. The meaning of associations between multiple-source reports may be quite different depending upon whether behaviors or feelings are being studied. In either case, a subjective element is present, and the subjectivity associated with perceptions of behavior is linked to individuals' emotional reactions to these behaviors. Consequently, the nonshared variance in multiple respondents' ratings often reflects more than mere measurement error.

Although understanding fathers and family life is enhanced by obtaining different family members' perspectives, this strategy raises the question of how one analyzes multiple-source data. This topic is too complex to address here; nevertheless, new statistical methods for analyzing multiple-source data (such as hierarchical linear modeling) allow researchers to model both the agreement and the discrepancies between observers (Maquire, 1999). The innovative work of Smith and Morgan (1994) represents another approach. Consequently, advancing research on father involvement will require researchers to obtain data from more than one family member.

Another methodological issue relates to growing concerns about the reliability of developmentalists' observational studies of fathers. Just as the reliability of measurement obtained using self-report questionnaires increases with the number of observations (questionnaire items), the same is true of observational (behavioral) data (Epstein, 1979, 1980). Using data obtained in extended observations of independent samples of upper-middle-class White Americans, Central American immigrants to the United States, and middle-class Costa Ricans, Leyendecker and her colleagues reported that reliable measures of individual behavior and the more theoretically important interaction patterns were not obtained unless each of the families was observed for several hours (Leyendecker, Lamb, & Schölmerich, 1997; Leyendecker,

er, Lamb, Schölmerich, & Fricke, 1997) and that measures continued to become more reliable as the length of observation increased. Of course, the actual amount of time needed to obtain reliable measures would undoubtedly change as a function of the specific coding system involved (Leyendecker et al. used a rather gross 20-second observe, 10-second record time-sampling system), the extent to which the observers focused on carefully specified functional contexts, and the age of those being observed. The data of Leyendecker et al. nevertheless demonstrate that the typical study, sampling 10 to 30 minutes of interaction, is unlikely to provide reliable measures of individuals. These findings should encourage researchers to check and report the reliability of their observational data and underscore the need for careful replication. Moreover, because fathers typically spend shorter periods of time with their children, naturalistic observations of children will necessarily need to embrace even longer periods of time to ensure adequate sampling and thus reliable assessments of father-child relationships.

#### FATHERHOOD: DEMOGRAPHIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Although interest in fatherhood diversity predates the 1990s, researchers have recently accelerated their efforts to study the shifting demography of fatherhood and cultural aspects of fathering. The literatures in these areas have accentuated fathers' diverse experiences resulting from their varied living arrangements, responsibility for early off-time births, racial or ethnic background, and experiences as gay parents. Much of this research has profiled and studied divorced fathers (Arendell, 1995; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999), nonresident or "absent" fathers (Braver & O'Connell, 1998; Braver, Wolchik, Sandler, Gogas, & Zvetina, 1991; Clarke, Cooksey, & Verropoulou, 1998; Furstenberg & Harris, 1992; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Mott, 1990, 1994; Nord & Zill, 1996a, 1996b; Rettig, Leichtentritt, & Stanton, 1999; Seltzer, 1991, 1998b; Seltzer & Brandreth, 1995; Stewart, 1999; Thompson & Laible, 1999) resident single-father families (Bianchi, 1995; Brown, 1996; Downey, Ainsworth-Darnell, & Dufur, 1998; Eggebeen, Synder, & Manning, 1996; Garasky & Meyer, 1996; Grief, 1990; Grief & DeMaris, 1995; Heath & Orthner, 1999; Meyer & Garasky, 1993; see also Fox & Bruce, 1999), stepfathers (Bray & Berger, 1993; Fine, Ganong, & Coleman, 1997; Hawkins & Eggebeen, 1991;

Hetherington, 1993; Hetherington & Henderson, 1997; Larson, 1992; MacDonald & DeMaris, 1996; Marsiglio, 1995b), young fathers of children born to teenage mothers (Kiselica, 1995; Landry & Forrest, 1995; Lerman & Ooms, 1993; Lindberg, Sonenstein, Ku, & Martinez, 1997; Marsiglio & Cohan, 1997), and fathers in violent and neglectful families (Dubowitz, 1999; Sternberg & Lamb, 1999). Relatedly, some researchers have considered the socioeconomic and family life consequences associated with premarital, adolescent, or both those types of fatherhood (Heath & McKenry, 1993; Nock, 1998).

This literature is too expansive for us to provide a detailed review of the substantive issues here, but several findings warrant brief comment. Scholars in the 1990s have increasingly recognized the need to move beyond simplistic analyses of fathers' presence or absence in the household, family, or both, noting the complexity, fluidity, and cultural variations associated with fathers' multifaceted connections to particular households, families, or individual household members. Similarly, researchers have recently highlighted how our understanding of the changing demography of single-father families requires us to account for the significant roles cohabiting partners play in the lives of many single fathers. A number of researchers have also focused on the critical gatekeeping role many women play in nonresident fathers' and stepfathers' relationships with their children, whereas others have attempted to clarify the factors that account for nonresident fathers' declining level of involvement in their children's lives after their romantic relationships with the children's mothers have ended. There is also mounting evidence that stepfathers frequently exhibit a disengaged parenting style, which needs to be considered in the context of the circumstances that influence the quality of stepfather-stepchild relationships and the factors associated with the adjustment to life with a stepfather.

Researchers interested in the cultural diversity of fathering have focused primarily on variations in racial or ethnic background or on status as gay fathers. Although some studies conducted during the 1990s improved our understanding of how the social ecology of race affects men's lives as fathers, research in the U.S.A. has focused disproportionately on men from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and has been largely limited to African Americans (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Furstenberg, 1995; Gadsden, 1999; Hammer, 1997; McAdoo, 1993; Roy, 1999). Some cross-national

comparative research has produced valuable insights related to familial perceptions and paternal involvement within American, Japanese, and German families (Ishii-Kuntz, 1992, 1995), and Hewlett (1991) has explored the remarkably intimate relations between Aka Pygmy fathers and infants. Meanwhile, other researchers have extended our understanding of culture and fatherhood by exploring gay fathers' unique experiences resulting from societal misgivings about gay parenting compounded by factors associated with nonresident or single fatherhood (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht, 1993; Patterson & Chan, 1997).

#### FATHER INVOLVEMENT AND CHILD OUTCOMES

Many studies conducted in the 1990s explored the patterns as well as the possible causes and consequences of varied forms of father involvement (see Pleck, 1997 for an extensive review; Parke, 1996; Russell, 1999). Most researchers focused on behaviors such as financial support and visitation patterns (especially among nonresident fathers), on one-on-one engagement activities (e.g., sharing a leisure activity, helping with homework, instructional talks), or on more general indicators of the absence or presence of the father in the home. Recent research focusing on nonfinancial forms of father involvement continued to document a slow increase in the level of father involvement in two-parent households since the 1970s, both in proportionate and absolute terms, although levels of fathers' engagement and accessibility remained significantly lower than those for mothers (Pleck, 1997).

#### *Fathers' Economic Support*

One way in which fathers contribute to their children's well-being is through the provision of economic support. Many researchers have documented the harmful toll that economic hardship takes on children, including a greater risk of poor nutrition, health problems, low school grades, dropping out of school, emotional distress, and behavioral difficulties (Brooks-Gunn, Britto, & Brady, 1999; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Klerman, 1991; Mayer, 1997; McLoyd & Wilson, 1991). Because women earn less money than men and are less likely to be employed full-time, children's economic status is largely determined by their fathers. In other words, most children are poor either because their fathers earn little money or be-

cause their fathers are absent and pay little or no child support.

Surprisingly few studies of two-parent families have estimated the independent influence of paternal and maternal income. However, two studies have shown that fathers' earnings are positively associated with the educational attainment (Kaplan, Lancaster, & Anderson, 1998) and psychological well-being of young adult offspring (Amato, 1998), even when mothers' earnings are controlled. Other studies yield less clear results (Blau & Grossberg, 1992). Overall, however, the evidence suggests that fathers' earnings are positively and independently associated with offspring outcomes in two-parent families.

With respect to nonresident fathers, it is not the total income earned but the amount that is transferred to children that is central. Consequently, the most relevant studies focus on fathers' payment of child support. We located 12 studies published since 1990, including journal articles and book chapters, that examined associations between fathers' payment of child support and child outcomes. Most studies were based on different data sets. A couple of studies used the same data set (the Add Health data) but relied on different subsamples or child outcomes. Of the 12 studies, 9 reported positive and significant associations between the amount of child support paid by nonresident fathers and aspects of children's well-being, including school grades and behavior problems at school (McLanahan, Seltzer, Hanson, & Thomson, 1994), reading and math scores (King, 1994), and years of educational attainment (Graham, Beller, and Hernandez, 1994; Knox and Bane, 1994). In general, these associations do not appear to vary with the sex or race of the children. Of course, not all findings are consistent (e.g., Simons, Whitbeck, Beaman, & Conger, 1994), but a recent meta-analysis of this literature confirmed that nonresident fathers' child support payments are positively associated with children's educational success and negatively associated with children's externalizing problems (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999).

#### *The Father-Child Relationship*

*Fathers in two-parent families.* A large number of studies in the 1990s have dealt with the links between child outcomes and various dimensions of paternal behavior, such as spending time with children, providing emotional support, giving everyday assistance, monitoring children's behavior,

and noncoercive disciplining. Most of these behaviors can be subsumed under the general category of *authoritative parenting*. Developmentalists have consistently indicated that authoritative parenting is the parenting style that best predicts more desirable outcomes among children (Baumrind, 1968, 1991; Parke & Buriel, 1998). Relevant child outcomes include academic success (test scores, grades, years of education), lower levels of externalizing behavior problems (conduct problems, delinquency) or internalizing problems (depression, self-esteem, life satisfaction), and positive social behavior (social competence, popularity, size of support networks).

We found 72 studies in journal articles or book chapters published in the 1990s of fathers and children with continuously married parents. Of these studies, 55 dealt with young children or adolescents (aged 0–19), and 17 dealt with young adult offspring (aged 20 or older). These studies used different data sets, with the exception of three studies based on the NSFH, three studies based on the National Survey of Children, and five studies based on Conger and Elder's (1994) sample of families in Iowa. These latter 11 studies, however, all reported data on different subsamples or dependent variables.

For studies of young children and adolescents, the mean zero-order correlation between paternal authoritative parenting and children's behavior problems was  $-.23$ . The corresponding mean correlation for children's internalizing problems was  $-.27$ . These results indicate that the associations between paternal behavior and offspring outcomes were, on average, moderate rather than large. The percentage of studies reporting significant results did not vary with the ages of children sampled. Furthermore, similar associations were apparent for racial minorities as well as Whites. For example, in a sample of African American urban adolescent boys, Zimmerman, Salem, and Maton (1995) found that the amount of time spent with fathers and the amount of emotional support obtained from fathers were associated with less depression, higher self-esteem, higher life satisfaction, and less delinquency. In addition, Amato and Rivera (1999) found that the estimated positive influence of paternal involvement on children's behavior was similar for White, African American, and Latino fathers. Overall, these results are consistent with the belief that positive father involvement is generally beneficial to children.

However, three qualifications to this conclusion are necessary. First, as noted earlier, the majority

of studies relied on a single source of data; consequently, shared-method variance may have inflated the magnitude of the observed correlations and increased the risk of type I errors. Second, many researchers did not control for the quality of the mother-child relationship when estimating the impact of the father-child relationship. In fact, maternal and paternal behaviors are highly correlated in many studies. For example, Clark-Lempers, Lempers, and Netusil (1990) found a correlation of  $.82$  between children's reports of support from mothers and fathers. Meanwhile, Wright, Peterson, and Barnes (1990) reported a correlation of  $.63$  between children's reports of positive communication with mothers and fathers. Perhaps these high correlations reflect the fact that effective mothers tend to encourage fathers to be highly involved with their children, but whatever the reason, significant zero-order associations between paternal behavior and child outcomes drop to nonsignificant levels in some studies after controls for the quality of the mother-child relationship (which are usually significant) are introduced (e.g., Barnett, Kibria, Baruch, & Pleck, 1991; Brody, Stoneman, Flor, McCrary, Hastings, & Conyers, 1994; Wright et al., 1990). Other studies, however, continue to show significant associations between paternal behavior and child outcomes, even with maternal behavior controlled.

Of the 72 studies identified, only eight used data from independent sources and controlled for the quality of the mother-child relationship. Of these, five revealed significant associations between positive father involvement and child outcomes. For example, Browne and Rife (1991) found that teachers' reports that children had few problems at school (such as failing a grade or poor attendance) were associated significantly with children's reports of supportive paternal behavior, even after controlling for variations in the level of supportive maternal behavior. Overall, the majority of studies that use multiple sources and control for maternal characteristics support the notion that positive father involvement is linked with desirable outcomes among children, although the number of methodologically sound studies is disappointingly small.

A third qualification deals with the time ordering of variables. The great majority of studies are correlational and consequently provide little evidence of causal relationships between paternal behavior and offspring outcomes. The conclusion that fathers influence their children is stronger when paternal behavior is measured prior to as-

assessments of the children's status. The few extant longitudinal studies tend to support the hypothesis that fathers affect their children (e.g., Amato & Booth, 1997; Franz, McClelland, & Weinberger, 1991; Koestner, Franz, & Weinberger, 1990; Snarey, 1993). For example, Amato and Booth (1997) found that parents' reports of paternal involvement in 1980 were associated with adult offspring's reports of greater social integration in 1992. Similarly, Franz et al. (1991) reported that fathers' warmth (as reported by children's mothers when children were age 5) predicted offspring well-being (marital success and supportive social networks) at age 41. Nevertheless, more longitudinal research on this topic is necessary, including studies that model possible reciprocal relationships between offspring and fathers.

*Nonresident fathers.* Divorce is often followed by a decline in the quality and quantity of contact between fathers and children. Never-married fathers are even less likely than divorced fathers to keep in contact with their children. Nevertheless, some nonresident fathers manage to see their children frequently and maintain positive relationships. If the father-child relationship is an important resource for children, then a close relationship with nonresident fathers should predict positive outcomes for children (Lamb, 1999b; Thompson & Laible, 1999).

In 38 studies published since 1990, researchers examined linkages between children's well-being and their relationships with nonresident fathers. In general, these studies do not provide strong support for the belief that visitation with nonresident fathers benefits children. Of the 24 studies that included data on the frequency of contact, only 10 (42%) found that contact significantly predicted some aspect of children's well-being. Other studies focused not on contact but on how close children feel to their fathers. Of these 10 studies, only 3 found significant associations in the predicted direction. Taken together, these studies suggest that the frequency of visitation and children's feelings about their fathers are not good predictors of children's development or adjustment.

An additional nine studies focused on the extent to which nonresident fathers exhibit aspects of authoritative parenting. Consistent with studies of two-parent families, eight of these nine studies found significant associations in the predicted direction between paternal behavior and children's well-being. For example, Barber (1994) found that adolescents who frequently obtained advice from

nonresident fathers (about educational plans, employment goals, and personal problems) were less likely than other adolescents to experience symptoms of depression. Similarly, Simons et al. (1994) found that the quality of nonresident fathers' parenting (as reflected in emotional support, giving reasons for decisions, providing consistent discipline, and praising children's accomplishment) was negatively related to externalizing problems among adolescent sons and daughters. The assumption that the authoritative parenting of nonresident fathers is associated with positive child outcomes was confirmed in a recent meta-analysis by Amato and Gilbreth (1999).

In general, these studies suggest that it is not the amount of time that nonresident fathers spend with their children but how they interact with their children that is important. The same principle applies to two-parent families. For example, Young, Miller, Norton, and Hill (1995) found that when married fathers engaged in authoritative parenting (such as providing encouragement and talking over problems), children tended to have high levels of life satisfaction. But merely spending time with fathers (by going out to dinner or seeing movies together) was not related to children's life satisfaction. Unfortunately, contact between nonresident fathers and children tends to be recreational rather than instrumental. Compared with fathers in two-parent households, nonresident fathers provide less help with homework, are less likely to set and enforce rules, and provide less monitoring and supervision of their children (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). If nonresident fathers rarely engage in authoritative parenting, then mere contact, or even sharing good times together, may not contribute in a positive way to children's development.

Frequent contact also provides opportunities for parents to quarrel. Because conflict is harmful to children, conflict between parents may cancel, or even reverse, any benefits associated with frequent visitation. Thus, for example, Amato and Rezac (1994) reported that contact with nonresident fathers following divorce appeared to lower sons' behavior problems when conflict between the parents was low but increased behavior problems when conflict between the parents was high. A similar result was reported by Healy, Malley, and Stewart (1990).

In conclusion, recent research suggests that nonresident fathers play an important role in their children's lives to the extent that they provide authoritative parenting—especially if this occurs

within the context of cooperative relationships between the parents. Unfortunately, nonauthoritative fathering within the context of minimal interparental cooperation is the pattern observed in most families. For this reason, nonresident fathers may have a difficult time making positive contributions to their children's development.

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We now selectively highlight several of the compelling issues that are likely to guide the next generation of research on fatherhood, relying heavily on recommendations proposed by the interdisciplinary working groups for the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (1998). Our general comments emphasize the four areas we identified earlier: cultural representations of and discourses about fatherhood, conceptual and empirical analyses of the diverse forms of fatherhood and paternal involvement, linkages between dimensions of the father-child relationship and children's well-being and development, and the interpretive practices surrounding paternal identity and fathering. Where appropriate, we comment on the intersections among demographic trends, research agendas, and social policy concerns involving fathers.

Because the culture of fatherhood has grown more fragmented and politicized, scholars will be challenged to understand the familial, social, and legal processes through which men in diverse settings appropriate and negotiate their status as father, with its accompanying rights, obligations, and privileges. These efforts must be complemented by initiatives to develop a richer portrait of how men, women, and children from different cultural and social backgrounds view aspects of fatherhood. What types of distinctive cultural (e.g., social class, race, community) and organizational (e.g., work place, Promise Keepers' movement, fathers' rights groups) contexts contribute to the definition and evaluation of good or responsible fathering? In what ways and to what extent are men's visions of fathering and their actual paternal behaviors affected by their exposure to these cultural forces? How are various forms of father involvement fostered or impeded by external factors? Efforts to address these and related questions must be informed by recent attempts to broaden the way father involvement and paternal influence are conceptualized.

Developing a broader conceptualization of fathering, one that more fully acknowledges the

cognitive and indirect dimensions (e.g., via emotional support of the mother) of father involvement, will shape the substantive questions researchers ask concerning the ways and extent to which fathers affect their children's well-being and development, especially during the childhood and adolescent years. Researchers appear poised to study more seriously how father involvement patterns and consequences are affected by the larger ecological context within which they occur. Recent efforts to examine the contributions of fathers' social capital to their children's lives through their familial and community relations are consistent with this development. Likewise, researchers need to turn their attention to the ways fathers affect their children through their participation in various family processes (e.g., distance regulation, social support, and monitoring). These analyses require researchers to make good on their commitment to secure data from multiple family members' perspectives. A high priority should be to study how fathering is often a co-constructed accomplishment, tied as it is to familial processes involving various participants, most notably the children's mothers. Relatedly, researchers must examine more closely how children's behaviors, personalities, and perceived needs influence men's identities and behaviors as fathers as well as how fathering affects men's individual development. A significant, complex, and politicized theme that inevitably will continue to shape some research agendas focuses on whether men have gendered practices as fathers that uniquely contribute to their children's development. Finally, research is needed that explores the wide range of formal and informal ways fathers actively contribute to their children's moral, religious, and spiritual development.

Meanwhile, more conventional, policy-oriented lines of research that examine the relationship between certain aspects of father involvement (e.g., financial child support, visitation, varied parenting styles) and child outcomes (e.g., school performance, psychosocial health, juvenile delinquency) are likely to remain in vogue given the political and cultural climate surrounding welfare reform and crime prevention. Researchers studying child support/visitation patterns and child outcomes are hopeful that recent and proposed data collection efforts (e.g., Add Health, NLSY, PSID) that include more information directly obtained from fathers, enhanced efforts to enroll hard-to-reach fathers, and new approaches for analyzing data will enable them to answer various questions

more convincingly. Data from the large national surveys we reviewed are a critical source of information about how fathers are involved in the lives of children and how differing levels and types of care affect children's well-being. We therefore urge funding agencies to continue to recognize the value of these costly data collection efforts as researchers struggle to understand important family processes.

The growing diversity and transitional nature of men's experiences as fathers in recent years also invites researchers to explore how structural, interpersonal, and individual level factors influence the types and intensity of men's commitments to their biological and step children. Research agendas built on these concerns are closely tied to a variety of specific social policy initiatives related to paternity establishment, divorce, blended families, child support, and visitation. Researchers are likely to become increasingly attentive to the significance of studying how pregnancy resolution dynamics and union formation and dissolution patterns, coupled with shifts in residency arrangements, affect paternal involvement in both low income and more advantaged familial environments. Understanding how fathering roles are defined, negotiated, and expressed in diverse contexts and transitional periods will become increasingly important. As alluded to earlier, the scope and utility of these types of analyses will depend on methodological innovations designed to help researchers identify, enroll, and interview diverse and hard-to-reach samples of men as well as make sense of data from multiple respondents. Finally, researchers ideally should strive to develop research designs that allow them to explore the connections and transitions between men's fatherhood experiences prior to conception, during pregnancy, and after birth.

Although research agendas have been and will continue to be defined in large part by pressing social policy concerns, researchers should continue to study fathers' involvement with and influence on their children in healthy, stable families. Fortunately, given the burgeoning number and diversity of scholars interested in studying fathers during the 1990s, the immediate prospects are promising that a wide range of interdisciplinary perspectives are likely to characterize future advances.

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