

In this essay, I reflect on the changes in our conceptualization of the family, especially the changing role of the father. For decades, family research was synonymous with "mothering," with fathers being relegated to the socialization sidelines. Much has been written and much has changed since Lamb's famous pronouncement that fathers were the "forgotten contributors to child development" (1975a, p. 245). In the 21st century, fathers are clearly recognized as central players in the family and major contributors to children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. These shifts in paternal roles and the evidence of the importance of fathers as socialization agents are well documented (Lamb, 2004; Parke, 1996).

Several issues remain underdeveloped on the research front, and it is my goal to highlight those topics that are fertile for more theoretical and empirical work. These include the reemergence of interest in the biological determinants of fathering, the cultural constraints on fathering, the impact of fathering on men themselves, the need for an intergenerational examination of fathering, and the challenge of recent work on gay and lesbian parents for our understanding of the father's role.

Re-Biologization of Fatherhood

Although much attention has been devoted to the social, demographic, and economic determinants of fathering, the role of biology has been neglected until recently. In part this was due to the assumption that the lack of biological preparedness accounted for fathers' lack of involvement in caregiving of children. In fact, early evidence (Lamb, 1975b) suggested that the tyranny of hormones as a constraint on father involvement was not well founded and that hormones did not play a necessary role in paternal behavior in either rats or humans. Instead, social factors such as exposure to young offspring increased paternal activity without any changes in hormonal levels in both rats and humans (Fleming & Li, 2002). For example, studies of father-infant relationships in the cases of adoption clearly suggest that hormonal shifts are unnecessary for the development of positive father-infant relationships (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002).

More recent evidence has challenged the assumption that hormonal levels are unimportant determinants of paternal behavior by examining this issue in species other than rats, which is not a natural paternal species. In naturally paternal species such as canid species, which constitute less than 10% of mammalian species (Storey, Walsh, Quinton, & Wynne-Edwards, 2000), researchers have found that males experience hormonal changes, including increases in prolactin and decreases in testosterone, prior to the onset of parental behavior and during infant contact (Rosenblatt, 2002; Fleming & Li, 2002). Human fathers, too, undergo hormonal changes during pregnancy and childbirth. Storey et al. (2000) found that men experienced significant pre-, peri-, and postnatal changes in each of three hormones--prolactin, cortisol, and testosterone a pattern of results that was similar to the women in their study. Specifically, prolactin levels were higher for both men and women in the late prenatal period than in the early postnatal period, and cortisol levels increased just before and decreased in the postnatal period, which corresponds to the first opportunity for interaction with their infants.

Hormonal levels and changes were linked with a variety of social stimuli as well. Men with lower testosterone held test baby dolls longer and were more responsive to infant cues (crying) than were men with higher testosterone. Men who reported a greater drop in testosterone also reported more pregnancy or couvade symptoms. Together these findings suggest that lower testosterone in the postnatal period may increase paternal responsiveness to infant cries and in men reporting more couvade symptoms during pregnancy. Finally, Storey et al. (2000, p. 91) argue that the "cortisol increases in late pregnancy and during labor may help new fathers focus on and become attached to their newborns." Men's changes in hormonal levels are linked not only with baby cries and the time in pregnancy cycle but also to the hormonal levels of their partners. Women's hormonal levels were closely linked with the time remaining before delivery, but men's levels were linked with their partner's hormone levels, not with time to birth. This demonstrates that contact with the pregnant partner may play a role in paternal responsiveness, just as the quality of the marital relationship is linked with paternal involvement in later infancy. This suggests that social variables need to be considered in understanding the operation of biological effects. Perhaps intimate ties between partners during pregnancy stimulate hormonal changes, which, in turn, are associated with more nurturance toward babies.

Other evidence is consistent with a psychobiological view of paternal behavior. Fleming, Corter, Stallings, and Steiner (2002) found that fathers with lower baseline levels of testosterone are more sympathetic and show a greater need to respond when presented with infant cries than men with higher baseline testosterone levels. Moreover, fathers with higher baseline prolactin levels are more positive and alert in response to infant cries. However, experience also appears to play a role. At two days after the birth of a baby, fathers show lower levels of testosterone than non-fathers. Moreover, fathers who have more experience with babies have lower testosterone and higher prolactin levels than first-time fathers (Cotter & Fleming, 2002), even after controlling for paternal age. This perspective recognizes the dynamic or transactional nature of the links between hormones and behavior in which behavior changes can lead to hormonal shifts and vice versa. In contrast to the myth of the biologically unfit father, this work suggests that men may be more prepared--even biologically--for parenting than previously thought. More work is needed to explore the implications of these hormonal changes for the long-term relationship between fathers and their offspring. For example, are the ties between children and fathers who do not experience hormone-related changes at birth weaker, or can experience compensate for this lack of hormonal shift?

The Cultural Embeddedness of Fathers

Cultural factors also play an important role in determining both the quantity and quality of father involvement. In spite of this recognition, relatively little is known about the cultural aspects of fatherhood. There are numerous reasons for our lack of a cultural perspective on fathers. First, a universalist assumption underlies much of the theorizing in the social sciences. This assumes that the processes noted in studies of Western fathers--or more narrowly, Euro-American and middle-class fathers--will be generalizable both to other cultures and to non-Euro-American groups in the United States. In the last several

decades, this assumption has been challenged on several fronts. Theoretically, there has been a revival of interest in cross-cultural and intracultural variations, in large part due to the rediscovery of Vygotskian theory with the strong locus on the cultural embeddedness of families (Rogoff 2003). This is reflected in renewed interest in cross-cultural variations in parenting more generally (Bornstein, 1991; Parke & Buriel, 1998) and in fathering more specifically (Hewlett, 1991).

A cross-cultural perspective on fathers has not only forced us to confront the variability in fathering behaviors but also challenged some of our assumptions about central features of the father role. For example, the well-established finding that physical play is the hallmark of fathers' interactive style has been questioned (Parke, 2002a). In a variety of cultures (Taiwan, India, Africa, and Thailand), fathers rarely engage in physical play and few mother-father differences in play style are found (Hewlett, 1991; Sun & Roopnarine, 1996). These cross-cultural observations may lead to a reevaluation of the pathways through which fathers influence their children and may force us to rethink the father's role as a major contributor to children's emotional regulation--at least in non-Western cultures.

Second, demographic shifts in North America have fueled interest in intracultural variation. In 2003, 31% of the population belonged to a racial minority group. Currently, 13% of the U.S. population are Hispanic (37 million), 12.7% are African American (36.7 million), 1% are Asian American, Indian, or Alaska Natives (2.7 million), and another 4.1% are of two or more races (4.1 million) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). In view of these demographic shifts, there is an opportunity to evaluate the generalizability of our assumptions about fathering. However, to date most of the fatherhood research has focused on white middle-class samples. Only limited attention has been paid to fathers in other ethnic groups, and often the focus has been on nonresident or unmarried fathers (Gadsen, 1999). At the same time, we have a moral obligation to better understand large segments of our population in order to be able to develop and provide culturally sensitive services, programs, and policies on behalf of children and families of diverse cultural backgrounds. In recognition of intracultural diversity within the United States, there has been a shift away from the cultural deficit model, in which the focus was on majority-minority differences in parenting behavior. Instead, the field has moved toward an understanding of intragroup variation with a focus on understanding the adaptive strategies that ethnic minority fathers and families develop in response to their ecological circumstances and cultural traditions. This new paradigm recognizes the value of intragroup analyses involving a single ethnic group and focuses attention away from merely documenting group differences. Unfortunately, relatively little research has documented intragroup variability among fathers.

In spite of the importance of addressing these cultural variations in fathering processes and practices, barriers have limited the amount of work that has been devoted to these minority groups. Not only are fathers more difficult to recruit for research participation relative to mothers, but members of ethnic minority groups are especially difficult to enlist in our research projects (Parke et al., 2003). Members of minority groups are often skeptical about participation in scientific studies for a variety of reasons, including the

past history of mistreatment of minority research participants. Moreover, in the case of Hispanic American and Asian American groups, some of whom are recent immigrants--sometimes illegal--there is a healthy wariness of official institutions and distrust of unfamiliar individuals. As a result, our minority samples are often biased and unrepresentative. Moreover, due to the biased samples there is a tendency to pathologize fathers and/or families who do not conform to the structure, role arrangements, or child-rearing practices and values of the majority culture (Gadsen, 1999). Many African American fathers, for example, are poor and unmarried and not living with their partner, and therefore fathers from intact African American families are underrepresented in our studies. Moreover, this sampling bias not only leads to a distorted portrait of the full range of African American fathers' involvement but makes comparisons with Euro-American fathers problematic, since most of this work involves intact, middle-class fathers. A second problem is the establishment of scalar equivalence between fathers in different ethnic groups. Progress has been made on this front, but more on mothers than fathers (Knight, Tein, Prost, & Gonzales, 2002). Another problem is "interpretative validity" (Maxwell, 1992), or the need to ensure that our interpretations of fathers' behaviors and utterances are consistent with their own understanding of those displays. The increased use of focus groups (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999) with fathers of different ethnic backgrounds has been valuable in addressing these issues. The next few decades will be increasingly devoted to the elaboration of how culture conditions fathers' roles and behavior. Just as Kessen (1979) argued that the child is a "cultural invention," the future will confirm that fathers (and families) are "cultural inventions" as well. Our challenge for the future will be to include fathers from a wider range of cultural backgrounds in our studies of children and fathers.

Recent Challenges to Fathers as Essential Socialization Agents

Although it is common to assume that fathers are essential to the successful socialization of children, recent evidence concerning the impact of gay and lesbian parents on children's development challenges this basic assumption. Recent work by Golombok, Patterson, and their colleagues suggests that the development of children raised by lesbian parents is well within normal limits (Golombok, 2000, in press; Patterson, 1995, 2002). Although the amount of research on the effects of being reared by two male parents is even more limited than the work on two female parents, the limited available data suggest that the gender identities of children of gay fathers are similar to those of children of heterosexual fathers (Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe, & Mikach, 1995). Moreover, as Bozett (1987) reported, the relationships that children develop with their gay fathers are positive. One important challenge faced by children of gay and lesbian parents, however, is their possible stigmatization by others. An issue that requires concerted attention in this debate is the role of social norms and attitudes toward children growing up in same-gender child-rearing unions. Beyond the theoretical plausibility of successful adaptation of this type of childrearing arrangements, our field needs to devote more attention to the level of societal acceptance of these family types as a critical factor that can either facilitate or disrupt the successful adaptation of children in these families (Patterson & Chan, 1997).

If children reared in homes with two parents of the same gender are developing well, it raises the question about the necessity of fathers or mothers in the socialization mix. As Silverstein (2002) and Golombok (2000) suggest, our focus on the gender of the parent may be too narrow a conceptualization of the issue. Instead, it may be helpful to recast the issue to ask whether exposure to male and female parents is the key, or whether it is exposure to the interactive style typically associated with either mothers or fathers that matters. A study by Ross and Taylor (1989) is relevant. They found that boys prefer the "paternal" play style, whether it is mothers or fathers who engage in the physical and active stimulation. Their work suggests that boys may not necessarily prefer their fathers but rather their physical style of play. In another body of work relevant to this issue, fathers and mothers reversed their customary roles (Radin, 1993). In this case, the primary caregiving functions typically fulfilled by women were undertaken by men. Evidence from both the United States (Field, 1978) and Australia (Russell, 1984) suggests that the style of interaction of primary-caregiving fathers is more like that of primary-caregiving mothers. For example, Russell found that role-sharing fathers engaged in a less stereotypically masculine style of parenting and instead exhibited a more maternal interactive style (e.g., more indoor recreational activities and less exclusive locus on roughhousing and outdoor games). Finally, Israeli primary-caregiving fathers were more nurturant as reported by both themselves and their children relative to traditional fathers (Sagi, 1982). Together, this evidence indicates that the style of parenting and the gender of the parent who delivers or enacts this style can be viewed as at least partially independent. These types of data will help us eventually address the uniqueness of fathers' and mothers' roles in the family and in their children's development, and they will help provide needed clarity on the important issue of how essential fathers (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999) or mothers (Parke, 2002b) are for children's development.

At the same time, it seems premature to conclude that fathers or mothers are replaceable based on this evidence. Studies have relied largely on small samples of highly educated individuals in stable relationships. Furthermore, two key issues need to be addressed in ongoing work. More needs to be understood about the extent to which role division in lesbian or gay families approximates role division in heterosexual families, and more needs to be understood about the degree to which same-gender couples expose their children to opposite-sex role models. In the first case, evidence suggests that lesbian couples share household tasks and decision-making responsibilities more equally than do heterosexual couples (Patterson, 1995). Similarly, gay parental couples are more likely to share child rearing duties evenly (McPherson, 1993). At the same time, however, lesbian biological mothers viewed their parental role as more salient than either nonbiological lesbian mothers or heterosexual mothers (Hand, 1991). Moreover, despite the more egalitarian divisions of household labor in lesbian households, there also exists some traditionality in roles. Biological lesbian mothers are more revolved in child care than are their partners: nonbiological lesbian mothers spent more time working outside the family (Patterson, 2002). This raises the possibility that even in same-gender families, the usual role division concerning child care, which characterizes heterosexual partnerships, may be evident. Whether the nonbiological mothers enact other aspects of more traditional male roles, such as a physical play style, remains to be established. Moreover, we know

little about the ways in which gay men enact their family roles and whether one partner is likely to enact a more traditional maternal role. In short, children may be afforded opportunities to experience both maternal and paternal interactive styles in same-gender households, but more work is needed to evaluate this possibility.

Parents have increasingly been recognized as managers of their children's social environments (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999; Parke et al., 2003). In this role, they can choose to deliberately expand their children's range of experiences with male or, in the case of gay parents, female figures. At this point, we simply do not have extensive data on how much exposure children raised by lesbian or gay couples have to males or females outside the family, or whether lesbian mothers intentionally provide this exposure as a means of compensating for the absence of a male figure in the household (Parke, 2002b). Moreover, nothing is known about the duration and frequency necessary to confer any potential developmental advantage if such exposure were found to be beneficial.

Perhaps most fundamentally, we lack data on the kind of relationship needed if exposure is to prove beneficial for the child's development. And of course, the larger question is whether this exposure, after controlling for parent effects, makes a difference in child outcomes. Recent work on adult mentors confirms conventional wisdom and past research on nonparental adult influence: the effect of nonfamilial mentors on adolescents' social behavior is independent of the effect of parent-child relationships (Greenberger, Chen, & Beam, 1998).

New Routes to Fatherhood (and Motherhood)

Recent studies of the new reproductive technologies raise important questions for fatherhood research. These new technologies are expanding the ways that individuals become parents. Recent changes in childbearing include in vitro fertilization, anonymous and nonanonymous sperm donors, and surrogate mothers (Golombok, 2000, in press). Djerassi (1999) argued that just as "technology's gift to women (and men) during the latter half of the 20th century was contraception, the first 50 years of the new millennium may well be considered the decades of conception" (p. 53).

Various scenarios that may alter our usual ways of conceptualizing families and parenthood are possible. Assisted reproductive technology (ART) including in vitro fertilization has produced more than 3 million babies since 1977. Although evidence suggests that children conceived by donor insemination are developing well within normal limits (Golombok, 2000), less is known about the father's role in these families. We do not know whether important issues such as the disclosure of identity of donors or donor involvement with the family interact with family structural variables (e.g., lesbian or gay versus heterosexual partnerships). Other questions remain as well. Does it make a difference if the identity of the donor is known or unknown? What is the effect of disclosing or not disclosing the nature of the child's conception to the child? What is the effect of disclosing or keeping confidential the identity of the donor? Does the availability of the donor to the child after the birth make a difference in the child's

adjustment? Are patterns of parent-child relationships different in couples that have achieved parenthood through in vitro fertilization after a long period of infertility? Do such parents develop closer relationships with their children? Are they overprotective of their offspring? It would also be important to understand how the partner-partner relationship is altered by this sequence leading to parenthood.

A variant of the new ART is the increased use of surrogate mothers. This innovation raises questions about the effect of this choice on parent-parent, parent-child, and couple-surrogate mother relationships. Again, issues of disclosure arise. Is there any meaningful developmental effect of the child's learning she or he was born via a surrogate mother? What are the implications of contact between the surrogate mother and the child for the child's adjustment? What is the effect of continuing contact between the surrogate mother and the child-rearing family on the parent-parent relationship? Is the father-child relationship altered in these types of families? Our scientific knowledge about these issues is still limited but growing (Golombok, in press; Hahn & DiPietro, 2002). Moreover, there is an accumulating and thoughtful clinical literature that can serve as a guide for research in this area and as a helpful map for practitioners and policy and legal scholars (see Paulson & Sachs, 1999; Robertson, 1994).

These recent advances in reproductive technologies remind us that fatherhood (and more generally family) is a socially constructed category. Moreover, this work challenges the traditional conception of fathers and families as both biological and social units. Reproduction can clearly be independent of the social responsibilities of parenthood, and this clearly underscores the lack of necessity of the family as central for reproduction and child-rearing. We are only beginning to appreciate the implications of this "divorce" between the procreative and child-rearing aspects of families. How will this alter marriage rates in the future? Will the number of men and women who choose to be solo parents increase? And of course, as the numbers shift and these routes become more normative, will the effects of discrimination and prejudice decrease as well?

Fathering and Men's Development

Becoming a father has an impact on a man's own psychological development and well-being. As I noted more than 20 years ago, "the father-child relationship is a two-way process and children influence their fathers just as fathers alter their children's development" (Parke, 1981, p. 9). Several aspects of this issue have been examined, especially marital relationships and societal generativity. Some progress has been made on both of these issues. For example, there is a sizable literature on the impact of fatherhood on marital satisfaction (Cowan & Cowan, 1992). However, most of the prior work has focused on infancy, and more attention to the long-term impact of fatherhood on marital relationships is needed (for an exception, see Snarey, 1993). Moreover, the earlier long-term studies are based on cohorts studied several decades ago, and new studies that recognize the changing roles of men and women in both the home and the workplace are needed to adequately evaluate the links between fatherhood and marital satisfaction. Family role shifts for fathers have focused largely on short-term shifts associated with the onset of new parenthood in infancy (Cowan & Cowan, 1992), and

more recently more attention has been given to shifts in fathers' roles during adolescence (Larson & Richards, 1994). The implications of these shifts in roles across children's development are still poorly understood and require more attention, especially as these shifts interact with ongoing biological changes in adolescents (e.g., puberty).

The most provocative new direction concerns the links between fathering and generativity, a term introduced by Erikson (1975) and expanded by Snarey (1993), who described three types of generativity that apply to fathers: (1) biological generativity, (2) parental generativity, and (3) societal generativity (indicated by caring for the next generation by mentoring, providing leadership). Snarey (1993), using an older cohort of fathers, has presented evidence that men who were involved in their children's lives were themselves more generative in areas outside the family, such as community and neighborhood organizations and activities. Similarly, Palkovitz (2002) recently provided confirmation of this conclusion based on a qualitative analysis of men's views of how fatherhood changed a wide number of aspects of their lives, including health, moral and religious beliefs, marital relationships, and work. Less is known about how these perceived shifts in men's views of themselves and their relationships with others alter their roles as parents, which in turn, alter children's development. Studies that trace shifts in men's lives as a consequence of fatherhood with resulting shifts in their parenting practices will permit us to connect this new work in men's generativity with children's development.

Toward an Intergenerational Examination the Father's Role

Another issue that needs more attention is the study of men in lifespan perspective, especially as they shift their roles and responsibilities as their children develop and become parents themselves. Both intergenerational ties between fathers and their adult children and their roles as grandfathers merit more research. Several recent reviews have highlighted the issues in this area (see Dunn, in press; Smith & Drew, 2002). Several topics merit underscoring as directions for future research in this area, including the consistency of child-rearing style across generations of fathers, the impact of grandfathers on children's development, and the role of culture in shaping grandfather roles. Such work will underscore that fathering is a lifelong process and not a role that ends when children reach maturity.

Concluding Perspectives

To adequately address these emerging and continuing concerns about father's roles and their impact on children's development, a variety of methodological innovations are needed.

First, qualitative as well as quantitative approaches are needed. Especially in our efforts to understand fathers in different cultural contexts, fathers' own voices and perspectives are needed to guide the research agenda. Focus groups can be useful in generating the right questions, in identifying new variables, in the scale production and refinement process, and in ensuring "interpretative validity" (Maxwell, 1992) after the data have

been collected (for examples of focus-group approaches with Latino and African American fathers, see Hunter & Davis, 1994; Parke et al., 2003; Silverstein, 2002). Qualitative and quantitative approaches should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. Instead, both are useful at different stages of the research process in our attempts to better understand fathering (Parke, 2004).

Second, the fathering literature has largely been a correlational one, and reliance on nonexperimental strategies may be insufficient to address the important issue of direction of effects on the impact of fathers on children and families. To date, experimental strategies have been underutilized in studies of fathers. By experimental modification of either the type of paternal behavior or the level of father involvement, firmer conclusions concerning the direct, causative role that fathers play in modifying their children's and their wives' development will be possible. Intervention studies (e.g., Fagan & Hawkins, 2000) aimed at modifying fathering behaviors provide models for this type of work, and if these studies include measures of child outcomes they could provide valuable evidence of the impact of fathers on children's development. Moreover, these experimentally based interventions have clear policy implications by exploring the degree of plasticity of fathering behaviors and by illustrating the beneficial impact of father-friendly policies that support increased involvement on children's development (Parke & Brott, 1999). Finally, these interventions can serve as vehicles for evaluation of competing theoretical views of fatherhood.

In conclusion, the role of fathers in children's lives is now more widely recognized and better understood than even a few decades ago. As I have argued in this essay, a variety of issues still remain and require our attention in future conceptual and empirical work. Addressing these issues will not only increase our understanding but potentially benefit children and families as well as fathers themselves.

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