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FATHERS AND FAMILIES

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Introduction

Theoretical assumptions that guide research on fathers and families both explain the choice of topics and provide an organizational structure for this chapter. We draw attention to 11 themes of importance. First, to understand fully the nature of father–child relationships, it is necessary to recognize the interdependence among the roles and functions of all family members. Families are best viewed as social systems. Consequently, to understand the behavior of one member of a family, the complementary behaviors of other members also need to be recognized and assessed. For example, as men’s roles in families shift, changes in women’s roles in families are also in flux (Parke, 1996, 2013).

Second, family members—mothers, fathers, and children—influence each other both directly and indirectly (Cox and Paley, 2003; Parke, Power, and Gottman, 1979). Examples of fathers’ indirect impact include various ways in which fathers modify and mediate mother-child relationships. In turn, women affect their children indirectly through their husbands by modifying both the quantity and the quality of father-child interaction. Children may indirectly influence the husband-wife relationship by altering the behavior of either parent that consequently changes the interaction between spouses.

Third, different levels of analysis are necessary to understand fathers. The individual level—child, mother, and father—remains a useful and necessary level of analysis, but recognition of relationships among family members as levels or units of analysis is also necessary. The marital, the mother-child, and the father-child relationships require separate analyses. The family as a unit that is independent of the individual or dyads within the family requires recognition (McHale and Lindahl, 2011).

Fourth, families are embedded within a variety of other social systems, including both formal and informal support systems as well as the cultures in which they exist. These include a wide range of extrafamilial influences such as extended families, informal community ties such as friends and neighbors, work sites, and social, educational, and medical institutions (Leventhal, Dupéré, and Shuey, 2015; Parke, 2013).

Fifth, the role of biology in shaping father roles has become more widely recognized. Fathers and families are embedded in a network of biological and neurological systems, and we will examine the biological basis of fathering. This perspective suggests that fathers (as well as mothers) are biologically prepared for the parenting role due to hormonal changes as well as neurological predispositions to respond to infants as part of their preparation for the caregiving role (Feldman, Gordon, Influs, Gutbir, and Ebstein, 2013; Swain et al., 2014).
A sixth assumption concerns the importance of considering father-child relationships from a variety of developmental perspectives. Developmental changes in child perceptual-cognitive and socioemotional capacities represent the most commonly investigated types of development. In addition, a life-span perspective (Elder, Shanahan, and Jennings, 2015; Parke and Elder, in press) suggests the importance of examining developmental changes in the adult because parents continue to change and develop during adult years. For example, age at the time of the onset of parenthood can have important implications for how females and males manage their maternal and paternal roles. Adult age involves an exploration of the tasks faced by adults such as self-identity, education, and career and examination of relations between these tasks and the demands of parenting.

A seventh assumption involves recognition of the impact of secular shifts on families. In recent years, a variety of social changes in the United States has had a profound impact on families. These include the decline in fertility and family size, changes in the timing of the onset of parenthood, increased participation of women in the workforce, an initial rise in rates of divorce that has become more stable, and subsequent increase in the number of single-parent families (Golombok, 2015; Parke, 2013). The ways in which these society-wide changes impact on interaction patterns between parents and children merit examination.

Another closely related eighth assumption involves recognition of the importance of the historical time period in which the family interaction is taking place (Parke and Elder, in press). Historical time periods provide the social conditions for individual and family transitions: Examples include the 1930s (the Great Depression), the 1960s (the Vietnam War Era), or the 1980s (Farm Belt Depression). Across these historical time periods, family interactions may be quite different due to the peculiar conditions of the particular era (Elder et al., 2015). These distinctions among different developmental trajectories, as well as social change and historical period effects, are important because these different forms of change do not always harmonize (Elder et al., 2015; Parke, 1988). For example, a family event such as the birth of a child—the transition to parenthood—may have very profound effects on a man who has just begun a career in contrast to the effects on one who has advanced to a stable occupational position. Moreover, individual and family developmental trajectories are embedded within both the social conditions and the values of the historical time in which they exist (Elder et al., 2015). The role of parents, as is the case with any social role, is responsive to such fluctuations (Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Bradley, and Roggman, 2014).

A ninth assumption addresses the major challenge concerning the universality of theories about fathers and families and the error of assuming that generalizations from a single culture (e.g., United States) to other cultures are appropriate (Rogoff, 2003). Cultures vary enormously in how they organize their families, how they allocate family roles to different individuals, what outcomes they value in their children, and even what childrearing tactics they choose to achieve their socialization goals. Although there are many similarities across and within cultural groups around the globe, we need to recognize the variations and how to learn from these variations. Closely related to the issue of cross-cultural variation in fathering is recognition that intracultural variations in ethnicity need to be considered as well. It is important not only to examine the diversity of familial organization, roles, goals, and strategies across ethnic groups but also it is equally critical to explore variations within different ethnic groups (Parke, 2013). Recognizing the ethnic diversity within our own culture is necessary both for understanding variations in fatherhood and for guiding social policy.

A tenth assumption concerns the role of cognitive factors in understanding father-child relationships. Specifically, we assume that the ways in which parents perceive, organize, and understand both their children and their roles as parents will affect the nature of father-child interaction (Cookston et al., 2012; Goodnow and Collins, 1990).

The eleventh and final assumption observes that research on fathering benefits from an intersectional framework that operationalizes both identity and social position simultaneously (Shields, 2008). Because fathers have authority over their children, they are imbued with power in the lives
of others that nonfathers lack. Similarly, when men enact the role of father, they assume a gendered identity that differs from mothering in the types of experiences a man might provide his child, his expectations for the child’s behavior when they are together, and his expectations for how the child should act when alone with the father versus when in public. Themes of identity and social position abound when fathers are the focus of study, such as the father’s sex assignment at birth, ethnicity, socioeconomic opportunities and disadvantage in childhood, and availability of male role models during childhood, among others.

To understand the nature of father-child relationships within families, a multilevel and dynamic approach is required. Multiple levels of analysis are necessary to capture the individual, dyadic, and family unit aspects of operation within the family itself as well as to reflect the embeddedness of families within a variety of extrafamilial social systems. The dynamic quality reflects the multiple developmental trajectories that warrant consideration in understanding the nature of families in children’s development.

Figure 3.1 serves as a theoretical guide for the chapter and aims to capture the transactional nature of the linkages among predictors and father and child outcomes.

The substantive portion of this chapter begins with a discussion of the nature of father-child relationships and how these shift across development of the child. Next, the chapter moves to an examination of the determinants of father involvement to examine the impact of the marital relationship on the parent-child relationship. The effect of historical changes, namely, shifts in work patterns of family members and changes in the timing of the onset of parenthood on father-child relationships, will be reviewed. Finally, the implications of fathering for men themselves, their wives, and their children are examined.

This chapter is a review of recent work on fatherhood and devotes less attention to the historical aspects of the topic. However, several reviews caution against any simple and linear set of historical trends that lead clearly from the past to the present (LaRossa, 1997; 2012; Parke and Stearns, 1993; Pleck, 2004; Rotundo, 1993). Perhaps most striking is the continued tension and variability in fathering behavior—a set of characteristics that have long marked definitions of fatherhood. There have always been counteracting forces that have both promoted and limited father involvement with their children and families. There have been “good dads and bad dads” (Furstenberg, 1988) throughout the course of the history of fatherhoods, and this theme of variability in the amount, type, and consistency of fathering across time and context continues (Furstenberg, 2014). It is encouraging to note that there has been an increase in research attention to fathers from diverse family structures as reflected in journal articles focused on fathers (Goldberg, Tan, and Thorsen, 2009). Stearns (1991, p. 50) characterized the shifts over the last century as follows:

The most pressing context for fatherhood over the past century has been the change in work—family relationship. . . . An 18th Century father would not recognize the distance contemporary men face between work and home or the importance of sports in father-child relationships or the parental leadership granted to mothers or indeed the number of bad fathers. An 18th Century father would, however, recognize certain contemporary tensions such as a balance between seeking and giving love on the one hand and defining proper authority and he might feel kinship to present-day fathers who sense some tension between responses they regard as male and special restraints required for proper family life.

In summary, many of the themes that characterize contemporary thinking about fatherhood have clearer antecedents over the last century than we often assume. There has been a tendency to confuse the resurgence of interest in fathering as a research topic with the assumption that the changes in fathering activities have been only recent as well.
Figure 3.1  Theoretical overview of the predictors and consequences of father involvement
Paternal Versus Maternal Involvement With Children

There are overall differences in the quantity of involvement for mothers and fathers, and there are important stylistic or qualitative differences as well. Not all forms of father involvement are conceptually equivalent (Lamb, Pleck, and Levine, 1985; Palkovitz, 1997; Parke, 2000). The most influential scheme was offered by Lamb and his colleagues (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine, 1987; Lamb et al., 1985), who suggested three components: Interaction, availability, and responsibility.

Interaction refers to the father's direct contact with his child through caregiving and shared activities. Availability is a related concept concerning the father's potential availability for interaction, by virtue of being present or accessible to the child whether direct interaction is occurring. Responsibility refers to the role the father takes in ascertaining that the child is taken care of and arranging for resources to be available for the child (Lamb et al., 1987, p. 125).

As several previous authors (e.g., Palkovitz, 1997; Parke, 2000; Pleck, 2010) found, the focus of research on fathers has been primarily on face-to-face parent-child interaction. To a large degree, this emphasis reflects the common assumption that parental influence takes place directly through face-to-face contact or indirectly through the impact of the interaction on another family member.

Pleck (2010) modified this conceptual scheme to further distinguish specific qualitative aspects of interaction, namely, warmth, responsiveness, and control. This has encouraged researchers to measure not only time with the child but also the quality of the interactions as well. In turn, the goal was to increase the strength of the links between aspects of father engagement and child outcomes. However, it is still useful for cross-time comparisons to continue to track changes in the relative level of father and mother overall involvement as part of the goal of monitoring shifting family roles by mothers and fathers. If the goal is to assess the effects of parental behavior on child outcomes, qualitative measures of the type of involvement are generally better than simply the amount of time in parental activities (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Other updates on the paternal involvement measure have been suggested. Absolute and relative involvement need to be distinguished because these two indices are independent and may affect both children's and adults' views of role distributions in different ways (Pleck, 2010; Pleck and Masiadrelli, 2004). It is important to distinguish among domains of involvement, because fathers and mothers vary in their distribution of time across different child and household activities (Doucet, 2013). Several distinctions have been made including personal care activities, involvement in play, leisure, and affiliative activities with children (Beitel and Parke, 1998; Palkovitz, 2002; Pleck, 2010). Others (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, and Hofferth, 2001) have expanded the domain list to include not just personal care and play but also achievement-related activities (homework, reading), household activities (housework, shopping), social activities (conversation, social events), and other activities (time in school, sleep). As noted ahead, both the amount of time that fathers spend on these different activities and the determinants of involvement in these domains vary across fathers. Finally, estimates of father involvement have usefully distinguished between weekdays and weekends because both the types of activities and levels of father involvement vary as a function of the time period being assessed (Yeung et al., 2001).

Although the availability issue has been addressed largely through the research on father absence as a consequence of either divorce or unwed parenthood (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010; McLanahan and Sandefer, 1994; Stevenson et al., 2014), studies of the quantity and quality of fathers' nonfamily work have begun to shed light on variations in father availability (O'Brien and Moss, 2010; Williams, 2010). Finally, researchers and theorists have recognized the “managerial” function of parents (Lamb et al.'s “responsibility” notion) and have examined the impact of variations in how this managerial function influences child development (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, and Sameroff, 1999; Parke et al., 2003). By managerial, we refer to the ways in which parents organize and arrange the child’s home environment and set limits on the range of the home setting to which the child has access and the opportunities for social contact with playmates and socializing agents outside the family.
managerial role may be just as important as the parent’s role as stimulator, because the amount of time that children spend interacting with the inanimate environment far exceeds their social interaction time (White, Kaban, Shapiro, and Attonucci, 1976). Nor are fathers always mere helpers; in over 20% of married employed mother families, fathers served as the primary care provider during the hours that the mother was working (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). So fathers are active contributors to childcare not only in U.S. culture but in other places as well. Mothers still do more than fathers of the child caregiving, such as feeding and diapering in infancy and in providing meals, school lunches, and clothing, as the child develops (Gray and Anderson, 2010; Pleck, 2010). And mothers continue to assume more managerial responsibility than fathers, such as arranging social contacts, organizing schedules, taking the child for medical checkups, and monitoring homework and school-related tasks. However, these patterns change as a function of the time of the week and the age of the child. For example, fathers are more involved in household activities (shopping) and social activities on weekends than weekdays, and play as the focus of fathering decreases as the child develops (Yeung et al., 2001).

Mothers and fathers differ in their degree of responsibility for management of family tasks. From infancy through middle childhood, mothers are more likely to assume the managerial role than fathers. In infancy, this means setting boundaries for play, taking the child to the doctor, or arranging day care (Doucet, 2013; Power and Parke, 1982). In middle childhood, mothers continue to assume more managerial responsibility (e.g., directing the child to have a bath, to eat a meal, to put away toys) (Russell and Russell, 1987). Nor is the managerial role restricted to family activities but includes initiating and arranging children’s access to peers and playmates (Ladd, 2005; McDowell and Parke, 2009), and maintaining contact with teachers and schools (Kim and Hill, 2015), tasks which fathers are less likely to undertake than mothers. In addition, parents function as supervisors or overseers of especially younger children’s interactions with age mates. Both mothers and fathers are equally capable of this type of supervisory behavior as shown in laboratory studies (Bhavnagri and Parke, 1991) and in home contexts, but fathers are less likely to perform this supervisory role in everyday settings (Bhavnagri and Parke, 1991; Ladd, Profilet, and Hart, 1992). As Doucet (2013) observed, this disparity between men and women’s managerial/responsibility roles has persisted: “The responsibility for childcare and domestic life has remained overwhelmingly in women’s hands” (pp. 302–303).

The extent to which fathers in intact families participate in childcare needs to be distinguished from the level of involvement of fathers who are not coresident with their children for a variety of reasons including divorce, out-of-wedlock births, economic hardship, or incarceration. In fact, this conceptual distinction reflects the contradictory trends in the fathering literature that Furstenberg (2014) characterized as the “two-tier family system.” On the one hand, well-educated and economically viable fathers seem to be increasing their involvement and moving slowly toward more equal participation with their wives in the care and rearing of children. On the other hand, due to lack of education and limited employment opportunities, many men forgo marriage and, in many cases, coresidency due to lack of education and limited employment opportunities and develop different patterns of involvement with their children than fathers in intact families. Similarly, other groups of fathers who are separated from their children due to military deployment, incarceration, or immigration are receiving attention. By recognizing these various groups of fathers beyond traditional intact, residential family-based fathers, the variability in contemporary fathering becomes evident and reminds us that change across time in fathering is not linear and straightforward but is contradictory and inconsistent and open to influence by changing societal conditions.

**Father Involvement in Intact, Majority Families in the United States**

Most attention in the research literature has been devoted to the study of fathers in two-parent intact families. According to a survey of over 1,100 journal articles from 1930 to 2006, 76% of the fathers
were from two-parent families and the rest were focused on divorced, single or nonresident father families (Goldberg, Tan, and Thorsen, 2009). In spite of shifts in cultural attitudes concerning the appropriateness and desirability of shared roles and equal levels of participation in routine caregiving and interaction for mothers and fathers, the shifts toward parity are small, but nonetheless real (Pleck, 2010). More mothers are entering the workforce, but current occupational arrangements still mean that the vast majority of fathers have less opportunity for interaction with their children than mothers. Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie (2006) using a national survey of parents, found that in the year 2000, resident American fathers with children under 18 spent an average of 2.4 hours per week in interactive activities with their children in comparison to 3.3 hours for mothers. Fathers spent 72% of the time as mothers. Across time there is a marked increase. In comparison with 1965, the interactive engagement time in 2000 increased 94% while mothers’ time increased even more from 1.5 hours to 3.3 hours. However, the gap is closing, as data from 2003 to 2004 indicate that fathers’ engagement had increased to 3.0 hours (Wang and Bianchi, 2009). To place these trends in perspective, fathers also increased their time in routine care as well as direct interactive activities. Fathers spent 4.1 hours per week in routine childcare activities and were present and accessible to their children another 26.5 hours per week. This was an impressive 33 hours per week in total time with their children.

Compared with mothers, fathers’ total time in 2000 was 64.7% of time as mothers compared with 44.7% in 1965 (Bianchi et al., 2006). Others report similar trends. Yeung et al. (2001) found that the relative time fathers in intact families were directly engaged with children was 67% of the time that mothers were involved on weekdays and 87% of mothers’ engagement on weekends. Accessibility showed similar shifts across time and in accord with earlier estimates were higher than levels of engagement.

### Involvement Among Ethnic Minority Fathers in the United States

The historical view of the African American father as absent or uninvolved in the lives of their children is no longer valid, and recent work has corrected the scholarly neglect of this large ethnic minority group (12% of U.S. population). Comparisons across ethnic groups (African and European American) revealed either few differences in level of father involvement (Yeung et al., 2001) or in some studies African American fathers are higher in their levels of caregiving and play than European American fathers (Cabrera, Hoffreth, and Schae, 2011; Hoffert, 2003). The greater level of caregiving involvement is consistent with the less traditional attitudes of African American fathers toward gender roles than European American fathers (Gadsden, 1999). However, studies of African American families confirm the pattern found for European Americans, namely, that fathers were less involved in caregiving their infants than mothers (Roopnarine and Hossain, 2013). In a study of Head Start fathers, African American fathers of sons reported more involvement in physical play and social activities (taking children out with friends and visiting relatives) than European American fathers (Leavell et al., 2012). In terms of responsibility, African American fathers are higher in monitoring than European American fathers, in part possibly due to their residence in more dangerous neighborhoods (Deater–Deckard and Dodge, 1997). As we note ahead, even nonresidential African American fathers are more involved with their children than is commonly assumed.

Another ethnic group that has received increased attention is Latin American fathers. Today, Latino Americans constitute 18% of the U.S. population, and it is projected that by 2065, Latin American families will be the most prominent minority in the U.S. culture at 24% (Pew Charitable Trust, 2015). Historically, it was assumed that Latino fathers are “traditional patriarchs, authoritarian, and emotionally uninvolved, and not very engaged in the daily care of their children” (Cabrera, Aldoney, and Tamis-Lemonda, 2013, p. 248). Recent research suggests that this portrait is outdated and misleading. In contrast to this characterization, Latino fathers typically rear their children in two-parent families where fathers are often involved in their children’s lives from an early age, even beginning in the prenatal period (Cabrera et al., 2009). The importance of focusing on Latino fathers
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stems from Latin American fathers having been found to be more involved in household and personal care activities than European American fathers (Yeung et al., 2001) and spending more time in caregiving activities than fathers of other ethnic groups (Cabrera et al., 2011; Hofferth, 2003). Finally, Latino fathers show similar levels of affection and warmth to their children as fathers of other ethnicities (Hofferth, 2003; Toth and Xu, 1999). Studies of responsibility among Latino fathers have focused on monitoring and restrictiveness of their children’s behavior. Some reports increased restriction of their children’s behavior (Toth and Xu, 1999), especially for daughters (Wilson, Dalberth, and Koo, 2010). At the same time, as in the case of other groups, fathers spend less time than mothers in routine caregiving and more time in play (Roopnarine and Hossain, 2013). These findings are consistent with Latino values of familism, which stress the centrality of family life in Latino culture. Acculturation is important as well. More acculturated Latino fathers are more involved with their children than less acculturated men (Glass and Owen, 2010).

Asian Americans are another rapidly growing ethnic minority. Although Asian Americans currently constitute 6% of the U.S. population, this will increase to 14% by 2065 (Pew Charitable Trust, 2015). Asian American fathers in comparison with mothers have typically been viewed as aloof and uninvolved with their children (Ishii-Kuntz, 2009). Again, this stereotype has some historical basis, but the portrait of the modern Asian father is changing due to both patterns of immigration and acculturation as well as shifting economic conditions in some Asian countries (Chao and Tseng, 2002; Ishii-Kuntz, 2009; Li and Lamb, 2013). In both Asian American and Asian families, there are some general findings that characterize maternal and paternal roles in the family. The strong commitment to the breadwinner role among Asian fathers has resulted in men’s limited involvement with the care of their children (Ishii–Kuntz, 2009; Li and Lamb, 2013) compared with mothers as well as to men in other cultures. For example, Japanese fathers are less involved with their children compared with mothers and less than fathers in other countries (Ishii–Kuntz, 2009). Similar lower levels of father involvement in childcare relative to mothers have been reported for Chinese families (Chuang and Zhu, 2018; Jankowiak, 2010; Lau, 2016) as well as Taiwanese families (Sun and Roopnarine, 1996). In China, fathers were not viewed as sufficiently competent or trustworthy to care for infants. Instead, in Chinese families, a father’s role was focused on children’s education when children entered middle school (Li and Lamb, 2013). However, the centrality of the men’s breadwinning role among Asian fathers is changing (Li and Lamb, 2013; Nakazawa and Shwalb, 2013). In one study, 81% of Japanese fathers ranked the paternal role as first or second in importance among five paternal roles—evidence that the importance of the worker role is lessening (Shwalb et al., 2010). An increase in the labor force participation of women in both China and Japan has contributed to this decline. In Japan, fathers are more likely to be involved in childcare when their wives were employed full time (Ishii–Kuntz, 2009). In China, a similar pattern has emerged with a shift away from the focus only on the provider role for father to a more multifaceted set of roles including a more active role in childcare (Chuang and Su, 2008; Chuang and Zhu, 2018), although some evidence suggests that paternal involvement is more evident among preschoolers and older children than with infants (Jankowiak, 2010). There are also rural/urban and regional differences. Urban Chinese fathers are less oriented to traditional gender roles, more likely to be more involved with their children, and tend to have closer relationships with their children than their rural counterparts, in part due to higher employment rates among urban mothers as well as more exposure to contemporary cultural messages concerning parental roles (Song, 2004). In terms of regional variations, fathers in Asian Indian families are less likely to participate in household and childcare work even when their wives are employed, which suggests that patriarchal values may persist in some Asian regions more than others (Suppal and Roopnarine, 1999). As in the case in other cultures, Asian fathers are more likely to be playmates or as children enter school to act as an educational guide than as caregivers, a reminder that involvement still often follows gender-based scripts (Chuang and Su, 2008; Song, 2004). Similarly, in the United States and Canada as Asian families become more acculturated, there is a trend toward
greater equality in the division of household labor including more equity in childcare responsibilities among Japanese Americans (Ishii-Kuntz, 2009), Chinese Canadian (Costigan and Su, 2008), and Asian Indian immigrant fathers in the United States (Jain and Belsky, 1997). However, the patterns are not uniform across Asian subgroups that vary in terms of immigration patterns and levels of economic participation. It is clear from these brief examples that cultural factors will either enhance or diminish differences between mothers and fathers and underscore the plasticity of parental roles.

These findings are important in light of past negative characterizations of low-income African American and Latin American fathers as uninvolved. Clearly, the stereotypes surrounding fathers of different ethnic backgrounds are inaccurate and outdated and needs to be revised in light of recent evidence (Cabrera et al. 2013; Roopnarine and Hossain, 2013). Much of the earlier work concerning fathering among ethnic minority fathers was based on single-parent families and/or on young unwed fathers and failed to recognize differences within ethnic groups.

**Father Involvement in International Perspective**

An examination of non-U.S. countries reveals a pattern similar to the one observed in the United States. From 1965 to 2000, fathers in Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, France, and the United Kingdom showed a similar increase over time in the amount of “child care time” (Bianchi et al. 2006). However, with the exception of France, “childcare time” for U.S. fathers is lower than fathers in many industrial countries, with British fathers being highest (Bianchi et al., 2006). The most comprehensive cross-national examination of this issue comes from the Multinational Time Use Study in which time use diary surveys across 16 countries were utilized to assess cross-time shifts from the 1960s to the 2000s in men’s and women’s household roles (Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny, 2011). As expected, women continue to devote more time to routine housework (e.g., cooking, cleaning, other care) than men who, in turn, have increased their contribution to nonroutine household tasks (e.g., shopping, gardening, house repairs). Over time, the gender gap is closing, in part, due to a reduction in routine household activities by mothers and an increase in men’s contributions to these tasks. Small-scale studies in several countries including Sweden, Israel, and Japan confirm this general pattern (see Shwalb, Shwalb, and Lamb, 2013). These findings are consistent with the more general proposition that pregnancy and birth of a first child, in particular, are occasions for a shift toward a more traditional division of roles regardless of whether their initial role division between husbands and wives was traditional or equalitarian (Cowan and Cowan, 2010).

**Developmental changes in father involvement**

The overall pattern of contact time between mothers and fathers and their infants and toddlers continues into middle childhood and adolescence. In a study of middle childhood (6– to 7-year-olds), Russell and Russell (1987) found that Australian mothers were available to children 54.7 hours/week compared with 34.6 hours/week for fathers. Mothers also spent more time alone with children (22.6 hours/week) than did fathers (2.4 hours/week). However, when both parents and child were together, mothers and fathers initiated interactions with children with equal frequency and children’s initiations toward each parent were similar. Adolescents spend less time with their parents than younger children and less time alone with their father than with their mother (Larson and Richards, 1994).

Part of the explanation for the greater involvement of mothers versus fathers is because the maternal parenting role is more mandatory and more clearly scripted by our culture, whereas paternal parenting is less clearly scripted and more discretionary. The gendered nature of parenting roles is illustrated by custody decisions which, in spite of shifts toward more equal custody arrangements across mothers and fathers, continue to favor mothers. In a study with a national probability sample, Kelly, Redenbach, and Rinaman (2005) found that in 80% of the cases, the mother received sole
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physical custody of the minor child or children. However, the number of fathers with sole custody has increased over the last several decades as a result of the growing national fatherhood movement, the growing recognition of fathers as significant parental figures and perhaps father-friendlier courts (Stevenson et al., 2014).

A caveat is in order. The lower level of father involvement in caregiving and other forms of interaction does not imply that fathers are less competent than mothers to care for infants and children. Competence can be measured in a variety of ways; one approach is to measure the parent's sensitivity to infant cues in the feeding context. Success in caregiving, to a large degree, depends on the parent’s ability to correctly “read” or interpret the infant’s behavior so that the parent’s own behavior can be regulated to respond appropriately. Decades of research has documented that maternal and paternal behavior that is contingent on, sensitive to, and responsive to a child’s signals and behavior is critical for adequate development (Tamis-LeMonda and Baumwell, 2001; Tamis-LeMonda, Baumwell, and Cabrera, 2013). Beginning in infancy, fathers’ sensitivity to a variety of cues (e.g., auditory distress signals during feeding [sneeze, spit up, cough], vocalizations, mouth movements) is just as marked as mothers’ responsivity to these cues (Parke and Sawin, 1976, 1980) in spite of the fact that fathers may spend less time in caregiving activities. Moreover, the amount of milk consumed by infants when either their mothers and fathers were the feeding agent is similar; fathers and mothers are equally successful in feeding their infant. Other evidence is similar: Mothers and fathers show similar levels of sensitivity to their 24- and 30-month-old children’s behavior during play (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004) and are responsive to their 12-month-olds when engaged in an interactive task (Notaro and Volling, 1999). Invoking a competence/performance distinction, fathers may not necessarily act as a caregiver or interactive partner as often as mothers, but when called on, they are sensitive and competent interactive agents. Fathers’ ability to perform caregiving tasks matches mothers’ skill in middle childhood as well. As Russell and Russell (1987) found, both parents reported that they were involved on a regular basis in a variety of caregiving activities (e.g., having a cuddle, sit and have a talk) even though mothers were higher in their frequencies. Finally, fathers can function effectively as managers and supervisors of their children’s activities, but do so less than mothers on a routine basis (Ladd, 2005; Parke et al., 2003). Again, it appears that fathers are capable of this type of caregiving function but execute this function less regularly than mothers. On balance, the evidence suggests that fathers are competent caregiving agents.

Qualitative Effects: Stylistic Similarities and Differences in Mother and Father Interaction

Although the levels of involvement may differ for mothers and fathers, their childrearing styles do not differ greatly. Both mothers and fathers express warmth and responsiveness in their interactions with their children, and in general, the notion of the aloof and unresponsive father is an outdated view. For example, among residential fathers with preteens, 73% reported that they showed affection (87% for mothers), 62% expressed love (85% for mothers), and 37% offered appreciation to their children (55% for mothers; Child Trends, 2006). Similarly, evidence from other ethnic groups reveals a similar picture. African American fathers showed moderate levels of responsiveness and low levels of negative behavior directed toward infants (Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, and Cabrera, 2006) and toddlers (Mitchell and Cabrera, 2009). In the case of Asian fathers, Chao and Tseng (2002) observed, “Parenting differences purported between Asian fathers and mothers have been based on the traditional adage ‘strict father, kind mother’—wherein fathers exert high degrees of authoritarian control and mothers manifest high degrees of warmth” (p. 73). Although there is some support for this view among Chinese families, other studies of Asian American families fail to support this profile. Consistent with a view endorsing a more involved mother, in a study of Chinese adolescents’ perceptions, maternal parenting was viewed as being more positive than paternal parenting (Shek,
Adolescents stated that fathers showed less concern, less responsiveness, and higher levels of harshness than mothers. Also, father–adolescent communication was perceived less positively and as occurring less frequently than mother–adolescent communication (Shek, 2000). Others (Xu and Zhang, 2008) report similar findings of low levels of communication and emotional support for Chinese fathers. In contrast to this traditional picture of Asian families, studies of Asian American immigrant families have found few differences between mothers and fathers in levels of authoritative parenting control and warmth (Chao and Kim, 2000). Again, acculturation clearly plays a role in helping to understand differences and similarities in mother–father childrearing styles. These patterns present a clear challenge to our stereotype of the maternal and paternal childrearing styles among Asian American families. In contrast to traditional portraits of Latino fathers as patriarchal, authoritarian, and aloof (Mirande, 2008), Latin American fathers are characterized as warm and nurturing (Gamble, Ramakumar, and Diaz, 2007; Leidy et al., 2011; Toth and Xu, 1999) especially as a result of acculturation (Taylor and Behnke, 2005). Similarly, African American fathers showed moderate levels of responsiveness and low levels of negative behavior directed toward infants (Shannon et al., 2006) and toddlers (Mitchell and Cabrera, 2009). However, mothers and fathers may exhibit differences in level of control. For example, African American fathers set limits less often than mothers but have more sole responsibility for disciplining their children than European American fathers (Child Trends, 2006). Among Latin American families, fathers often exercise more control over children than mothers, especially in the case of adolescent daughters. Finally, among Asian American immigrants, few mother–father differences in strictness have been found (Chao and Kim, 2000) in contrast to higher levels of paternal compared with maternal strictness among mainland Chinese families (Berndt et al., 1993). Clearly, acculturation and exposure to new cultural values play a role in parenting styles.

In spite of similarities in interactive stylistic features, the contexts that mothers and fathers choose for interacting with their children tend to differ. Fathers participate less than mothers in caregiving and in providing meals, school lunches, and clothing but spend a greater percentage of the time available for interaction in play activities. Among North American families, fathers regardless of ethnicity (European American, Asian American, African American, and Latin American) spent a greater percentage of time with their infants in play than mothers (Roopnarine and Hossain, 2013). However, in absolute terms, mothers spend more time than fathers in play with their children (Yeung et al., 2001).

The quality of play across mothers and fathers differs too. Among young infants, older infants, and toddlers, fathers’ hallmark style of interaction is physical play with characteristic degrees of arousal, excitement, and unpredictability in terms of the pace of the interaction. In contrast, mothers’ playful interactive style is characterized by a more modulated and less arousing tempo. Moreover, mothers play more conventional motor games or toy-mediated activities and are more verbal and didactic (Hossain and Roopnarine, 1994; Parke, 1996). They engage in more pretend play and role play than fathers as well as more teaching activities than fathers (by labeling colors and shapes) as they engage their infant in play (Power and Parke, 1982). Fathers engage in more physical play with sons than daughters (Power and Parke, 1982), whereas mothers facilitate pretend play of their daughters more than of their sons (Bornstein, 2007). In turn, girls engage in more frequent and more sophisticated pretend play than boys (Bornstein, 2007). Nor are these effects evident only in infancy. MacDonald and Parke (1984) found that fathers engaged in more physical play with their 3- and 4-year-old children than mothers, whereas mothers facilitate pretend play of their daughters more than of their sons (Bornstein, 2007). In turn, girls engage in more frequent and more sophisticated pretend play than boys (Bornstein, 2007). Nor are these effects evident only in infancy. MacDonald and Parke (1984) found that fathers engaged in more physical play with their 3- and 4-year-old children than mothers, whereas mothers engaged in more object-mediated play than fathers. The fathers’ distinctive role as a physical play partner changes with age, however. Physical play is highest between fathers and 2-year-olds, and between 2 and 10 years of age, there is a decreased likelihood that fathers engage their children physically (MacDonald and Parke, 1986). In spite of the decline in physical play across age, fathers are still more often physical play partners than mothers. In an Australian study of parents and their 6- to 7-year-old children (Russell and Russell, 1987), fathers were more involved in physical/outrdoor play interactions and fixing things around the house and garden than mothers.
In contrast, mothers were more involved in caregiving, household tasks, reading, toy play, and arts and crafts. In sum, fathers are tactile and physical, and mothers tend to be verbal, didactic, and toy-mediated in their play. Clearly, infants and young children experience qualitatively different stimulatory patterns from mothers and fathers.

In adolescence, the quality of maternal and paternal involvement continues to differ. Just as in earlier developmental periods, mothers and fathers may complement each other and provide models that reflect the tasks of adolescence—connectedness and separateness. Across development, the focus on physical play on the part of fathers declines and is replaced in adolescence by verbal playfulness in the form of sarcasm, humor, and word play, even though this often increases emotional distance but perhaps encourages independence and more equal and egalitarian exchanges as well (Shulman and Klein, 1993): “Fathers, more than mothers conveyed the feeling that they can rely on their adolescents, thus fathers might provide a ‘facilitating environment’ for adolescent attainment of differentiation from the family and consolidation of independence” (Shulman and Klein, 1993, p. 53). Mothers are more emotionally available to their adolescents, and mother-adolescent dyads spend more time together than father-adolescent dyads (Larson and Richards, 1994; Larson and Sheeber, 2007). Mothers continue to be more involved in arts, crafts, and reading, and maintain more open communication and emotional closeness with their offspring during adolescence. Although the style of fathers’ involvement as a play or recreational partner appears to have reasonable continuity from infancy through adolescence, the meaning and function of this interaction style shift across development.

Why do mothers and fathers play differently? Both biological and environment factors probably play a role. Experience with infants, the amount of time spent with infants, and the usual kinds of responsibilities that a parent assumes are all factors that influence parents’ style of play. For example, as a result of spending less time with infants and children than mothers, fathers may use their distinctive arousing style as a way to increase their salience to compensate for their more limited interaction time. Mothers who overall spend more time with their infants and young children than fathers focus on less arousing types of activities such as symbolic pretend play (Bornstein, 2007). Biological factors cannot be ignored in light of the fact that male monkeys show the same rough-and-tumble physical style of play as U.S. human fathers, and infant male monkeys tend to respond more positively to bids for rough-and-tumble play than females (Parke and Suomi, 1981): “Perhaps [both monkey and human] males may be more susceptible to being aroused into states of positive excitement and unpredictability than females” (Maccoby, 1988, p. 761)—speculation that is consistent with gender differences in risk-taking and sensation seeking. In addition, human males, whether boys or men, tend to behave more boisterously and show more positive emotional expression and reactions than females (Maccoby, 1998). The fact that girls and their mothers engage in more symbolic pretend play than fathers and boys suggests that mothers and fathers may enact complementary roles in their children’s lives. Together, these threads of the puzzle suggest that predisposing biological differences between males and females may influence the play patterns of mothers and fathers. At the same time, the cross-cultural data underscore the ways in which cultural and environmental contexts shape play patterns of parents and remind us of the high degree of plasticity of human social behaviors.

How mutable are these stylistic differences? The common wisdom concerning these parent gender differences has been questioned. Instead, a profile has emerged of overlapping play styles between and within mothers and fathers as well as adoption of a range of play styles by both mothers and fathers has emerged. This revision does not diminish the contribution of either parent to children’s development but opens up new questions about the processes through which parents contribute. Moreover, we may need to reevaluate the distinctiveness of maternal and paternal contributions to developmental outcomes but still recognize that both parents can play important roles. Despite evidence about the unique styles of mothers and fathers, questions remain. The gender-of-parent differences, on average, are relatively small, and there is a good deal of overlap between mothers and fathers in both the style of play as well as in the absolute amount of time devoted to playful
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interactions (Pleck, 2010; Yeung et al., 2001). And fathers do not own the physical play franchise; mothers have a mixed play repertoire, too, and can and do bouncing and tickling as well as reading and conversing with their children. In the same vein, fathers, like mothers, play with toys, read books, and engage in pretend play in addition to their supposedly signature style of arousing and stimulating physical play (Lamb and Lewis, 2010). Parents may do a variety of types of play not only in a single play session but also across different days, weeks, or even times of day depending on their mood, their energy level, the child’s momentary interest, and their child’s daily schedule. Both mothers and fathers contribute to their children’s development in a myriad of playful ways (Roggman, Boyce, Cook, Christiansen, and Jones, 2004; Tamis-LeMonda, 2004):

The stylistic differences in play between fathers and mothers became enshrined in our views of mothers and fathers based on work conducted 20–30 years ago when traditional conceptions of fathers’ role predominated, maternal employment was still relatively uncommon and was viewed negatively, and fathers were much less involved in the day-to-day care of their infants.

(Lamb and Lewis, 2010, p. 116)

As men in contemporary society have expanded their range of involvement to include more caregiving and managerial parenting activities, the predominance of play as the distinctive feature of the father role has diminished in importance. Play has become merely one of a variety of ways that fathers (and mothers) are involved with their children. Some leading father scholars have revised their earlier views of the uniqueness of father play: “There is less and less justification for viewing the identification of fatherhood with play and companionship as something with unique psychological significance as was once thought” (Lamb and Lewis, 2010, p. 117).

Other Cultures, Other Interactive Styles, and Other Play Partners

Another challenge to the uniqueness of these play distinctions comes from scrutiny of other cultures, which clearly demonstrates that both the quantity and quality of parental involvement vary across cultures. This evidence has challenged the assumption of the universality of paternal physical play as well as the widely shared view that physical play is the hallmark of fathers’ interactive style. In some cultures that are similar to mainstream U.S. culture, such as England and Australia, there are comparable differences between mothers and fathers in play. However, findings from several other cultures do not find that physical play is a central feature of the father–infant relationship (Roopnarine and Hosain, 2013; Shwalb et al., 2013). Neither in Sweden nor among Israeli Kibbutz families were fathers more likely than mothers to play with their children or to engage in different types of physical play (Hwang, 1987). Similarly, among Chinese Malaysian, Indian and Aka pygmy (Central Africa) parents, parents, they rarely engage in physical play with their children (Hewlett and MacFarlan, 2010; Roopnarine and Hosain, 2013). Instead, both parents display affection and engage in plenty of close physical contact. Perhaps societies that value sharing and cooperation are less likely to encourage a physical playful interactive style, whereas industrialized societies which are characterized by a high degree of competition and value independence and assertiveness commonly support this interactive style (Paquette, 2004). In fact, children in Western technologically advanced and highly individually oriented societies have the highest levels of competition between partners in their play (Hughes, 1999). However, there is less competitive play among North American children reared in cooperation-oriented communes (Plattner and Minturn, 1975) and perhaps less prevalence of physical play between fathers and children, although the possible decrease in physical play has not been established.

Another challenge to the traditional view of mothers and fathers as play partners comes from cross-cultural observations that parents are not always active play partners. Instead, in some cultures,
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the play duties are assumed by other members of the community. In Italy, neither mothers nor fathers but other women in the extended family or within the community are more likely to play physically with infants (New and Benigini, 1987), and in Mexico, this physical play role often falls to siblings (Zukow-Goldring, 2002). These findings suggest that the physical play role of the father is not universal and that the play role may be assumed by other social agents in some cultures. Moreover, these cross-national differences suggest that cultural context is one of the factors that may reduce the differences—in this case, in terms of play style—between mother and father interaction patterns. These observations argue for a reevaluation of the pathways through which fathers influence their children and suggest that we reconsider the father’s physical play role as a major contributor to children’s emotional regulation—at least in some cultures.

The findings from other cultures suggest that our focus on the gender of the parent may be too narrow a conceptualization of the issue of necessary adult input for adequate child development. Instead, it may be helpful to recast the issue by asking 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. In an experimental examination of this issue, Ross and Taylor (1989) found that boys prefer the physical play style, whether it is mothers or fathers who engage in it. Their work suggests that boys may not necessarily prefer their fathers but rather their physical style of play. Together, these studies suggest that gender of the agent of delivery of playful input may be less important than the type of stimulation itself. Further evidence is consistent with this interchangeability argument, which suggests that mothers and fathers can substitute for each other as we saw in the case of caregiving. To illustrate gender of parent substitutability, consider a classic study of the effects of having a secure or insecure attachment relationship with mother or father on an infant’s sociability with a stranger, a friendly clown (Main and Weston, 1981). Infants who had secure attachment ties to both mother and father were most responsive to the friendly stranger, whereas those with insecure attachment relationships with both parents were the most wary and least responsive. Infants who had a secure attachment with either their mother or their father and an insecure attachment to the other parent exhibited a mid-level of social responsiveness. However, the gender of the parent with whom the infant developed a secure attachment did not matter; the parents were substitutable for one another. Studies of the effects of having supportive or unsupportive parents on toddlers’ and 5-year-olds’ cognitive development came to a similar conclusion (Martin, Ryan, and Brooks-Gunn, 2007; Ryan, Martin, and Brooks-Gunn, 2006). When both mothers and fathers were supportive, the children’s cognitive development scores were highest, and when both parents were unsupportive, the children scored lowest. The scores were between the two high and low extremes when one parent was supportive and the other parent was unsupportive. However, the scores were similar regardless of which parent was supportive or unsupportive. Clearly, it is better to have two supportive parents, but if the child has only one supportive parent, sex of parent is irrelevant and mother and father are equivalent.

Together, this evidence indicates that the style of parenting and the gender of the parent who delivers it can be viewed as at least partially independent. These data help us address the uniqueness of fathers’ and mothers’ roles in the family. Moreover, they help provide clarity on the important issue of how essential fathers (Silverstein and Auerbach, 1999) and mothers (Parke, 2002, 2013) are for the successful socialization of their children. Work on same-gender parents that shows that parenting processes are more important than the family type (same gender versus heterosexual) for children’s development is consistent with this view (Golombok, 2019; Miller, Kors, and Macfie, 2017; Patterson, 2016). Finally, the focus on parents themselves as the sole agents in the socialization matrix is too narrow a framing as well, as we saw in the cross-national examples in Mexico and Italy. These findings suggest that a variety of socialization agents beyond mothers and fathers, such as siblings, extended family members, and nonkin figures in the community, play important roles in children’s lives.
Beyond the “New Involved Father” in Intact Married Families

It is increasingly clear that the previous descriptions of the albeit slow emergence of fathers who are more actively involved in the care of their children, and shared the responsibilities of both caregiver and breadwinner with their partners, do not apply to all fathers (Doucet, 2013; Edin and Nelson, 2013). There is increasing recognition that there is a two-tier family system based to a large extent on social class (Furstenberg, 2014). The cultural trends involving new and involved fathers apply most clearly to economically and educationally advantaged families, but they apply less readily to less economically well off and less educated fathers and families. Especially as economic inequality has increased, it is important to recognize that economic disparities have yielded more variability across social class in the patterns of fathering than is usually recognized. Many fathers are either in cohabitation with a partner rather than married; others may be divorced or never in residence with their partner but still involved in the lives of their children. Reviews of fathering after divorce and stepfathering are beyond the scope of this chapter (see Ganong, Coleman, and Sanner, 2019; Weinraub and Bowler, 2019). Instead, several recent trends in fathering will be examined in this section including the father’s role in multiple partner fertility families. In a subsequent section, work on patterns of “fathering at a distance” in which fathers do not reside with their children on a regular basis for a variety of reasons, such as military deployment, incarceration, or work in another country, will be examined.

Disadvantaged Families and Patterns of Father-Child Contact

Much of the recent work on fathers and families who have experienced disadvantage is based on large national samples of fathers and children, such as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH), the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), and the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010). These studies and recent qualitative studies (Edin and Nelson, 2013) provide important insights into fathers’ roles in the lives of children as well as the effects of these fathers on children’s development. According to the Fragile Families study, unmarried fathers are generally younger than married fathers at the time of the birth of their first child (27 versus 32 years), of minority background (African American or Latin American), and less educated and less likely to be employed (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010). A variety of other features characterizes these families, such as early onset of parenthood and a decision not to marry. However, many parents are either cohabitating or in a partner relationship at the time that the baby is born (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010). In spite of stereotypes, these men often had a close relationship with their partners, with 82% being romantically involved at the time of the birth, 50% were cohabiting, and another 32% were romantically involved but not in residence. Clearly, the belief that most out-of-wedlock births are a product of casual relationships is misleading (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010). Across time, however, just as is the case of early-timed marriages, these relationships are unstable. Only about two fifths of unmarried couples are still romantically involved 5 years after the birth of the child, compared with 77% of married couples (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010).

Moreover, disadvantaged men may be involved with multiple partners across time and, in turn, have children with subsequent partners. Almost 20% of fathers between the ages of 15 and 44 years have children with more than one partner (Guzzo, 2014; Guzzo and Furstenberg, 2007). Age at first sexual experience, age at birth of the first child, and relationship status of partners are correlates of multi-partner fertility (Guzzo, 2014). Men whose first children are born outside of marriage are three times as likely to experience multi-partner fertility than are men who are married to the mother of their first child at the time of birth (Carlson and Furstenberg, 2006).

What about involvement with their children? Several studies converge in finding that contact between unmarried fathers and their children decreases over time and, in contrast to the
new contemporary fathers, have less contact with their offspring (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010). However, contact is not absent, and there is a notable amount of variation in the amount of time that unmarried fathers spend with their children as well as variations in their forms of support for their child. Studies of unmarried fathers indicate a surprising amount of paternal involvement for extended periods following the birth. Results from Fragile Families indicate that 87% of fathers saw their child in the year after the birth and 63% saw the child more than once a month (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010). There is considerable instability in levels of father involvement with their children across time. In a sample of low-income African American, unwed fathers, nearly 40% either increased or decreased their level of involvement between the child’s birth and 3 years (Coley and Chase-Lansdale, 1999). Similarly in the Fragile Families study (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010), by 3 years, only 71% of fathers had seen their child in the prior 2-year period and less than half (47%) had seen their child more than once in the past month. By 5 years, 63% of fathers had seen their child since age 3, and 43% had seen their child more than once in the past month. These declines in father participation continue across childhood and adolescence (Furstenberg and Harris, 1993).

A word of caution in needed because the pattern of instability over time in contact patterns of nonresident fathers and their children may apply more to poor fathers than all nonresidential fathers. To illustrate, using a nationally representative sample, Cheadle, Amato, and King (2010) found that most nonresident fathers have fairly stable patterns of contact over a 12-year period. A large group (38%) maintained a high level of contact across the study, and another group (32%) were initially uninvolved and continued to remain at a distance from their children across time. A third group (23%) of men were initially involved with their offspring but became relatively uninvolved across time, as a small group (7%) were low at the beginning but gradually increased their level of involvement.

There is great variety in forms of father involvement beyond financial or even emotional and practical support for the mother. Fathers provide nurturance, play and leisure activities, safety, moral guidance, and discipline as well as connections with the extended family and community (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010; Palkovitz, 2002). In the Fragile Families study, formal child support was rare but informal support in the form of money, toys or diapers for the baby, or transportation were common around the birth of the baby (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010; Edin and Nelson, 2013). A broadened definition of support has clearly corrected the myth of the “deadbeat dad” among poor and unmarried fathers (Tamis-LeMonda and McFadden, 2010). And the stereotype that African American fathers are uninvolved is not true, either. In the Fragile Families study, African American men were more likely to maintain contact with their children than either European American or Latin American men (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010). Similarly, others report that fewer African American fathers (12%) have no contact with their offspring than European American (30%) and Latin American (37%) fathers.

Finally, to fully appreciate the variability in contact between poor, often nonresidential, fathers and their offspring, another feature of fathering among poor unmarried men needs attention, namely, that fathers do not maintain similar levels of contact across all biological children. Middle-class men are more likely to marry, divorce, and remarry, a pattern that has been termed the “Marriage go round” (Cherlin, 2009), but men in poverty are less likely to marry but more likely than middle-class men to have multiple children with different partners. According to Edin and Nelson (2013), these men are on “the ‘Family-go-round’ where good fatherhood is accomplished by moving from one child to another” (2013, p. 189) as romantic relationships end and they move on to a new relationship and often a new bout of fathering. Fathering efforts are not evenly distributed across all offspring because few men are able to support or even maintain ties with several children. Instead, a pattern of selective fathering is more normative among poor unmarried men whereby a father selectively and serially invests his fathering capital in one or a few offspring. Instead of supporting the child’s mother, many women are left to their own resources as many poor men are unable to play the traditional breadwinner role due to high unemployment or sporadic and low paying employment or
intermittent incarceration. Instead of a contemporary package deal in which a middle-class father is expected to be both a breadwinner and a nurturer, guide, and support for their child, poor men may elect to play only the nurturing role. This selective involvement choice represents a reversal of roles between the sexes because it is the mother who is the financial provider and the father the playmate to their child. Although selective involvement allows men to perhaps father at least one child well, it leaves not only the women who have borne these other children to bear the major responsibility for the financial burden of rearing a child but also these “nonselected” children without support from their biological father. As we elaborate ahead, this arrangement may have detrimental effects on children. Clearly, the patterns of contact between fathers and their offspring, the modes of support provided to either children or the biological mother, and the couple relationships among these poor families in which fathers are often nonresidential are sufficiently unique from more typical married families to raise caution about any single profile of fathers in the current era. Instead, there continue to be multiple faces of fatherhood.

Paternal Incarceration and Father Contact

Another group of fathers who have begun to receive attention and who are disproportionately drawn from poor, disadvantaged, and minority groups are incarcerated fathers. A recent estimate suggests that more than 5,000,000 children, or 7% of all U.S. children, have experienced a coresident parent leaving to spend time in jail or prison (Murphey and Cooper, 2015; see Dallaire, 2019). A recent report revealed that 1 in 28 children in the United States had an incarcerated parent in 2010, up from 1 in 125 children in 1985 (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). Estimates suggest that cumulatively, 1 in 25 European American children and 1 in 4 African American children born in 1990 had experienced parental imprisonment by their 14th birthday (Wildeman, 2009). There has been increasing interest in both the modes and the frequency of contact between incarcerated parents and their children (Poehlmann-Tyman, 2014). A variety of factors alters the contact patterns between incarcerated parents and their children. First, proximity is a major factor, and the greater the distance between the incarceration site and the family, the less the likelihood of visitation (Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen, and Kennon, 1999). Therefore, those in more distant state or federal prisons, rather than in local jails, are less likely to experience regular visitation (Dallaire, 2019).

Second, the appropriateness and friendliness of visiting arrangements affect both the likelihood of visitation and the positive or negative effects of the visit on both parent and child (Loper, Carlson, Levitt, and Scheffel, 2009). Noisy, inhospitable contact settings, such as plexiglass barriers that limit direct contact between parent and child, may reduce the benefits of visitation. In light of these difficulties surrounding live visitation, remote forms of contact such as phone calls or written correspondence offer a viable alternative for reliable contact between incarcerated parents and their children (Poehlmann et al., 2010). Letter writing is the most frequent vehicle for parent-child contact, with an estimated 52% of parents in state prisons having at least monthly mail contact with at least one of their children (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008). Moreover, Tuerk and Loper (2006) found that frequency of letter writing, rather than the frequency of personal visits or phone calls, accounted for the association between more child contact and less parenting stress. As Poehlmann et al. (2010) noted, “Parents have control over the content of letters and can plan and anticipate what their children may need to hear in ways that are not available to them in a noisy or unpredictable visitation environment” (p. 586). Other forms of remote communication are increasingly feasible such as video calls, instant messaging, and e-mail, but these forms of communication are not uniformly available to incarcerated individuals or are limited to a few contacts and at a cost to the imprisoned person (Poehlmann-Tyman, 2014). Boudin (1997) described a program by which incarcerated parents read and recorded stories for their children. The effects of these forms of contact remain to be rigorously evaluated.
Third, according to a national survey of state and federal prisoners, imprisoned mothers more frequently reported at least monthly phone calls (47% versus 38%) and mail correspondence with children (65% versus 51%) than did imprisoned fathers (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008). Fathers are less likely to receive visitation contact with their children than incarcerated mothers, and contact is likely to vary with the earlier quality of the parent-child relationship (Poehlmann, Shlafer, Maes, and Hanneman, 2008). Others found that imprisoned fathers (and mothers) perceiving stronger coparenting alliances were more likely to experience child contact (letters in particular) than those who disagreed about coparenting issues (Loper et al., 2009). Most children with incarcerated fathers live with their mothers during the incarceration period, whereas children with incarcerated mothers are more likely to live with their grandparents, other family members, or in foster care (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008). Particularly in the case of young children, the non-incarcerated caregiver often restricts contact with the incarcerated parent due to concerns about negative reactions to the visit (Arditti, 2003). Additionally, because many young incarcerated fathers have limited direct experience caring for children, interventions to pair parent education with one-on-one time with the child appear to be having an impact on father-child time and relationships (Barr et al., 2011). Finally, prior incarceration is related to less child contact in the post-incarceration period due to “the social stigma, lower earning capability, and complicated relationships with mothers typically experienced after they are released” (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010, p. 253). As we note ahead, incarceration has a clear negative effect on children and families and although some forms of contact may be beneficial, the effects of contact between incarcerated fathers and their children remain poorly understood.

**Transnational Fathers and Patterns of Contact**

Another understudied aspect of fathering at a distance involves transnational fathers who often leave their country of origin and migrate to another country to improve their economic prospects but who often leave either their partner or children or sometimes both behind in the process. Some estimates suggest that 25% of children in U.S. immigrant families have at least one parent abroad (Mazzucato and Schans, 2011), and most often it is the father who is the emigrating parent. The decision to divide childcare and provisioning responsibilities across international borders is best viewed as a family strategy aimed at helping the family survive economically by finding better-paying jobs in another country. At the same time, the consequences of these economic strategies for father-mother relationships and father-child relationships are poorly understood. Little is known about the variations in the amount of time that fathers (or mothers) are separated from their children (or partners). Thus, we need better information on the patterns of contact between transnational parents and their children and or partners who remain in the country of origin.

Clearly, most parents make an effort to stay in contact with their children. Although visiting their children is obviously important, and according to an internet survey (Cookston, Boyer, Vega, and Parke, 2017), 64% of parents who were residing in the United States cited “visiting children living there” as their primary reason for visiting their families in Mexico, visiting their home country is often difficult in terms of logistics and cost. In spite of their motivation to see their children, 75% of parents had not been back to visit their children in over a year. Alternatively and as a result of the limited opportunities to have face-to-face visits, most transnational parents use some form of “communication at a distance” strategy to keep in contact with their children. In one study (Dreby, 2010), most U.S.-based parents—mothers and fathers—reported calling home to Mexico once a week. Similarly, 61% of children in this study reported talking to their parents once a week or more. The frequency of contact needs to be better understood, and the modes of communication need to be better specified. In the internet survey, Cookston et al. (2017) found that 83% of parents communicated with their children via telephone, 85% via the internet, and 67% by video conference. Only 24% communicated by traditional postal mail.
Many questions remain to be addressed. What is the quality of internet contact? What topics are most frequently discussed? And how are variations in contact patterns related to fathers’ (and mothers’) perceptions of his role as father? What factors determine variations in separation periods? How does the age of the child alter the patterns of separation? Do fathers return home more often when children are younger (or older)? Perhaps, fathers return more frequently to visit infants to establish attachment bonds. Are they less (or more) likely to leave at all when children are young? Or do fathers visit more when children are adolescents? Fathers may view themselves as more critical in curbing deviant behavior during the adolescent period.

**Father Duty: Military Fathers During Deployment and Back Home**

Another form of fathering at a distance involves military fathers who are deployed to foreign lands as part of their military duties. Patterns of contact between these physically absent fathers and their children is beginning to receive attention (MacDermid Wadsworth, 2013). The evidence suggests that deployed fathers use a variety of communication strategies to maintain contact with their partners and children, such as phone contact, video conference, and other forms of electronic communication. Ahead, we examine the impact of this form of father-child separation on children’s development.

This form of fathering at a distance is an especially useful comparison because many of the confounding factors, such as stigma and poverty, associated with other forms of distant fathering, such as incarceration, are avoided.

Fathers who are in the military and are deployed due to military service experience a unique set of challenges. On the one hand, their physical separation makes direct contact a challenge; however, access to modern telecommunications means fathers can interact with their children regularly while deployed and their relationships with their children’s other parent means they are able to remain involved in the lives of their children. However, as we would expect with long periods of absence, when military deployed fathers are separated from their children for extended periods, children appear to increase in their adjustment problems at both school (Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, and Richardson, 2010) and home (Lester and Flake, 2013). For the most part, children who experience deployment fare well, but a subset of children experience adversity as a result of the deployment separation (Mustillo, Wadsworth, and Lester, 2015). Importantly, a DVD intervention that employed Sesame Street characters that was designed to help families prepare for and cope with deployment was linked to better functioning among caregivers and children (Flittner O’Grady et al., 2016).

For many military fathers who have seen active duty, a return to family life can prove challenging, and it is common for these fathers to experience difficulties in their marriages and parenting (Mustillo, Wadsworth, and Lester, 2015). In one sample of men who had served in the National Guard (Mustillo et al., 2015), combat exposure was linked to major depression and the experience of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Further, the quality of the marital relationship was associated with father internalizing symptoms, and parenting difficulties were greatest when depressive symptoms were greatest.

Cozza, Holmes, and van Ost (2013) drew attention to risks associated with childhood in a military family and suggested that a deficit perspective has emerged for research on the risks of a life in the military. In fact, when both risk and protective factors associated were measured, evidence emerged that the protective factors within families increased when risk was present (MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2016). For these reasons, the experiences of military families offer an important perspective for consideration of the role of fathers in the lives of their children. In a qualitative study of deployed fathers, parent identity emerged as a salient determinant whether and how fathers remain involved in the lives of their children (Willerton et al., 2011). Given that the military is a workplace with expectations and rules that bind members, opportunities exist to promote education and opportunities for men to fully engage in the lives of their children and partners. An evaluation of a mobile phone
application designed to help military fathers learn about child development, track milestones, and communicate with their child’s other parent demonstrated that the content resonated with military fathers and could be a useful tool to engage military fathers in the lives of their children despite possibly being separated by a great distance (Lee and Walsh, 2015). Clearly as the previous sections illustrate, both differences in fathering across cultures and the considerable variability in patterns of father involvement across social and ethnic groups in our own culture need to be recognized.

**Determinants of Father Involvement**

The importance of examining the determinants of father involvement stems from the view that the paternal role is less culturally scripted and determined than the maternal role and few clear role models for defining fatherhood exist. It is assumed that a multifactor approach to father involvement is necessary because a variety of factors determines the degree of father involvement with children. It is useful to distinguish individual, familial, and societal levels of analysis in assessing the determinants of father involvement with children. As outlined in Figure 3.1, it is useful to distinguish both biological (hormonal and neurological) and social (individual, familial, and societal levels) determinants of father involvement with children (Doherty, Kouneski, and Erikson, 1998; Li and Fleming, 2019; Parke and Buriel, 2006). It is important to recognize that these factors operate together in determining fathering behavior even though most prior investigators have examined single or a few predictors within an individual study. The advantages of an additive and interactive approach over a model focusing on single components to understanding father–child interaction are illustrated in a study by Holmes and Huston (2010), who found that a variety of factors including father parenting beliefs, child language and social skills, maternal employment and mother–child interaction quality together predicted father–child interaction patterns (see Parke and Buriel, 2006; Pleck, 2010; Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004 for reviews).

**Biological Factors in Paternal Behavior**

**Hormonal Influences**

It has long been recognized that females undergo a variety of hormonal changes during pregnancy and childbirth that may facilitate maternal behavior. It was long assumed that hormones play an unimportant role in paternal behavior because exposure to rat pups increases paternal activity without any changes in hormone levels (Li and Fleming, 2019). More recent evidence has challenged the assumption that hormonal levels are unimportant determinants of paternal behavior by examining this issue in species other than the rat, which is not a natural paternal species. In naturally paternal species, such as canid species who constitute less than 10% of mammalian species (Storey and Walsh, 2013), researchers have found that in a variety of animal species, males experience hormonal changes including increases in prolactin and decreases in testosterone prior to the onset of parental behavior and during infant contact (Li and Fleming, 2019).

Human fathers, too, undergo hormonal changes during pregnancy and childbirth (Feldman, 2019; Storey and Walsh, 2013). Males experience hormonal changes prior to the onset of parental behavior and during infant contact. Storey, Walsh, Quinton, and Wynne-Edwards (2000) found that men experienced significant pre-, peri-, and postnatal changes in each of these 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 prenatal period, and cortisol levels increased just before birth and decreased in the postnatal period for both men and women. Testosterone levels were lower in the early 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 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, in part, by reducing competitive non-nurturing behavior (Storey et al., 2000). Similarly, prolactin levels were higher in men showing greater responsiveness to infant cries and in men reporting more couvade symptoms during pregnancy. Storey et al. (2000, p. 91) argued 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 the pregnancy birth cycle but also to the hormonal levels of their partners. Women’s hormonal levels were closely linked with the time remaining before delivery, and men’s levels were linked with their partner’s hormone levels, not with time to birth. That father hormone levels are linked with those of his partner suggests 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. Clearly, social variables need to be considered in understanding the operation of biological effects. Perhaps intimate ties between partners during pregnancy stimulates hormonal changes, which, in turn, are associated with more nurturance toward babies. 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.

Other evidence is consistent with a psychobiological view of paternal behavior. Fleming and colleagues (2002) found that fathers with lower baseline levels of testosterone are more sympathetic and show a greater need to respond when hearing 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. Just as in the case of mothers, contact with the baby is linked to the level of the hormone oxytocin for new fathers too; paternal oxytocin correlated with the degree of stimulatory parenting behaviors, including proprioceptive contact, tactile stimulation, and object presentation (Feldman, Gordon, Schneiderman, Weisman, and Zagoory-Sharon, 2010). This stimulatory play style is the typical and unique way that many Western fathers interact with their infants. But all of these studies were cross-sectional snapshots, and alternative interpretations are possible. Perhaps men who show lower testosterone are more likely to partner and reproduce, whereas higher testosterone men stay single and do not become parents. Longitudinal work suggests that becoming a father does, indeed, lead to a drop in testosterone which, in turn, may better prepare them for the nurturing aspect of parenting. Gettler and his colleagues (2011) followed a group of over 600 men in the Philippines over a 5-year period from the time that they were single to the time some became fathers. Men with high levels of testosterone were more likely to become partnered fathers over the course of the study than men with lower levels of the hormone, possibly because men with higher testosterone were more assertive in competing for women or appeared healthier and more attractive. However, the men who became partnered fathers showed a larger drop in testosterone than did single non-fathers, whereas the drop for the men who became fathers was nearly twice as large as the decline in testosterone shown by the single men. These findings show that relations between testosterone and men’s reproductive strategies are bidirectional. High testosterone is helpful in the mating process but declines rapidly once men become fathers and begin the process of parenting where lower levels of testosterone are better for maintaining a family. As anthropologist Peter Gray noted, “A dad with lower testosterone is maybe a little more sensitive to cues from his child, and maybe he’s a little less sensitive to cues from a woman he meets at a restaurant” (Simon, 2011).

Moreover, childcare experience also plays a role. Fathers who have more experience with babies have lower testosterone and higher prolactin levels than first-time fathers (Fleming, Corter, Stallings, and Steiner, 2002), even after controlling for paternal age. In the Gettler, McDade, Feranil, and Kuzawa (2011) study, fathers with extensive involvement in childcare (3 hours a day or more
playing, feeding, bathing, toileting, reading, or dressing them) showed larger decreases in testosterone than fathers who were less involved with the routine care of their children. Similar links between testosterone and involvement in childcare have been found in Tanzania (Muller, Marlowe, Bugumba, and Ellison, 2009). In two neighboring cultural groups, fathers in the group in which paternal care is the cultural norm had lower testosterone than among fathers in the group in which paternal care is absent. In a study of a polygamous Senegalese society, fathers who were highly invested in their children, as reported by the children’s mothers, had lower testosterone compared with fathers who were less invested (Alvergne, Faurie, and Raymond, 2009).

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. Men, just like women, are biologically evolved to be parents, and cooperation between parents is an adaptive strategy.

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? Do childless men or women show hormonal changes as a result of opportunities to engage infants and children as well? However, it is clear that hormonal, in combination with social, factors are an important class of factors to recognize because the shifts in paternal hormones may decrease differences in maternal versus paternal parenting behavior. It is not just hormones that reflect fathers’ biological preparedness for parenting.

**Insights From the Brain**

Perhaps some of the most striking evidence that humans—mothers and fathers—are biologically prepared for caregiving comes from studies of how our brains react when we are exposed to babies. From the earliest days of life, fathers as well as mothers are neurologically primed to respond to infants. Using brain imaging techniques such as fMRI, they show more neural activation when shown pictures of babies than pictures of animate objects (Swain, Lorberbaum, Kose, and Strathearn, 2007). Brain imaging reveals that mothers and fathers compared with nonparents exhibited more pronounced neural responses in the right amygdala (an area involved in emotional processing) in response to infant crying than to infant laughter (Seifritz et al., 2003). Evidence for differences in neural responses to the emotional responses of children suggests parents may experience a cry as an emotionally important signal which requires their attention and demonstrates that the emotion areas of the brain may be involved in fathers and mothers listening/responding to babies distress signals (Seifritz et al., 2003). Fathers and mothers show higher levels of activity in emotional processing areas of the brain when exposed to infant cries than nonparents (Swain, 2008; Swain et al., 2011).

Other brain imaging studies found that men respond neurologically more to the cries of their own infants than to the distress signals of unrelated infants (Swain et al., 2007). Structural changes in the brain of fathers over the first 4 months postpartum have been documented (Kim et al., 2014). Fathers exhibited increase in gray matter (GM) volume in several neural regions involved in parental motivation, including the hypothalamus, amygdala, striatum, and lateral prefrontal cortex. Fathers exhibited decreases in GM volume in the orbitofrontal cortex, posterior cingulate cortex, and insula. These changes may support the development of close attachment relationships with their offspring during early infancy. The findings provide evidence for neural plasticity in fathers’ brains that accompanies interaction experience between fathers and their infants. How much and what type of social interactional experience between fathers and infants is related to these brain changes remains unexplored. Moreover, hormonal changes in vasopressin may be related to these brain changes (Kim et al., 2014), a reminder that neurological and hormonal influences may act together in shaping paternal responding.
In sum, our brains as well as our hormones prepare not just mothers but also fathers for the challenges of caregiving. 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. Finally, it is critical to underscore that these hormonal possibly neurological changes are not necessary for the elicitation of fathering behaviors in either animals or humans (Li and Fleming, 2019). In humans, 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 (Grotevant and McDermott, 2014; Pinderhughes and Brodinsky, 2019). Next, we turn to a discussion of the social determinants of father involvement.

**Individual Factors**

Men’s own psychological and family background, attitudes toward the fathering role, motivation to become involved, and childcare and childrearing knowledge and skills all play a role in determining men’s level of involvement with their children.

**Men’s Relationships With Their Family of Origin**

The quality of relationship that fathers develop with their own mothers and fathers has been viewed as a possible determinant of fathers’ involvement with their own children. However, evidence in support of this proposition is not clear-cut. Two views have guided this inquiry. First, from social learning theory (Bandura, 1989) comes a modeling hypothesis that suggests that men model themselves after their fathers, and this modeling process will be enhanced if their fathers were nurturant and accessible. Second, a compensatory or reworking hypothesis argues that fathers tend to compensate or make up for deficiencies in their childhood relationships with their own fathers by becoming better and more involved when they themselves assume this role (Roy and Smith, 2013). There is support for both views. In support of the modeling hypothesis, a number of studies suggest that positive relationships with fathers in childhood are related to higher levels of later father involvement (Cowan and Cowan, 1992; Sagi, 1982). Hofferth (1999) found that men whose fathers were active participants in rearing them are more involved with their own offspring, take more responsibility, are warmer, and monitor them more closely than men reared by less involved fathers. Subsequent results from the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth showed that men were more involved with their children when their own fathers were more involved when they were children (Hofferth, Pleck, and Vesely, 2012). Importantly, the link between more involved fathering as a child and involved fathering as a parent was not better explained by mothering or adolescent adjustment. Moreover, fathers parent more like their own fathers than their mothers (Losh–Hesselbart, 1997). There is also intergenerational transmission of harshness. Scaramella and Conger (2003) found that children who experienced hostile parenting were more likely to use similar tactics when they became parents.

Support for the second hypothesis is also evident. Men may reject their own experiences with their fathers and opt for alternative compensatory parenting practices. Baruch and Barnett (1986) found that men who viewed their own relationships with their fathers as negative tended to be more involved with their 5- and 9-year-old children. Similarly, studies of men reared in father absent homes suggest that many men became more involved when they themselves became fathers (Roy, 2006). As Sagi (1982, p. 214) argued, these two hypotheses “are not mutually exclusive since either process is possible depending on the circumstances.” Prior history often combines with current circumstances as well as child temperament in determining cross-generational father involvement. Low-income men who had poor childhood relationships with their fathers and poor current circumstances (poor coparent relationship, limited education) were low on involvement with their children, whereas men with negative histories with their fathers but a positive current situation were
highly involved with their children (McFadden, Tamis-Lemonda, Howard, Shannon, and Cabrera, 2009). Moreover, cross-generational continuity of parental hostility is more likely if children were temperamentally negative (high in negative reactivity), but less continuity was found when children were temperamentally more positive (Scaramella and Conger, 2003). Another factor that can disrupt the intergenerational transmission of hostility is the presence of a warm and supportive coparent (Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, and Cabrera, 2006). It is oversimplified to assume that family of origin is the only major influence on fathering, and a broader set of cultural factors needs to be recognized. Roy, Buckmiller, and McDowell (2008) found that only about half of the men reported that their own fathers taught them how to be a father. In a qualitative study, Daly (1993) interviewed fathers of young children about the sources of their role models for their own fatherhood identity. Some fathers emulate their own fathers, others compensate, and still others report little influence of their own fathers as mentors or models. However, most fathers interviewed by Daly either did not view their fathers as a model or wanted to do better as fathers than their own fathers. Many fathers in Daly’s study opted for a piecemeal approach to defining fathering. Instead of emulating one person, many men tried to piece together an image of fathering from many different sources including extended family members, cultural figures, and friends. This view is echoed by Roy and Smith (2013), who suggested that “young men’s lessons about how to care emerge through the enactment of relationships as sons to their parents, as siblings or as junior family members with aunts and uncles, cousins or grandparents” (p. 324).

Men thus draw on models from their own generation of contemporary fathers as well as fathers from earlier eras and generations. As men become fathers, they struggle to reconcile past and present images and models of fathering behavior with the changed historical circumstances that face modern fathers. Even if they chose to emulate their own fathers, the rapid changes in our society make it difficult for current fathers to apply these lessons from the past in any simple way. It is clear that the process of intergenerational transmission of parenting is an active one in which the father himself plays a central role in sorting, retaining, and discarding images and guidelines from a variety of sources. There is no simple or single route to developing a father identity; there are many different paths just as there are many different kinds of fathers.

**Socialization of Boys Into the Fathering Role**

It is not only the specific nature of the relationship a child develops with his parents but the ways in which girls and boys are differentially prepared for parenthood during childhood that determine the ways in which girls and boys enact their parenting roles in adulthood. It is well known that girls and boys are treated differently by parents during socialization but most of this work focuses on occupational aspirations, activity, and object preferences and modes of relating to others. However, the differential treatment of girls and boys may help shape a boy’s expectation about his future fathering role. A variety of strands of evidence supports this view. First, children’s household chores are based on gender, with girls engaging in more household duties such as cleaning, ironing, cooking, and childcare, whereas boys take out the garbage and mow the lawn (Goodnow and Lawrence, 2001; McHale, Crouter, and Whiteman, 2003). Cross-national studies of over 30 countries confirm these findings, with girls engaging in more household work and boys engaging in non-household labor such as farm- or business-related activities (Putnick and Bornstein, 2016). Of particular importance are the differential opportunities afforded to girls and boys to learn childcare skills. Cross-cultural evidence (Whiting, Edwards, Ember, and Erchak, 1988), as well as evidence from our own culture, suggests that boys are given dolls less often than girls and are discouraged from playing with dolls (Rheingold and Cook, 1975; Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit, and Cossotte, 1990). In middle childhood, boys are less likely to be babysitters (Goodnow, 1999) and are less likely to be caregivers for their siblings (East, 2010). This lack of opportunities for socialization into parenthood makes boys
less prepared for fatherhood than girls are for motherhood and may lead to lower levels of parental self-efficacy for men than women (Rose and Halverson, 1996). However, some qualitative evidence suggests that in single-mother families or in economically disadvantaged households, boys as well as girls are more likely to be recruited into household work, including sibling caregiving duties, in part due to the more limited parental resources in these households (Roy and Smith, 2013). When boys are obligated to care for younger siblings, some suggest that “these first steps toward learning to parent may lead to a new sense of self confidence, empathy or leadership” (Roy and Smith, 2013, p. 325). Although these qualitative studies suggest that these childhood experiences may enhance later father involvement, further quantitative work is needed to firmly establish these links.

Men’s Attitudes, Motivation, and Skills

Paternal attitudes, motivation, and skills are important determinants of father involvement (Lamb and Lewis, 2010). In early work on attitudes and father involvement, the focus was on the relation between sex role attitudes and paternal involvement. However, weak or no links between sex role attitudes and father involvement have led to a more specific focus on men’s attitudes concerning the paternal role (Parke, 2002). When the focus is more specifically oriented toward beliefs about parental roles, clearer links between beliefs and behavior are evident (Bornstein, Putnick, and Suwalsky, 2017). This work has been guided, in part, by identity theory which recognizes that men play a variety of roles as spouse, parent, and worker and that the relative importance men assign to these roles in their formation of a self-identity is a useful predictor of father involvement (Rane and McBride, 2000).

Paternal attitudes about parenting relate to measures of father involvement with their 3-month-old infants (Beitel and Parke, 1998). Specifically, fathers’ belief in the biological basis of sex differences, their perception of their caregiving skills, and the extent to which they valued the father’s role were predictors of father’s involvement. Finally, a variety of types of involvement relates to paternal attitudes including play, caregiving, and indirect care (e.g., packs diaper bag, changes crib linen).

Other studies have confirmed that paternal attitudes are important beyond infancy. Russell (1983) found that Australian men who do not accept the notion of maternal instinct participate in childcare more with their 3- to 6-year-old children. Consistent with this work, McBride and Rane (1997) found that fathers’ attitudes about the importance of father for preschool age children’s development were linked to several indices of father involvement (responsibility, interaction, and accessibility), and their perceived investment in the worker role was inversely related to their workday accessibility and responsibility. Rane and McBride (2000) found that fathers who considered the nurturing role highly central to their sense of self engaged in more interaction and assumed more responsibility behaviors with their children than fathers low on nurturing role centrality. Bonney, Kelley, and Levant (1999) found that fathers with more liberal gender ideology and who view fathers as critical for child development and as capable of performing childcare as mothers have higher levels of involvement in childcare than more traditional fathers. Similarly, fathers who have more traditional childrearing attitudes (high in control and emotionally distant) have lower quality interactions with their children than less traditional fathers (Holmes and Huston, 2010). Finally, Hofferth, Pleck, Goldscheider, Curtin, and Hrapczynski (2013) suggested that paternal attitudes (e.g., “fathers should be as involved as mothers,” “fathers and mothers are equally good at meeting their children’s needs”) are undergoing change but also predict father involvement across time. Compared with 1997, in 2003, fathers’ attitudes concerning their paternal role became more positive. And positive attitudes were linked with several indices of father involvement (i.e., engagement, warmth, control, discussion of rules) across this period.

In spite of the fact that men are competent caregivers, there are wide individual differences among men in either their perceived or actual level of skill in caregiving. In turn, these variations in skill may be related to level of father involvement.
Paternal Mental Health

A variety of studies supports the prediction that personal resources—including mental health—alter parenting behaviors (Cummings, Merrilees, and Ward George, 2010). Although many studies have found that maternal psychopathology, such as depression, will alter parenting behavior, evidence suggests that paternal depression is an important determinant of fathering as well (Cummings, Keller, and Davies, 2005). Fathers who report depression at 8 weeks postpartum have children with more conduct problems 3 years later (Ramchandani, Stein, Evans, and O’Connor, 2005). Others find that paternal depression is linked with poorer peer relationships and more behavior problems (Dave et al., 2005). Labeled the “paternal mental health hypothesis” (Cummings et al., 2010), this perspective focuses on the role of parental psychological functioning in accounting for the effects of marital conflict either as a risk or protective factor. While recognizing that the mental health of both parents is important, a strong version of this position suggests that father mental health may be particularly influential in altering children’s adjustment. Papp, Cummings, and Schemerhorn (2004) found that paternal (as well as maternal) depression was linked with poor child adjustment indirectly through a poor marital relationship. Mothers’ depression was directly related to child problems, which suggests that paternal and maternal depression may be linked to child outcomes through different pathways. Other work suggests that the effects of paternal and maternal depression may affect different child outcomes and vary by gender of child (Cummings et al., 2005; Shelton and Harold, 2008).

As we explore ahead, fathers’ parenting may be more vulnerable to problematic marital relationships than mothers’ parenting. Some evidence suggests that paternal depression may have a greater impact on their parenting and, in turn, their children’s adjustment than maternal depression (Low and Stocker, 2005), a finding that would bolster the paternal mental health hypothesis. Cummings, El-Sheikh, Kouros, and Keller (2007) found that children’s sympathetic nervous system reactivity in response to marital conflict was linked to child adjustment more strongly for fathers’ than mothers’ dysphoria, a result that supports the paternal mental health argument. Further support for this hypothesis comes from evidence that suggests that problem drinking may negatively impact not only the marital relationship but also parenting and, in turn, children’s adjustment; again, paternal drinking is more consequential for child outcomes than maternal alcohol consumption (Keller, Cummings, Davies, and Petersen, 2009).

Characteristics of the Child

In recognition that fathers and children mutually influence each other, it is important to note that a variety of child characteristics merits consideration as well. Several individual child features have been identified, including child gender, temperament, and children’s social skill and language competence. Support for gender of child has been found in infancy, with fathers devoting more time to boys than girls (Lamb and Lewis, 2010) but less support for a clear gender effect beyond infancy (Pleck and Masicardi, 2004). Child sociability positively predicted a father’s time with his child, his accessibility to his child, and his responsibility for the child’s care (McBride, Schoppe, and Rane, 2002) and to the quality of father–child interaction (Holmes and Huston, 2010). Moreover, children with high receptive and expressive language skills engage in more positive father–child interactions than children with low skills (Holmes and Huston, 2010). Children’s health appears to be important as well. Greater neurobiological risk at birth and a longer hospitalization at birth are associated with more distress at 6 months of age for fathers but not mothers (Gueron-Sela, Atzaba-Poria, Meiri, and Marks, 2015). Further, although diagnoses of a developmental delay in children are resolved similarly by mothers and fathers, mothers tend to employ methods of emotion coping, and fathers favor more cognitive coping strategies (Barak-Levy and Atzaba-Poria, 2013). When children experience sleep difficulties, fathers (more so than mothers) report their children as more difficult, but when fathers...
of children with sleep difficulties become more engaged, it serves to protect mothers from stress (Millikovsky-Ayalon, Atzaba-Poria, and Meiri, 2015). Finally, child temperament has been linked to father–child interaction quality. When children have difficult temperaments, fathers as well as mothers are more likely to use coercive parenting strategies (Rothbart, 2011) or be less involved with their children (Grych and Clark, 1999). And temperament may affect the quality of coparenting as well (Wong, Mangelsdorf, Brown, Neff, and Schoppe-Sullivan, 2009). In sum, both father and child characteristics play roles in determining the father–child relationship.

**Family Factors**

Individual factors are not the only determinants of father involvement. Family-level variables including maternal attitudes concerning father involvement and the marital relationship are both family level factors that require examination.

**Maternal Attitudes: Mother as Gatekeeper**

Consistent with a family systems view, maternal attitudes need to be considered as a determinant of paternal participation in childcare (Schoppe-Sullivan and Altenburger, 2019). In spite of advances in women’s participation in the workplace, many women still feel ambivalent about father involvement in domestic issues (Doucet, 2006). Due, in part, to the “cult of maternalism” (Duffy, 1988), which stresses the notion that mothers are indispensable, natural, and necessary, many women are reluctant to actively and wholeheartedly involve fathers in the daily routines of caregiving. As Allen and Hawkins (1999) suggest, their ambivalence “may be because increased paternal involvement intrudes on a previously held monopoly over the attentive and intuitive responsibilities of family work which if altered may compromise female power and privilege in the home” (p. 202). However, contradictory attitudes about father involvement may reflect a more deeply held belief that predates recent increases in father involvement. As a father of five in 1927 lamented, “There often seems to be a conspiracy on the part of the female of the species to exclude father from any active part in the care of the baby” (What Should a Child Demand of His Father, *Parents’ Magazine*, 1927; cited by Milkie and Denny, 2014). These maternal attitudes may lead to behaviors which, in turn, limit father involvement and constitute a form of gatekeeping. A major advance in the conceptualization of gatekeeping was made by Allen and Hawkins (1999, p. 200), who defined the term as follows:

Maternal gatekeeping is a collection of beliefs and behaviors that ultimately inhibit a collaboration effort between men and women in families by limiting men’s opportunities for learning and growing through caring for home and children.

These investigators identified three conceptual dimensions: Mothers’ reluctance to relinquish responsibility over family matters by setting rigid standards, external validation of a mothering identity, and differentiated conceptions of family roles. In a study of dual-earner families, Allen and Hawkins (1999) found that 21% of the mothers were classified as gatekeepers who, in turn, did more hours of family work per week and had less equal divisions of labor than women classified as collaborators. Unfortunately, the scales used to measure gatekeeping included both housework and childcare, although the authors noted that “separating housework and child care into unique measures produced similar results” (1999, p. 210). Nor were the number and ages of the children specified in analyses. Other studies of gatekeeping have focused specifically on father involvement in childcare.

Beitel and Parke (1998) examined the relation between maternal attitudes and father involvement with 3- to 5-month-old infants. A variety of maternal attitudes concerning father involvement including judgments about their husband’s motivation and interest in childcare activities, maternal
perception of his childcare skills, and the value that she places on his involvement linked with father involvement. Mothers’ belief in innate sex differences in female and male ability to nurture infants and the extent to which mothers viewed themselves as critical of the quality of their husbands’ caregiving were negatively related to father involvement. As these results suggest, maternal attitudes play a significant role in understanding father involvement, but the type of involvement needs to be considered, because maternal attitudes may vary across different types of involvement (e.g., play, role responsibility, indirect care).

But gatekeeping is not restricted to infancy. Fagan and Barnett (2003) found a direct link between maternal gatekeeping and father involvement in a sample of fathers of children between 3 and 17 years of age. Similarly, McBride and Rane (1997) found that maternal perceptions of their partners’ investment in the parental as well as the spousal role were related to father involvement, whereas their perceptions of their husbands’ investment in the worker role was negatively related to fathers’ involvement. In fact, mothers’ perceptions were the best predictors of total father involvement.

Other evidence suggests that fathers’ participation may be more self-determined than these earlier studies suggest. Bonney, Kelley, and Levant (1999) found that mothers’ attitudes about the degree to which fathers should be involved in childcare were unrelated to fathers’ participation in childcare. Instead, they found that fathers’ participation appears to influence mother’s beliefs about the father’s role. Or perhaps, as Bonney et al. (1999) argue, a transactional perspective best characterizes this relation between maternal attitudes and father involvement in which fathers who are more involved have female partners who develop more positive attitudes about their involvement which, in turn, increases fathers’ level of participation. Longitudinal studies are needed to more definitively determine the direction of causality in this domain.

Finally, gatekeeping effects are not confined to intact families as studies of postdivorce efforts on the part of the custodial parent demonstrate. Custodial parents, usually the mother, will often attempt to restrict access to the noncustodial father after divorce, especially if there is a high level of couple conflict and distrust (Fabricius et al., 2010; see Ganong et al., 2019). Moreover, in nonresidential father families, mothers or, in some cases, maternal grandparents control paternal access to the child and may facilitate or restrict his access (Edin and Nelson, 2013; Fagan and Barnett, 2003). Similarly, visitation opportunities between incarcerated fathers and their children are regulated by their nonincarcerated partner (Poehlmann et al., 2010), just as in the case on transnational fathers where custodial mothers or other relatives may control the duration and frequency of phone contact with their children (Dreby, 2010).

Two qualifications to our discussion of gatekeeping are needed. First, the term is gender neutral and fathers as well as mothers engage in gatekeeping activities in other domains of family life (Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Pruett, Williams, Insabella, and Little, 2003; Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, and Cannon, 2008; Trinder, 2008), and theoretical work suggests that there are likely to be bidirectional influences across partners with respect to gatekeeping attitudes and behaviors (Adamsons, 2010). Second, gates can open as well as close, and the term needs to be broadened to recognize that parents—mother and fathers—can facilitate as well as inhibit the type and level of domestic involvement of each other. Work on “parental gatekeeping” needs to include gateopening as well as gateclosing to underscore the dual nature of the inhibitory and facilitatory processes that are part of the coparenting enterprise.

Couple Relationships and Father-Child Relationships

Models that limit examination of the effects of interaction patterns to only father-child and mother-child dyads and the direct effects of one individual on another are inadequate for understanding the impact of social interaction patterns in families (Belsky, 1984; Cummings et al., 2010; Parke, 2013). From a family systems viewpoint, the couple relationship needs to be considered as well. The bulk of
attention has been given to intact families, as noted earlier, but the quality of the couple relationship in non-intact families suggests that the quality of the couple relationship is a major determinant of the degree of father involvement.

Studies of nonresident unmarried fathers suggest that when the relationship between the parental partners is harmonious (romantic or not) and their quality of coparenting is satisfactory, father involvement is higher (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010; Lerman and Sorensen, 2000), but if either parent has moved on to a new partner, father participation may decrease or at least be more selective in terms of which child is the recipient of father involvement (Edin and Nelson, 2013; Edin, Tach, and Mincy, 2009).

Among intact families, the primary focus has been on the effects of the quality of the couple relationship (conflictful versus cooperative/constructive) on their children. Two perspectives concerning the link between couple conflict and children’s adaptation can be distinguished. According to a direct effects model, direct exposure to couple conflict influences children’s behavior; the indirect model suggests that the impact of couple conflict on children is indirectly mediated by changes in the parent-child relationship (Crockenberg and Langrock, 2001; Cummings and Davies, 2010; Grych and Fincham, 1993). Several decades of investigation suggest that dimensions of marital functioning are related to aspects of children’s long-term overall adjustment and immediate coping responses in the face of interparental conflict (Cummings and Davies, 2010). Couple discord and conflict are linked to a variety of child outcomes, including antisocial behavior, internalizing and externalizing behavior problems, and changes in cognition, emotions, and physiology in response to exposure to marital conflict (Cummings et al., 2010). Although less empirical work has been directed specifically toward examination of the “carryover” of exposure to couple conflict to the quality of children’s relationships with significant others, such as peers and siblings, exposure to couple discord is associated with poor social competence and problematic peer relationships (Katz and Gottman, 1991; Kerig, 1996). Importantly, among divorcing families when conflict tends to be high, fathering can compensate for the negative risk associated with exposure to conflict (Sandler, Miles, Cookston, and Braver, 2008), and intervention with fathers after divorce appears to reduce interparental conflict while increasing perceived coparenting by mothers (Cookston, Braver, Griffin, deLusé, and Miles, 2007).

Couple discord can have an indirect influence on children’s adjustment through changes in the quality of parenting (Cummings and Davies, 2010; Fauber and Long, 1991). Factors that include affective changes in the quality of the parent-child relationship, lack of emotional availability, and adoption of less optimal parenting styles each has been implicated as a potential mechanism through which marital discord disrupts parenting processes. Marital conflict is linked with poor parenting, which, in turn, is related to poor social adjustment on the children. Other work has focused on the specific processes by which the marital relationship itself directly influences children’s immediate functioning and long-term adjustment. Several aspects of parental conflict appear to be relatively consistently associated with poor outcomes for children. More frequent interparental conflict and more intense or violent forms of conflict have been found to be particularly disturbing to children and likely to be associated with externalizing and internalizing difficulties (Cummings and Davies, 2010) and poor peer relationships (Parke et al., 2001). Conflict that was child-related in content was more likely than conflict involving other content to be associated with behavior problems in children (Cummings and Davies, 2010; Grych and Fincham, 1993). Finally, when parents resolve their conflict, the negative effects on children are reduced.

Resolution of conflict reduces children’s negative reactions to exposure to inter-adult anger and conflict. Exposure to unresolved conflict is associated with negative affect and poor coping responses in children (Cummings and Davies, 2010). In addition, the manner in which conflict is resolved may also influence children’s adjustment. Katz and Gottman (1993) found that couples who exhibited a hostile style of resolving conflict had children who tended to be described by teachers as exhibiting
antisocial characteristics. When husbands were angry and emotionally distant while resolving marital conflict, children were described by teachers as anxious and socially withdrawn.

Conflict is inevitable in most parental relationships and is not detrimental to family relationships and children’s functioning under all circumstances. In particular, disagreements that are extremely intense and involve threat to the child are likely to be more disturbing to the child. In contrast, when conflict is expressed constructively, is moderate in degree, is expressed in the context of a warm and supportive family environment, and shows evidence of resolution, children may learn valuable lessons regarding how to negotiate conflict and resolve disagreements (Cummings and Davies, 2010). However, although the evidence suggests that couple conflict may alter the parenting of both mothers and fathers, evidence suggests that fathers are more likely to be affected by marital conflict than their female partners. Several studies in the United States (Cummings and Davies, 2010), Great Britain (Pike, Caldwell, and Dunn, 2005), and other cultures (e.g., Japan; Durrett, Otaki, and Richards, 1984) support the conclusion that the quality of the mother-father relationship is related to the quality of the father- and mother-child relationships, which, in turn, may alter the child’s adjustment. Several major theoretical and empirical advances in this domain over the past several decades are noteworthy. First, the vulnerability of the father to disruptions in quality of the couple relationship has continued to receive attention. Often termed the father “vulnerability hypothesis” (Cummings et al., 2010), this notion suggests that the father-child relationship is altered more than the mother-child relationship by the quality of the couple relationship. This position continues to receive support but several moderating process that govern its operation have been identified. Second, possible mediators between the impact of couple quality on fathering and child outcomes have been discovered. Third, longitudinal evidence in support of this hypothesis has begun to accumulate. Fourth, the positive effects of a high-quality couple relationship on fathering (and mothering) have received more scrutiny as a corrective to the usual focus of the effects of marital conflict.

The Father Vulnerability Hypothesis

This notion has a long history of support over the last 30 years. A meta-analysis of the relations between interparental conflict and parenting provided strong evidence of this position including stronger links between a variety of aspects of fathering behaviors such as parental control, acceptance, harsh discipline, and overall parenting quality than for mothering behaviors (Krishnakumar and Buehler, 2000). However, this hypothesis needs to be qualified in several ways (Cummings et al., 2010). First, contextual factors need consideration because fathers’ parenting is linked with poor marital quality in both dyadic and triadic settings, but mothers exhibit the negative effects of marital conflict on parenting only in triadic contexts (Clements, Lim, and Chaplin, 2002). Perhaps the presence of her conflictful partner in the triadic interactional context highlight their mutual estrangement leading to a deterioration of mothering, whereas fathers may have more deeply internalized the negativity associated with the marital conflict. Second, the child’s gender matters as well. Some studies have found that fathering boys (Kitzmann, 2000) is more vulnerable to marital quality and conflict than mothering of boys, but others found that fathering girls is more negatively affected than fathering boys (Cowan and Cowan, 1992). Third, some child outcomes may be more strongly altered by marital conflict than others. For example, fathers’ parenting declines in response to marital quality were linked with increases in boys’ internalizing, whereas maternal parenting in high conflict marital contexts is associated with higher externalizing problems among boys (Kaczynski et al., 2006). There is overall support for the father vulnerability hypothesis, but a variety of factors may qualify its operation and probably more will be discovered.

Even stronger support for this hypothesis comes from longitudinal studies. For example, across time, interparental hostility and withdrawal are both linked to parental emotional unavailability and, in turn, to children’s adjustment (Sturge-Apple, Davies, and Cummings, 2006). Fathers’ emotional
unavailability is more consistently related to a range of child outcomes (internalizing, externalizing, and school-related problems), whereas maternal unavailability is related only to scholastic problems. Other longitudinal evidence supports this hypothesis and suggests greater complexity across time. A reverse pathway from parent-child to marital relationships was found for fathers, but not mothers, which suggests that the father-child relationship may be more closely tied to broader family relationships than the mother-child relationship (Schermerhorn, Cummings, and Davies, 2008). This bidirectionality of influence between parenting and other aspects of family dynamics is not surprising and is consistent with a general family systems view of fathering.

A number of factors aid in explaining the father vulnerability hypothesis. First, fathers’ level of participation is, in part, determined by the extent to which the mother permits participation (Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Beitel and Parke, 1998). Second, because the paternal role is less well defined than the maternal role, spousal support may help crystallize the boundaries of appropriate role behavior (Lamb and Lewis, 2010; Parke, 2013). Third, men have fewer opportunities to acquire and practice caregiving skills during socialization and, therefore, may benefit more than mothers from informational support (Parke and Brott, 1999).

Although the preponderance of evidence has focused on the negative effects of couple distress on parent-child relationships and child adjustment, it is important to recognize that positive couple relationships can have a protective effect on parenting and, in turn, child outcomes. In both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, support for this link has been found. Bonney et al. (1999), in a cross-sectional study of couples with children ages 1–4, found that for fathers, higher marital satisfaction was associated with more participation in common childcare activities. Lee and Doherty (2007) followed couples from the second trimester of pregnancy to 6 and 12 months postpartum. Fathers’ marital satisfaction and involvement were positively related, and mothers’ employment status and fathers’ attitudes toward father involvement were important moderators. Nor are the links evident in only European American families. A study focused on the potential benefits of positive marital quality for children in working-class, first-generation Mexican American families (Leidy, Parke, Clavis, Coltrane, and Duffy, 2009) examined the links between positive marital quality and child internalizing and externalizing behaviors 1 year later when the child was in sixth grade. Positive marital quality was negatively correlated with child internalizing behaviors. Not all studies found couple satisfaction negatively related to paternal involvement (Nangle, Kelley, Fals-Stewart, and Levant, 2003), so the issue remains open. However, this body of work serves as an important corrective to the sole focus on the negative aspects of couple relationships on fathering.

Changing Societal Conditions as Determinants of Father-Child Relationships

A number of society-wide changes in the United States have produced a variety of shifts in the nature of early family relationships. Fertility rates and family size have decreased, the percentage of women in the workforce has increased, the timing of onset of parenthood has shifted, divorce rates have risen, and the number of single-parent families has increased (for reviews, see Goldberg, 2014; Golombok, 2015; Parke, 2013). In this section, the effects of two of these changes—timing of parenthood and recent shifts in family employment patterns—are explored to illustrate the impact of social change on father–child and family relationships. Exploration of these shifts underscores an additional theme, namely, the importance of considering the historical period or era in which social change occurs.

Timing of Parenthood and the Father’s Role

A number of factors need to be considered to understand the impact on parenting of childbearing at different ages. First, the life course context, which is broadly defined as the point at which the
individual has arrived in his or her social, educational, and occupational timetable, is an important determinant. Second, the historical context, namely, the societal and economic conditions that prevail at the time of the onset of parenting, interacts with the first factor in determining the effects of variations in timing. Consider early and delayed childbirth in light of these issues. Patterns of the timing of the onset of parenting are changing for both mothers and fathers. In comparison to 1986–1987, when women were on average 22.7 years old and fathers were 25.3 years when they became parents, in 2013, both women and men were about 2 years older (24.6 and 27.8, respectively) when they made this transition (Eickmeyer, 2016). However, there is considerable variability, and the age of entry into this role varies with marital status, ethnicity, and education (Eickmeyer, 2016). Married fathers were older (29.4 years) than cohabitating fathers (26.7 years), who, in turn, were older than single men (21.5 years). European American men became fathers at later ages (28.3 years) than either African American men (26.5 years) or either native born (27.5) or foreign born (26.2) Latin American men. As educational attainment increases, men become fathers at later ages. Men who completed at least an undergraduate college degree were the oldest (30.9), and those without a high school diploma were the youngest (23.9) to become fathers. Those men who completed high school or attained a GED and those with some college entered fatherhood around 27 years of age. At the same time, it is important to recognize that, as the overall shift toward later childbearing has occurred, there has been a decline in births to teenage mothers over the last several decades. There were approximately 60 births per 1,000 to teen women in 1991, but by 2014, this number dropped to 24.3 per 1,000, which is a decline of about one third. In spite of the fact that teenage parenthood is still higher in the United States than in many Western countries, this is a decline in part due to delays in initiation of sexual activity and increased use of birth control (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). Moreover, most fathers or young mothers are, in fact, older, usually in their 20s or later rather than teenagers themselves. The focus of attention has shifted from teen or adolescent parenthood to early parenthood more broadly conceived as a challenge of young or emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2011). Movement through the educational system and into a stable position in the workforce is a longer, slower, and more challenging process than in prior eras. “Transitions of today’s young adults are both delayed and elongated: delayed because young adults take more time to complete their education and enter the job market and elongated because each subsequent transition (marriage and family formation) takes longer to complete. Typical transitions to adulthood can stretch from the late teens to early thirties” (Clarke, 2009, p. 14, cited by Leadbeater, 2014). Therefore the issue of early versus late-timed onset of fathering needs to be reframed as an issue of financial and educational readiness for the fathering role and more generally how poverty alters father roles. Educational level is positively linked with later onset of fathering (and mothering), which, in turn, alters job and financial prospects. In this section, we examine recent work on men who become fathers at a time before they are fully prepared for this role, and in a later section, we explore the effects of delayed entry into fatherhood.

The Challenges of Entry Into Fatherhood Before Preparation

Men who become fathers in young adulthood are often unprepared financially and emotionally to undertake the responsibilities of parenthood (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010). As Lerman (1993, p. 47) noted, “Young unwed fathers are generally less well educated, had lower academic abilities, started sex at earlier ages and engaged in more crime than did other young men.” Low family income and having lived in a welfare household increase the likelihood of entry into young unwed fatherhood. This profile is especially evident for European American unwed fathers. In spite of the fact that African American males are four times as likely to be an unwed father as European American males, African American unwed fatherhood is less likely to be linked with adverse circumstances but is a more mainstream issue. Several factors reduce the likelihood of becoming a father earlier.
than optimal including church attendance, military service, and higher reading scores. In view of the low rates of marriage and high rates of separation and divorce for adolescents, early and less prepared fathers, in contrast to “on-schedule” fathers, have less contact with their offspring. However, contact is not absent; in fact, studies of unmarried adolescent fathers indicate a surprising amount of paternal involvement for extended periods following the birth. Data (Lerman, 1993) based on a national representative sample of over 600 young unwed fathers indicated that three-fourths of young fathers who lived away from their children at birth never lived in the same household with them. However, many unwed fathers remain in close contact with their children. According to Lerman’s (1993) analysis of the national survey data, nearly half visited their youngest child at least once a week and nearly a quarter almost daily. Only 13% never visited, and 7% visited only yearly. There is considerable instability in levels of father involvement with their children across time. In a sample of low-income African American, unwed fathers, nearly 40% either increased or decreased their level of involvement between the child’s birth and 3 years (Coley and Chase-Lansdale, 1999).

These declines in father participation continue across childhood and adolescence. Furstenberg and Harris (1993) reported the pattern of contact between adolescent fathers and their offspring from birth through late adolescence. Under half of the children lived at least some time with their biological father at some time during their first 18 years, but only 9% lived with their father during the entire period. During the preschool period, nearly half of the children were either living with their father or saw him on a weekly basis. By late adolescence, 14% were living with him, and only 15% were seeing him as often as once a week; 46% had no contact, but 25% saw him occasionally in the preceding year.

In contrast to early-timed childbearing, when childbearing is delayed, considerable progress in occupational and educational spheres has potentially already taken place. Education is generally completed and career development is well underway for both males and females. Delayed fathers have described themselves to be in more stable work situations than early-timing fathers, to be more experienced workers, and have their jobs and careers more firmly established than early-timing peers (Daniels and Weingarten, 1982). The financial strains associated with early career status may be more likely to create conflict between the work and family demands of early/normal-timing fathers than delayed-timing fathers. Neville and Parke (1997) found some support for this proposition, but qualified by the sex of the child. Specifically, younger fathers of girls and older fathers of boys reported more interference by work in family life than older fathers of girls and younger fathers of boys.

What are the effects of late-timed parenthood for the father-child relationship? Retrospective accounts by adults who were the firstborn children of older parents report having felt especially appreciated by their parents (Yarrow, 1991). Daniels and Weingarten (1982) found late-timed fathers are three times more likely to be involved in the daily care of a preschool child. Cooney, Pedersen, Indelicato, and Palkovitz (1993) found that late-timed fathers were more likely to be classified as being highly involved and experiencing positive affect associated with the paternal role than “on-time” fathers. Finally, men who delayed parenthood until their late 20s contributed more to indirect aspects of childcare, such as cooking, feeding, cleaning, and doing laundry than men who assumed parenthood earlier (Coltrane and Ishii-Kuntz, 1991).

There are qualitative differences in styles of interaction for on-time versus late-timed fathers. In a self-report study, MacDonald and Parke (1986) found that age of parent is negatively related to the frequency of physical play, especially physical activities (i.e., bounce, tickle, chase, and piggyback), that require more physical energy on the part of the play partner. Moreover, Neville and Parke (1997) found older parents likely to engage in more cognitively advanced activities with children and to report holding their children more than younger fathers. These and other studies (Zaslow, Pedersen, Suwalsky, Rabinovich, and Cain, 1985) suggest that older fathers may be less tied to stereotypic paternal behavior, adopting styles more similar to those that have been considered traditionally maternal.
Observational studies of father-child interaction confirm these early self-report investigations. Volling and Belsky (1991), who studied fathers and their 3- and 9-month-olds, found that older fathers were more responsive, stimulating, and affectionate. Neville and Parke (1997) found that early fathers relied on physical arousal to engage their preschoolers, whereas delayed fathers relied on more cognitive mechanisms to remain engaged. Waiting too long to become a parent has a downside not only for women but also for men. As men age, they produce lower quality sperm that increases the risk of birth defects (Wyrobek et al., 2006). Men as well as women have ticking biological clocks.

Timing effects are important not just for fathers, but also for grandfathers as well. In their study of grandfathers interacting with their 7-month-old grandchildren, Tinsley and Parke (1987) divided grandfathers into three categories: Younger (36–49 years), middle (50–56), and older (57–68). Grandfathers in the middle age group were rated significantly higher on competence (e.g., confident, accepting), affect (e.g., warm, attentive), and play style (e.g., playful, responsive, stimulatory). From a life-span developmental perspective, the middle group of grandfathers could be viewed as being optimally ready for grandparenthood, both physically and psychologically (Tinsley and Parke, 1984) because they were less likely to be chronically tired or to have been ill or still be heavily involved in their work activities. Moreover, the age of the middle group of grandfathers fits the normative or age-appropriate time at which grandparenthood is most often achieved.

Women’s and Men’s Employment Patterns and Their Parental Roles in the Family

Relations between employment patterns of both women and men and their family roles are increasingly being recognized (Coltrane and Adams, 2008). In this section, a variety of issues concerning the links between the worlds of work and family is considered to illustrate the impact of shifts in work patterns on both men’s and women’s family roles. The impact of changes in the rate of maternal employment on both quantitative and qualitative aspects of father participation is examined as well as the influence of variations in family work schedules.

Since the mid-1960s, there has been a dramatic shift in the participation rate of women in the labor force. Between 1960 and 2016, the employment rate for mothers of children under age 6 increased dramatically from about 20% to 65% and among mothers of children between 6 and 17, it is even higher (75%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). In exploring these work trends, two issues are relevant. First, does father involvement shift with increases in maternal employment? Second, how does the quality of work alter maternal and paternal parenting behavior?

Maternal employment is a robust predictor of paternal involvement which, as noted earlier, has increased considerably over the last half century (Pleck, 2010). However, we are clearly not at 50/50 yet. Working women decrease their time devoted to housework, but they still spend time on childcare, especially in the case of children under 6 (Bianchi, 2009). Women who do not work outside the home continue to do a significantly larger share of childcare than their husbands (Coltrane and Adams, 2008).

In addition to documenting the quantitative shifts in father behavior as a consequence of maternal employment, it is also necessary to examine the impact of this shift on the quality of the father-child relationship. Pedersen, Anderson, and Cain (1980) assessed the impact of dual wage-earner families on mother and father interaction patterns with their 5-month-old infants. Fathers in single wage-earner families tended to play with their infants more than mothers did, but in the dual wage-earner families, the mothers’ rate of social play was higher than the fathers’ rate of play. Perhaps mothers used increased play as a way of reestablishing contact with the infant after being away from home for the day: “It is possible that the working mother’s special need to interact with the infant inhibited or crowded out the father in his specialty” (Pedersen et al., 1980, p. 10). However, as studies of reversed role families suggest, the physical style of fathers play remains evident (Field, 1978). These
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data suggest that both mothers and fathers may exhibit distinctive play styles, even when family role arrangements modify the quantity of their interaction. However, the father-infant relationship is altered as a result of maternal employment. Specifically, insecure infant-father attachment is higher in dual-career families, although only for sons and not daughters (Belsky, Rovine, and Fish, 1989). Other evidence suggests that fathers in dual-earner families are less sensitive with their male infants, and this pattern may explain the more insecure infant-father attachments (Braungart-Rieker, Courtney, and Garwood, 1999). Grych and Clark (1999) reported similar findings, namely, that in families where mothers work full time (defined as 25 hours or more), fathers were more negative in interacting with their infants at 4 months, although the relation was not evident at 12 months.

Father's Work Quantity and Quality and Father Involvement

Although there has been an increase in the number of parents who are employed, many workers experienced increases in work hours, a decrease in job stability, a rise in temporary jobs, and especially among low-wage workers, a decrease in income (Williams, 2010). As a result of these changes, the theoretical questions have shifted. Instead of examining whether one or both parents are employed, researchers have begun to address the issue of the impact of the quality and nature of work on the parenting of both mothers and fathers (see Cho and Ciancetta, 2016, for a review). Both how much and when parents work matter for children. As studies of poor nonresidential fathers indicate, lack of employment opportunities and, therefore, financial ability to support children is a major determinant of lack of father involvement (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010). Men who provide either informal or formal financial support are more likely to maintain contact with their children, whereas fathers who rarely or never visit are less likely to pay child support (Lerman, 1993; Lerman and Sorensen, 2000) which, in turn, adds to mothers' financial burden and may indirectly have negative effects on the children. The direction of effects is still being debated; perhaps fathers who can provide financial support are more likely to stay involved as a parent, or alternatively, those who stay involved are more likely to seek employment to fulfill their role as provider (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010; Coley and Chase-Lansdale, 1999).

Parental work schedules can be stressful and are associated with negative outcomes for children and adults (Li et al., 2013; Williams, 2010). In the 24-hour economy, 40% of employed individuals in the United States work part of their time outside normal working hours or what Europeans call “unsocial hours.” In 51% of two-job families with children, at least one parent works nonstandard hours, with the evening shift being the most common (Deutsch, 1999; Gornick and Meyers, 2003). As Williams (2010) observed, this trend toward nonstandard schedules takes its toll on family relationships. People working “unsocial hours,” not surprisingly, tend to have strained relationships. These schedules are associated with higher family-work conflict, lower marital quality, and reduced time with children. They are also associated with a lower likelihood of eating meals together, providing homework supervision, and sharing leisure (Han and Fox, 2011; Williams, 2010). In a Canadian study, children had more behavioral problems when parents worked nonstandard hours (Strazdins, Korda, Lim, Broom, and D’Souza, 2004). Nor are marriages immune from the effects of work schedules; nonoverlapping work hours for husbands and wives had negative effects on marital relationships (Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, and Crouter, 2000) and may increase the chances of divorce (Presser, 2004). And mothers’ household workload goes up more than fathers’ with nonstandard job schedules (Craig and Powell, 2011). Although such work schedules are often undertaken out of economic necessity, they still are a hardship for parents and children. Finally, job loss and underemployment have serious effects on family life, including marital relationships, parent-child relationships, and child adjustment (Conger et al., 2002; Parke et al., 2004; White and Rogers, 2000).

In terms of the quality issue, there are two types of linkage between father work and fathering. One type of research focuses on work as an “emotional climate” which, in turn, may have short-term
spillover effects to the enactment of roles in home settings. A second type of linkage focuses on the type of skills, attitudes, and perspectives that adults acquire in their work-based socialization as adults and how these variations in job experience alter their behavior in family contexts on a longer term basis.

Work in the first tradition (Repetti, 1994, 2005) has shown that fathers in high-stress jobs (e.g., air traffic controller) were more withdrawn in marital interactions after high-stress shifts and behaviorally and emotionally withdrawn during father-child interactions. Distressing social experiences at work were associated with higher expressions of anger and greater use of discipline during interaction with the child later in the day. Similarly Crouter, Bumpus, Maguire, and McHale (1999) found that mothers and fathers who felt more pressure on the job reported greater role overload, which, in turn, was linked to heightened parent adolescent conflict (see Repetti, 2005, for a review). Positive work experiences can enhance the quality of fathering. Grossman, Pollack, and Golding (1988) found that high job satisfaction was associated with higher levels of support for 5-year-old children's autonomy and affiliation in spite of the fact that positive feelings about work were negatively related to the quantity of time spent interacting with the child. This finding underscores the importance of distinguishing quantity and quality of involvement. Finally, when parents have better work-family balance, children's mental health is better (Repetti, 2005). This line of research underscores the importance of distinguishing between different types of work-related stress on subsequent father-child interactions and of considering direct short-term carryover effects versus long-term effects of work on fathering.

Research in the second tradition of family-work linkage, namely, the effects of the nature of men's occupational roles on their fathering behavior, dates back to Miller and Swanson (1958) and Kohn and Schooler (1983). Men who experience a high degree of occupational autonomy value independence in their children, consider children's intentions in discipline, and use reasoning and withdrawal of rewards instead of physical punishment. In contrast, men who are in highly supervised jobs with little autonomy value conformity and obedience, focus on consequences rather than intentions, and use more physical forms of discipline. In short, they repeat their job-based experiences in their parenting roles.

In extensions of Kohn's original focus on the implications of job characteristics for parenting, scholars have explored the effects of these variations in parenting for children's development. Fathers with more complex jobs (i.e., characterized by mentoring others versus taking instruction or serving others) spend more time alone with sons, more time developing their sons' skills (e.g., academic, athletic, mechanical, interpersonal), behave more warmly and responsively, and use less harsh and less lax control, but this is not the case for daughters (Greenberger, O'Neil, and Nagel, 1994). In fact, fathers spend more time in work and work-related activities if they have daughters, but report more firm but flexible control with daughters. Fathers who have jobs characterized by a high level of challenge (e.g., expected to solve problems, high level of decision-making) devote more time to developing sons' skills, give higher quality explanations to their sons, and use less harsh and more firm but flexible control in their interactions with their boys. Finally, fathers with time-urgent jobs (e.g., fast pace, few breaks) spend more time on work activities, less time interacting, and use less lax control if they have daughters. When fathers have complex, stimulating, and challenging jobs, boys seem to benefit much more than girls. Grimm-Thomas and Perry-Jenkins (1994) found that fathers with greater complexity and autonomy at work reported higher self-esteem and less authoritarian parenting. In a sample of European American, rural, dual-earner couples, Whitbeck et al. (1997) found that fathers with more job autonomy had more flexible parenting styles, which were linked to a sense of mastery and control in their adolescents. In another rural sample, poor job characteristics (e.g., low autonomy and flexibility, high pressure and supervisor criticism) were linked with lower levels of father engagement and less sensitive parenting (Goodman, Crouter, Lanza, and Cox, 2008) and lower quality of parent-infant interaction (Goodman et al., 2011). Some evidence suggests that these job characteristics effects may
be more evident for fathers than mothers (Parcel and Menaghan, 1994; Whitbeck et al., 1997). Perhaps mothers show fewer links due to the more heavily culturally- or evolutionarily-scripted nature of maternal roles with the focus on caregiving. However, as women’s involvement in the workplace continues, the effects of workplace characteristics on women may increase.

Although these myriad factors have been discussed individually, as our earlier theoretical model suggests and as empirical evidence supports, the challenge for the future is to test the additive and interactive effects of these individual factors in comprehensive models so that the complexity of predictive patterns of determinants of father involvement can be better understood.

Consequences of Father-Child Relationships

Variations in father involvement have implications for men themselves, their families, and their children.

Consequences of Fatherhood for Men Themselves

Becoming a father impacts on a man’s own psychological development and well-being. As Parke (1981) noted, “The father-child relationship is a two-way process and children influence their fathers just as fathers alter their children’s development” (p. 9). Several aspects of this issue have been examined, namely (1) mother-father relationships, (2) work and occupational issues, (3) self-identity, (4) psychological adjustment, (5) physical health, and (6) social connectedness beyond the family.

Impact on Mother-Father Relationships

Perhaps most attention has been devoted to the impact of the transition to parenthood on marriage. The general finding from a large number of studies is that there is a decline in marital satisfaction, especially on the part of men, as a consequence of the birth of a child (see Mitnick, Heyman, and Smith Slep, 2009, for a meta-analytic review). The psychological adjustments associated with the transition to fatherhood are clearly evident in the Cowan and Cowan (1992) longitudinal study. Their project followed families from pregnancy until the children were 5 years of age. Fathers’ marital satisfaction showed a modest decrease from pregnancy to 6 months, but a sharp decline between 6 and 18 months. In contrast, mothers show a linear decline beginning in the postpartum period and continuing across the first 2 years. In this same period of 18 months, 12.5% of the couples separated or divorced; by 5 years of age, this figure was up to 20%. Another study found lower marital satisfaction at 1 year postpartum than at 3 months (Shapiro, Gottman, and Carrere, 2000), a finding confirmed by a study of first-time fathers that found that marital satisfaction was lowest at 1 year post-birth (Condon, Boyce, and Corkindale, 2004). A more recent longitudinal study (Doss et al., 2009) compared couples who did and did not have children across 8 years of marriage. Both groups showed a decline, but in the case of the couples with children, there was a sharp drop-off in marital satisfaction after the onset of parenthood, whereas the decline was more gradual in childless couples. Perhaps most persuasive is the recent meta-analysis of 37 studies that followed couples from before to after birth (Mitnick et al., 2009). There were small-to-moderate effect sizes indicating a decline in marital satisfaction from pregnancy through 11–14 months after birth for men and women.

In spite of the dip in marital satisfaction, two caveats should be noted. First, even though marital satisfaction decreases for men (and women) after the onset of parenthood, marital stability (i.e., the likelihood of staying in the marriage) increases relative to childless couples (Cowan and Cowan, 1992). Second, not all of the couples showed a decline in marital satisfaction; 18% of couples showed increased satisfaction with their marital relationship. This figure rose to 38% for couples who participated in a supportive intervention program during the transition to parenthood (Cowan and Cowan,
1992). During the transition to parenthood, marital quality declined in about 30% of the families, improved in another 30%, and in nearly 40% of the families showed no change (Belsky, Rovine, and Fish, 1989). Similar diversity in the pattern of change in marital satisfaction is evident in other studies (McDermid, Huston, and McHale, 1990; Shapiro et al., 2000).

A variety of reasons has been suggested for this decline in men’s marital satisfaction, including (1) physical strain of childcare, (2) increased financial responsibilities, (3) emotional demands of new familial responsibilities, (4) the restrictions of parenthood, and (5) the redefinition of roles and role arrangements (Goldberg, 2014; Mitnick et al., 2009). Several lines of evidence suggest that discrepancies in expectations on the part of mothers and fathers concerning the relative roles that each will play may be an important determinant of postpartum marital satisfaction. When there was a larger discrepancy between the wives’ expectations of their husbands’ involvement in infant care and husbands’ level of actual participation, there was a greater decline in marital satisfaction (Cowan and Cowan, 1992). Similarly, McDermid et al. (1990) found greater negative impact of the onset of parenthood when there was a discrepancy between spouses’ sex role attitudes and the division of household and childcare labor, and McBride (1989) found that traditional fathers who held conservative sex-role attitudes, but were nonetheless involved in childcare, reported lower levels of dissatisfaction. On the positive side, when couple’s expectations and behaviors match, some evidence suggests that marital satisfaction is correspondingly high (Cowan and Cowan, 1992). In summary, discrepancies in parental expectations about roles, rather than the level of change per se, may be a key correlate of men’s marital satisfaction after the onset of fatherhood. It is important to underscore that marital relationships are both determinants as well as consequences of paternal involvement (Pleck, 2010).

Much of the literature is focused on infancy. Less is known about the impact of being a father on marital satisfaction after infancy. An exception is the longitudinal study by Heath (1976; Heath and Heath, 1991) that followed a cohort of college men into their 30s and mid-40s. Competent fathers were in satisfying marriages. However, these two indices also related to psychological maturity, leaving open the possibility that fathering activities lead to marital satisfaction and maturity or that maturity is the common correlate of being both a competent father and husband. Snarey (1993) found support for the relation between paternal involvement in childhood or adolescence on marital satisfaction. In a follow-up longitudinal study, Snarey assessed the marital success of men at mid-life (age 47):

> Fathers who provided high levels of social-emotional support for their offspring during the childhood decade (0–10 years) and high levels of intellectual, academic and social emotional support during the adolescent decade (11–21 years) were themselves as men at mid-life, more likely to be happily married.

(Snarey, 1993, p. 111)

In summary, it is clear that there are hints of long-term positive effects of father involvement on marriage, but these data must be interpreted cautiously for several reasons. First, there are negative effects of increased father involvement as noted earlier in our discussions of maternal gatekeeping. Some women may view increased father involvement as intrusive and unwelcome. Second, some of the literature is based on cohorts studied several decades ago. In light of the changing work and family lives of both men and women in the new millennium, conclusions based on earlier periods may not be readily applicable (Pleck, 2010).

**Fatherhood and Men’s Work Patterns**

There are two perspectives on this issue. First, a short-term perspective suggests that as fathers increase their involvement, they perceive higher levels of work-family conflict (Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007).
This work–family stress is more likely to be reported by fathers in dual- rather than single-earner families (Volling and Belsky, 1991). Many fathers wish they had more time for family and more flexible job arrangements (Parke and Brott, 1999), and, although there are clear trends toward more family-friendly policies, workplace barriers remain formidable. A long-term perspective suggests that father involvement is positively linked with occupational mobility, wage levels, and asset accumulation. Recent evidence suggests that

the links between fatherhood and men's work behaviors are a complex function of many factors including: human capital, marital status (non) resident status with children, age at the transition to fatherhood, race-ethnicity, desires and abilities to embrace “new” father ideals and selection effects.

(Eggebeen, Knoester, and McDaniel, 2013, p. 349)

Men who become fathers work longer hours, are more likely to be employed, receive higher wages and have more assets than men who are childless (Eggebeen, Dew, and Knoester, 2010; Hodges and Budig, 2010). However, married professional fathers, especially European American men, benefit more than others in terms of earnings and asset accumulation in part due to institutionalized discriminatory practices that penalize other groups of men such as African American fathers (Eggebeen et al., 2010; Glauber, 2008). Moreover, married professional European American men may be married to partners who assume a greater domestic burden, which allows men to specialize in outside employment. Young fathers, although their wages and assets are lower, often increase their commitment to work by increasing their employment hours in part due to the recognition that the onset of fatherhood requires greater responsibility including a heightened commitment to work (Astone, Dariotis, Sonenstern, Pleck, and Hynes, 2010; Settersten and Cancel-Tirado, 2010).

Finally, occupational mobility is also affected by father involvement. In his longitudinal study, Snarey (1993) found that fathers’ childrearing involvement across the first two decades of the child’s life moderately predicted fathers’ occupational mobility (at age 47) above and beyond other background variables (e.g., parents’ occupation, his IQ, current maternal employment). In general, fatherhood and work are linked, but the patterns clearly vary across age, level of professionalism, and ethnicity. It is also evident that fathering practices and work involvement may mutually influence one another.

Fatherhood and Men’s Self-Identity

Men’s sense of themselves shifts as a function of the transition to fatherhood. A variety of dimensions has been explored in prior research, including their role definitions, their self-esteem, and their sense of generativity. Roles change for both men and women after the onset of parenthood. Cowan and Cowan (1992, 2010) assessed role shifts during the transition to fatherhood and found that men who become fathers decreased the “partner/lover” aspect of their self and increased the “parent” percentage of their self-definition. In contrast, men who remained childless significantly increased the “partner/lover” aspect of their relationship over a nearly 2-year assessment period. Grossman (1987) found that first-time fathers who were both more affiliative (i.e., connected to others, empathetic relationships) and more autonomous had significantly higher life adaptation scores. Fathers of first-borns who were more affiliative at 1 year also reported being higher in emotional well-being than less affiliative fathers. Thus, it appears that “separateness and individuation are not sufficient for men’s well-being; they need connections as well” (Grossman, 1987, p. 107). Does fatherhood have a longer term impact on men’s self-identity? In a longitudinal study of college men, Heath (1977) found that fatherhood related to men’s ability to understand themselves, to understand others sympathetically, and to integrate their own feelings.
Fatherhood and Psychological Adjustment of Men

Becoming a father is linked with both positive and negative psychological consequences for men themselves (Eggebeen et al., 2013). As Palkovitz (2002) reported in his qualitative examination of fathers, men report joy, anticipation, and excitement about being a father while also reporting increased stress, anxiety, frustration, depression and, as we noted earlier, marital conflict. Married or cohabitating men are less likely than single men to experience depression on becoming a father (Woo and Raley, 2005). Stepfathers may report more stress and lower levels of life satisfaction (Kohler, Behrman, and Skytte, 2005). With longer duration of the stepfamily relationship, the negative effects increased stress, and altered perceptions of life satisfaction decrease (Umberson and Montez, 2010).

The early-timed entry into fatherhood has clear negative effects on men’s psychological adjustment. A variety of disruptions in their lives associated with early fatherhood, such as interruptions in education, increased financial and social responsibilities, and unstable partner relationships, all contribute to lower levels of life satisfaction for young fathers (Hofferth and Goldscheider, 2010). In contrast, on-time and late-timed fathers are generally better adjusted psychologically, although later fatherhood may be complicated by divorce and remarriage (Settersten and Cancel-Tirado, 2010). Some ethnicity-related effects have been found as well, with African American fathers reporting higher rates of depression than European American fathers (Gross et al., 2008). And fathers (and mothers) are often negatively affected (i.e., increases in depression) when adult children encounter stressful events such as job loss, financial problems, illness, or divorce (Pudrovksa, 2009).

Fatherhood and Physical Health

As in the case of psychological adjustment, the onset of fatherhood can have both positive and negative effects on men’s physical well-being but depends on the life stage, residential and marital status, and income level. Becoming a father may improve health by reducing risky behavior in part to provide a better model for children and to maintain their health to fulfill their parental role (Palkovitz, 2002). The majority of fathers attempt to curtail or quit smoking (Everett et al., 2005), and some have found that alcohol consumption decreases (Garfield, Isacco, and Bartlo, 2010). Even in the case of divorced fathers, who are likely to be stressed and potentially use excessive alcohol, those who are involved extensively in their children’s lives decrease alcohol and marijuana use (DeGarmo, 2010). Rearing a difficult child or encountering other life stressors, such as financial challenges, may increase alcohol consumption (Pelham and Lang, 1999). Or transitioning into fatherhood at a young age may lead to a continuation of risky behavior or patterns of drug abuse (Little, Handley, Leuthe, and Chassin, 2009), limited job opportunities, and more poverty, all of which may contribute to poorer long-term health outcomes (Williams, 2003). Even lower mortality is linked with fatherhood, especially in the context of marriage (Friedman and Martin, 2011) but decreases after the number of children increases (Lawlor et al., 2003).

Fatherhood and Social Connections Beyond the Family

Becoming a father has consequences for the roles that men play beyond the family in the wider community. This effect of fatherhood is reflected in increased generativity, a concept derived from Erikson’s (1975) theoretical writings. Snarey (1993, pp. 18–19) provided a succinct summary:

The psychosocial task of middle adulthood, Stage 7 [in Erikson’s Stage theory] is the attainment of a favorable balance of generativity over stagnation and self-absorption. Most broadly, Erikson (1975) considers generativity to mean any caring activity that contributes to the spirit of future generations, such as the generation of new or more mature persons,
products, ideas, or works of art. Generativity’s psychosocial challenge to adults is to create, care for, and promote the development of others from nurturing the growth of another person to shepherding the development of a broader community.

Snarey (1993) described three types that apply to fathers, namely (1) biological generativity (indicated by the birth of a child), (2) parental generativity (indicated by childrearing activities), and (3) societal generativity (indicated by caring for other younger adults, such as serving as a mentor, providing leadership, and contributing to generational continuity). The concept of generativity is a useful marker for assessing the long-term relation between fathering behavior and other aspects of mature men’s lives. It also serves as a theoretical corrective to earlier views of fathers as inadequate and deficient (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997; Palkovitz and Palm, 2009). The onset of fatherhood is linked with a strengthening of intergenerational ties (Eggebeen et al., 2010) as illustrated by more contact (letters, phone calls) with parents and relatives than nonfathers.

There are more instrumental exchanges, such as giving and receiving monetary, social and caregiving assistance, by fathers as well. A series of studies has examined relations between fatherhood and community-based social generativity. Fathers compared with non-fathers are more involved in community service and volunteer activities not only with child-related activities, such as team sports or girl or boy scout groups, but also in a wide variety of community organizations (labor unions, professional societies, or local/national political groups; Eggebeen et al., 2013; Knoester and Eggebeen, 2006). Snarey found that men who nurtured their children’s socioemotional development during childhood (0–10 years) and who also contributed to both socioemotional and intellectual-academic development during the second decade (11–21 years) were at mid-life more likely to become generative in areas outside their family. In summary, although the processes are not yet well understood, it is clear that involved fathering relates in positive ways to other aspects of men’s lives. As Snarey (1993, p. 119) noted, “Men who are parentally generative during early adulthood usually turn out to be good spouses, workers and citizens at mid life.” Although further empirical work is necessary to adequately evaluate the utility of this generativity perspective, it represents a promising direction for fatherhood research.

Palkovitz (2002; Palkovitz and Palm, 1998) argued that engagement in fatherhood roles may present a sensitive period for men in the development of religious faith and in religious practice. In support of this expectation, men become more religious and attend religious institutions more often after the onset of fatherhood (Knoester, Petts, and Eggebeen, 2007). This embrace of religion is important because religiousness (faith and practice) is linked not only with paternal and maternal warmth and parenting efficacy but also with increases in parental control. In turn, warmth and parenting efficacy are linked with higher social competence and school performance in children while parental control is related to increases in internalizing and externalizing (Bornstein et al., 2017). However, the conditions under which religiousness will yield positive or negative child outcomes remains unclear. The effects are evident across nine countries and religions (Protestant, Catholic, Buddhist, Muslim) and underscore the importance of religion as a determinant of fathering.

Implications of Father Involvement for Children’s Development

Three types of approaches to the issue of the impact of father involvement on children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development can be distinguished. First, in a modern variant of the earlier father-absence theme, sociologists, in particular, have examined the impact of nonresident fathers’ frequency and quality of contact on children’s development. In contrast to this paternal deprivation approach, a second strategy examines the impact of paternal enhancement. This approach asks about the lessons learned from focusing on unusually highly involved fathers, such as occurs in role sharing.
and reversed role families. The third or normative approach focuses on the consequences of the quality and quantity of father-child interaction on children's development in intact families.

**Beyond Intact Father Families: Effects on Children's Development**

**Disadvantaged Fathers and Child Development**

What are the effects of contact between disadvantaged fathers and children on children's development? It is noteworthy that unmarried fathers continue to see their children even though the ties with their partner have deteriorated. Some have suggested that the package deal whereby close ties between partners and involvement in child contact is a guiding principle may not apply to unmarried fathers who see contact with children and a relationship with the child's mother as separate components (Edin and Nelson, 2013; Edin, Tach, and Mincy, 2009). However, the selective investment of many poor fathers in a subset of their biological children may leave the nonselected biological children at a developmental disadvantage. Not only do these nonselected children receive less contact with their biological fathers, but also they experience the added stress of multiple transitions in their lives, as their mothers may form new partnerships and, in turn, have more children. As Edin and Nelson (2013) noted,

> Children may be exposed to the confusion of new parental figures who come and go, and they will likely accumulate half siblings along the way. Kids are resilient but the rate of family change among children of unwed fathers has become so rapid and now leads to such complicated family structures that kids might have a hard time adjusting.

_(p. 226)_

Although child outcomes were not the focus of the Edin-Nelson project, other studies have found that the higher the rate of family transitions in and out of coresidential unions or significant romantic relationships, the more behavior problems exhibited by the children (Fomby and Cherlin, 2007; Osborne and McLanahan, 2007) and more problems with peers (Cavanaugh and Huston, 2006). However, as Furstenberg (2014) cautioned, “The research challenge is sorting out the selection of couples with very different demographic and psychological attributes from the social process generated when couples encounter the challenges of supporting and raising children across different households” (p. 22).

Moreover, quality, not presence/absence alone, is important in assessing the impact of nonresident fathers. In a follow-up study of 18- to 21-year-old children of African American adolescent mothers, Furstenberg and Harris (1993) found little impact of contact alone on young adults’ outcomes but clear beneficial effects if the quality of the relationship were taken into account. Those who reported a strong bond or attachment with their father during adolescence had higher educational attainment, were less likely to be imprisoned, and were less depressed. These effects were especially evident in the case of children living with the father and were only marginally evident for nonresident biological fathers. The data suggest that both presence and quality matters, but quality is especially important because fathers’ presence is unrelated to outcomes when quality (degree of attachment to father) is controlled. Others report that paternal nurturing behaviors are related with better cognitive and behavioral outcomes (Martin et al., 2007; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004), and involvement by nonresidential fathers is related to lower rates of delinquency (Coley and Medeiros, 2007). Additionally, more father engagement in shared activities during adolescence is linked to more healthy cortisol responses to stressful events (Ibrahim, Somers, Luecken, Fabricius, and Cookston, 2017). The Amato and Gilbreth (1999) meta-analysis is consistent with findings; a measure of the
affective relationship between the father and child (feeling close) was positively associated with child academic success, and negatively with child internalizing and externalizing problems. The effect sizes were modest in magnitude. Second, fathers’ authoritative parenting was associated with higher academic success and fewer internalizing and externalizing problems. Authoritative parenting was a better predictor than either frequency of contact or the “feeling close” measure. In addition to quality of involvement, one other variable, namely, the amount of father’s payment of child support, was a significant predictor of children’s outcomes, including academic success and children’s externalizing behavior although not internalizing behavior. This finding is not surprising, because “fathers’ financial contributions provide wholesome food, adequate shelter in safe neighborhoods, commodities (such as books, computers, and private lessons) that facilitate children’s academic success and support for college attendance” (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999, p. 559). These findings were evident for both boys and girls and African American and European American families. Finally, in the Fragile Families project, few links have been found between father contact and child outcomes, but if the parents have an effective coparenting relationship, children have fewer behavior problems (Carlson and McLanahan, 2010) This work reflects earlier and recurring themes in the parent-child literature, namely, that quality of the father-child and couple relationship are the critical factors in determining children’s development.

**Incarcerated Fathers and Children’s Development**

What are the effects of paternal incarceration on children? Murray, Farrington, and Sekol (2012) examined evidence on the associations between parental incarceration and children’s later antisocial behavior, mental health problems, drug use, and educational performance. In their meta-analysis, the most rigorous studies that controlled for sociodemographic risk factors (e.g., ethnicity, education, poverty), children’s antisocial behavior before parental incarceration, or parental criminality (e.g., prior criminal convictions), they found that parental incarceration was associated with children’s increased risk for antisocial behavior, but not for mental health problems, drug use, or poor educational performance. Although previous studies have found multiple types of adverse effects of parental incarceration on children’s outcomes, results suggest that when important co-occurring risk factors are taken into account, only children’s antisocial behavior is uniquely affected by parental incarceration: “Although incarceration is likely not the cause of these compromised outcomes, it instead serves as one indicator of other co-occurring risks and vulnerabilities that make these families particularly fragile” (Shlafer, Gerrity, Ruhland, Wheeler, and Michaels, 2013, p. 9). For example, incarceration increases financial insecurity and housing instability, heightens stigmatization, and increases the probability that a non-incarcerated mother will repartner (Sykes and Pettit, 2014). Together, these shifts will have negative effects on children, including an increase in homelessness (Wildeman, 2014) and elevated food insecurity (Cox and Wallace, 2013).

Most evidence suggests that the parent-child attachment relationship is more likely to be negatively affected when the mother is incarcerated than when fathers are incarcerated because mothers are more likely to be the primary caregiver than fathers prior to incarceration. Only a quarter of fathers compared with three quarters of mothers reported providing primary care for their children prior to arrest (Maruschak, Glaze, and Mumola, 2010). However, the conditions surrounding the father’s incarceration are linked to the non-incarcerated caregiver-child relationship. Although no studies have directly examined the effects of paternal incarceration on children’s attachment to their fathers, paternal imprisonment is linked with poorer caregiver (mother)-child attachment, especially if the child is exposed to either their father’s crime or the arrest of their father. However, if the maternal caregiver was sensitive and provided a stimulating home environment, the levels of insecure attachment between child and the non-incarcerated caregiver were reduced (Poehlmann-Tyanan, Burnson, Runyon, and Weymouth, 2017).
An examination of how the contact patterns are managed during incarceration suggests a complex picture. On the one hand, Shlafer and Poehlmann (2010) found that no parent-child contact was associated with children’s feelings of alienation; on the other hand, visitation may not always be associated with positive outcomes. For example, there are associations between visits with parents (mothers) in corrections facilities and representations of insecure attachment relationships in children (Poehlmann, 2005). Children who experienced more frequent no contact barrier visits with their mothers in the jail setting exhibited more depression and anxiety symptoms, whereas the use of alternative forms of contact (mail, phone) was associated with fewer symptoms of internalizing behavior (Dallaire, Zeman, and Thrash, 2015). The child-unfriendly nature of visitation environments probably contributed to this link. As observations of children during visits with their jailed fathers (and mothers) indicate, children exhibit more emotional dysregulation in jail settings than at home (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2014). However, when the visitation setting is more child- and parent-friendly (direct physical contact between parent and child), visitation is associated with more positive outcomes for children (Snyder, Carlo, and Coats Mullins, 2001). In one small-scale intervention (weekly parent-child visit in a child-friendly setting) for incarcerated fathers and their young children, Landreth and Lobaugh (1998) found that children’s self-esteem increased across a 10-week intervention. Moreover, a longer term view suggests that the post-incarceration period needs to be examined. Some report more visitation and mail contact during incarceration was linked with more father-child contact and better father-child relationships and child outcomes in the post-incarceration period (LaVigne, Naser, Brooks, and Castro, 2005) as well as lower recidivism rates for inmates (Bales and Mears, 2008). In summary, the context and type of contact are important moderators of these links between contact and outcomes.

Transnational Fathers and Children’s Development

Some evidence suggests that the frequency of contact is an important factor in child outcomes for transnational fathers. For example, Nobles (2011) found a positive association between the amount of father-child contact and school performance for both sons and daughters. In an internet survey, Cookston, Boyer, Vega, and Parke (2017) found a positive relation between frequency of telephone contact between transnational Mexican parents and their children and the quality of parent-child relationships. How is the quality of the father-child relationship modified by the frequency and by the quality of these contacts? How are contact patterns related to children’s perceptions of their father? Clearly, this topic needs more attention by father researchers, especially in view of the continuing increase in transnational parenting.

Deployed Fathers and Children’s Development

Assessments of the impact of being separated from their families and children due to military deployment is a further avenue for exploring the effects of fathering on children’s development. A variety of negative outcomes on children of deployed parents (usually fathers) has been reported. In one study (Chandra et al., 2010) after controlling for family and service-member characteristics, children (11–17 years old) had more emotional difficulties compared with national samples. Older youth and girls of all ages reported significantly more school-, family-, and peer-related difficulties with parental deployment. Length of parental deployment and poorer non-deployed caregiver mental health were associated with a greater number of challenges for children both during deployment and deployed-parent reintegration. A study using deployment records and parent reports by primary caregivers revealed that greater exposure to deployment was linked with impaired family functioning and marital instability (Lester et al., 2016). Parental depressive and post-traumatic stress symptoms were associated with impairments in socioemotional adjustment in young children, increased
anxiety in early childhood, and adjustment problems in school-age children. Conversely, parental sensitivity was associated with improved social and emotional outcomes across childhood. In another study (Mansfield et al., 2011) of over 300,000 children between 5 and 17 years of age, those with parental deployment had more mental health diagnoses during a 4-year period compared with children whose parents did not deploy. After the children’s age, gender, and mental health history were adjusted for, excess mental health diagnoses associated with parental deployment were greatest for acute stress reaction/adjustment, depression, and pediatric behavioral disorders and increased with total months of parental deployment. Boys and girls showed similar patterns within these same categories, with more diagnoses observed in older children within gender groups and in boys relative to girls within age groups. However, caution is needed because a meta-analysis found a small association between deployment and poorer adjustment. This association varied across several features of the studies. Age moderation was such that associations are strongest in middle childhood and weakest during adolescence (Card et al., 2011). However, more recent studies have found stronger effects (McDermid-Wadsworth, 2013).

Together, these studies suggest that various forms of father-child separation and loss of contact are linked with several forms of negative developmental outcomes for children. However, this long-standing issue remains difficult to interpret because concurrent circumstances as a result of the separation (e.g., quality of caregiving, economic hardships associated with separation) may, in part, account for these negative outcomes. In spite of these problems, it is vital to better understand these various forms of fathering at a distance because significant numbers of children are developing under these family forms.

**Impact of Normal Variations in Intact Families on Children’s Development**

A voluminous literature has emerged over the last three decades that clearly demonstrates relations between quality of paternal involvement and children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development (Parke, 1996; Pleck, 2010). At the same time, considerable evidence shows a good deal of redundancy between fathers’ and mothers’ impact on children. However, accumulated evidence suggests that fathers make a unique contribution to children’s development independent of maternal influences. In a review of the effects of fathers on children, Marsiglio, Amato, Day, and Lamb (2000) found moderate negative associations between authoritative fathering and child internalizing and externalizing problems. The relation held for children and adolescents regardless of age. Aldous and Mulligan (2002), using a national data set, found that positive paternal engagement is linked to lower frequency of later behavior problems for boys and for “difficult to rear” children. Similarly, in a large sample of British teenagers, positive paternal engagement predicted positive school attitudes (Flouri, 2004) and lower rates of police contact (Flouri, 2004). Still other investigators have found that children of involved fathers have higher academic achievement (McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, and Ho, 2005) and better language and cognitive competence (Cabrera, Shannon, and Tamis-LeMonda, 2007). A meta-analytic review of 22 studies found positive effects of paternal involvement on children’s cognitive and personality development, whereas negative effects of involvement were rare (McWayne, Downer, Campos, and Harris, 2013). Moreover, Amato and Rivera (1999) found that the positive influence on children’s behavior was similar for European American, African American, and Latin American fathers. Similarly, others have found similar links between positive fathering and fewer behavior problems in adolescents regardless of ethnicity (Latin American and European American) (Leidy et al., 2011).

In spite of this consistent body of evidence that positive father involvement is advantageous to child and adolescent development, Marsiglio et al. (2000) offered three important caveats to this conclusion. First, most studies rely on a single data source, which raises the problem of shared method...
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variance. Second, many researchers do not control for the quality of the mother-child relationship when examining father effects. Because the behavior and attitudes of parents are often highly related, this step is critical. However, Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) concluded that in over 70% of studies that were methodologically sound (control for maternal effects and independent data sources), there is evidence of a positive correlation of paternal involvement with child outcomes. Although there is overlap between the effects of mothers and fathers on their children’s academic, emotional, and social development, evidence is emerging that fathers make a unique contribution to their children’s development.

A third caveat concerns problems of inferring direction of causality because studies are correlational and involve concurrent rather than longitudinal assessments. However, two strands of evidence suggest that the direction of effects plausibly flow from paternal behavior to child outcomes. First, longitudinal studies support the view that fathers influence their children (see Amato and Rivera, 1999; Cookston and Finlay, 2006; Parke and Buriel, 2006; Pleck, 2010; Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004, for reviews). Nor are the effects of fathering on developmental outcomes restricted to childhood. Boys who were separated from their fathers before age 10 due to paternal incarceration had more internalizing problems in adulthood (Murray and Farrington, 2008). In addition, father-adolescent closeness at age 16 predicted lower levels of depression and higher marital satisfaction at age 33 (Flouri, 2004). In a follow-up of Sears, Maccoby; and Levin (1957), Koestner, Franz, and Weinberger (1990) found that the most powerful predictor of empathy in adulthood (age 31) for both men and women was paternal childrearing involvement at age 5 and it was a better predictor than several maternal variables. Franz, McClelland, and Weinberger (1991), reported that men and women with better social relationships (marriage quality; extrafamilial ties) at age 41 had experienced more paternal warmth as children. Although these studies support a father effects perspective, it is likely that reciprocal relationships will become evident, in which children and fathers mutually influence each other across the life course (Parke, 2013).

Reverse Role Families

The other strand of evidence that supports the plausibility of a father-to-child direction of effects model comes from reports of reverse role families and intervention studies. A small minority of families has explored alternative family arrangements such as role sharing and reversing family roles. In spite of their rarity, these alternative family arrangements can inform us about the possible ways in which families can reorganize themselves to provide flexibility for mothers, fathers, and children (see Parke, 2013, for a recent review) and to assess the impact of increased father involvement on children’s development. Although this arrangement is a relatively recent phenomenon, it is on the rise. In 2007, stay-at-home fathers in the United States made up approximately 2.7% of the nation’s stay-at-home parents, triple the percentage from 1997 and has been consistently higher each year since 2005 (Shaver, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to a 2010 census report, there are 154,000 stay-at-home dads in the United States, up from 140,000 in 2008. These fathers cared for 287,000 children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The news from Canada is even more dramatic. The number of men self-identifying as stay-at-home dads has increased threefold over the past 30 years (Statistics Canada, 2010), with the number of stay-at-home dads gradually rising, reaching 60,000 in 2011, up from 20,000 in 1976. Canadian men now account for 12% of stay-at-home parents, compared with only 4% in 1986. To put these figures into perspective: One in every 100 stay-at-home parents were fathers in the 1970s and in 2011, it is 1 in every 8 fathers.

There is a variety of reasons for the increase in this family arrangement but also challenges that may account for the small number of families who choose this alternative and persist in it. For many families, it is economic; perhaps the father is laid off, or the mother earns more money so it makes more financial sense for the father to stay home and the mother to assume the financial provider role.
In fact, between 2009 and 2010, during the recession the United States, the earnings of men with college degrees dropped, but women’s earnings increased. In some cases, the wife’s job provides a better set of health benefits than her spouse’s job. In fact, as unemployment rises, the number of men who are thrust into primary care roles rises, in part, because the unemployment rates for men tend to be higher than those for women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). In some cases, women enjoy their job and prefer to work outside the home, and men may dread their work and prefer to become the primary caregiver. In other families, parents report that they simply believe that they should share the care of their children.

There are distinct consequences for mothers, fathers, and children from parents’ role sharing. According to Russell’s (1983, 1986) study of Australian families in which fathers took major or equal responsibility for childcare, mothers reported increased stimulation as a result of outside employment, greater independence, and increased self-esteem. Nearly half of the fathers reported difficulties associated with the demands—the constancy and boredom—associated with their full-time caregiving role. On the positive side, 70% of fathers reported that their relationship with their children and their understanding of children improved, and they noted a greater awareness of mother-housewife roles, and enjoyed the freedom from career pressures. In a 2-year follow-up (Russell, 1986), nearly two thirds of both parents continued to view improved father-child relationships as the major advantage of this sharing arrangement, but there was an increase in tension and conflict in the father-child as well as the marital relationship. According to a study of 3,600 couples who participated in the National Survey of Families and Households, Sayer et al. (2011) found that rates of divorce were higher in role-reversal families.

Others argue that we still view breadwinning and masculinity as linked, and some men feel that their sense of manhood is undermined by not being employed in an outside job and instead taking on a traditional female role of caregiver (Doucet, 2006, 2013). To combat this feeling of threatened loss of masculinity after giving up participation in the full-time labor force for a caregiving role, many fathers replace employment with “self-provisioning” work that allows them to contribute economically to the household economy as well as to display masculine practices, both to themselves and their wider community. For example, fathers play a role in children’s extracurricular activities such as sporting as well as in community work which emphasizes leadership, sports, construction, and building while also easing community scrutiny of their decision to give up work.

(Doucet, 2004, pp. 278–279)

In short, men who assume these primary caregiver roles adopt strategies to overcome some of the still remaining social isolation and prejudice associated with this new family form and the prevailing narrow definition of masculinity. To appreciate the potential impact of these changes in men’s roles on children, we need to examine the ways in which fathers’ styles of interaction shift when mothers and fathers reverse their customary roles as caregiver and outside-the-home worker. Evidence from the United States, Australia, and Israel suggests that when fathers stay home, their style of interaction becomes more like that of primary caregiving mothers with more imitative and vocal exchanges (Field, 1978); more indoor activities such as talking, singing and drawing, and less exclusive focus on roughhousing and outdoor games such as football (Russell, 1983); and more nurturance (Sagi, 1982). However, these stay-at-home fathers still played as physically as traditional fathers, which suggests that some aspects of paternal style may be resistant to change.

How do the children reared in reverse role families fare? There are no apparent major negative effects, but there are some positive effects for children. Children were higher in problem-solving skills and personal and social skills (Pruett, 1987) and higher verbal ability than children reared in traditional families (Radin, 1993) and higher in internal locus of control and in empathy than children.
of fathers with low involvement (Sagi, Koren, and Weinberg, 1987). Similarly, Pruett (2000) found
that adolescents of primary caregiver fathers showed greater emotional balance, stronger curiosity,
and a stronger sense of self-assurance than adolescents reared in homes with less involved fathers.

Although this role-reversal arrangement clearly violates the notion of an “ideal” family form, it is
clear that men as primary caregivers not only do an adequate job of rearing children but also their
increased involvement may benefit their children’s development as well. At the same time, our cul-
tural acceptance of men as primary caregivers is still slowly evolving. Finally, evidence suggesting that
children from these families fare better must be treated cautiously because stay at home fathers may
be different in other ways from parents who maintain more traditional roles. Perhaps they might have
treated their children differently from traditional parents, no matter which parent stayed home with
the children. At the same time, it is likely that parents who reverse roles are significantly affected by
their choice, and that, therefore, the nontraditional environment in which children develop is at least
partially responsible for the differences between children reared in role-reversal and traditional families.

**Intervention Evidence of the Effects of Father Involvement**

Intervention studies in which parenting skills are taught show that changes in paternal parenting
behavior are related to enhanced social and cognitive development in children and, in turn, suggest
that the direction of effects flow, in part, from father to child (see Holmes, Cowan, Cowan, and Hawkins,
2013; Knox, Cowan, Cowan, and Bildner, 2011, for reviews). For example, intervention studies
of fathers and infants have found that fathers who receive parenting training not only increase their
involvement (Parke, Hymel, Power and Tinsley, 1980), but also their infants show increased social
responsiveness and more play initiations (Dickie and Gerber, 1980). Studies of fathers with older
children, too, show positive changes in father involvement, which, in turn, improves the father-child
relationship (Levant, 1988). Unfortunately, relatively few of these studies systematically assess children’s
developmental outcomes. An exception is the work of the Cowans and their colleagues (Cowan,
Cowan, and Heming, 2005), who used a randomized design to assess the effects of parental interven-
tions on children’s outcomes. Prior to their children’s entry into elementary school parents of 5-year-
old first children were assigned randomly to one of three intervention conditions: (1) a couples group
in which facilitators focused more on parent-child issues (e.g., discipline), (2) a couples group in which
facilitators focused more on issues between the parents as a couple, and (3) a brief consultation condi-
tion, which served as a control group. In comparison with parents in the control condition, parents in
the group interventions displayed increases in positive parenting (e.g., greater warmth, engagement,
structuring behaviors). Parents in the marital focus groups showed more positive parenting, reduced
conflict in problem-solving as a couple, and positive changes in the overall quality of their relationship
as a couple. Furthermore, children of parents in the marital-focus group displayed a greater reduction
in externalizing behaviors between kindergarten and first grade and greater increases in achievement
(Cowan, Cowan, Ablow, Johnson, and Measelle, 2005). Revisiting the families 10 years later when the
children had made the transition to high school, they found that positive outcomes associated with
parents’ relationship satisfaction, couple communication, and the teens’ externalizing behaviors had
persisted for families in which parents had attended the groups with an emphasis on couple relation-
ship issues (Cowan, Cowan, and Barry, 2011). The results of this study suggest that there is added and
lasting value of including couple relationship content in parenting interventions.

Later work focusing on low-income fathers confirmed and extended these findings. The Support-
ing Father Involvement program (SFI) was developed with the aim of enhancing fathers’ involve-
ment with their children in low-income families (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, and Wong, 2009)
as well as strengthening the relationship between the parents. A sample of low-income participants
(two thirds were Mexican American) with a child from birth to age 7 were assigned randomly either
to (1) a one-time, 3-hour informational meeting for a group of couples, (2) 16-week groups attended
by fathers only (32 hours), or (3) 16–week groups attended by both mothers and fathers (32 hours). Parents in the informational meeting showed significant declines in couple relationship satisfaction and increases in their children’s problem behaviors. Participants in the fathers-only groups showed increased involvement in the care of their children but declining relationship satisfaction, whereas parents who attended the groups as couples reported increases in fathers’ involvement, declines in parenting stress, and stable levels of both relationship satisfaction and child behaviors over 18 months. In a replication with a more diverse high-risk sample, Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, and Gillette (2014) found that participation in a couples group intervention produced significant positive effects on parents’ reports of their own well-being, their relationships with each other and their children, and their children’s externalizing and internalizing behavior problems. The couple’s groups were equally effective for participants of different ethnic groups, different economic levels, and different levels of anxiety or depressive symptoms. From the perspective of policy, the SFI program demonstrates the importance of (1) early intervention, (2) explicitly inviting fathers to participate (versus recruiting fathers through mothers), and (3) focus on the coparenting and couple relationship as a means to engage men (Pruett, Pruett, Cowan, and Cowan, 2017). Although these studies involved both mother and fathers as the unit of intervention, these data suggest that experimental modification of fathering behaviors can be an effective way of more clearly establishing the direction of causality in fathering research.

Beyond Description: Processes Which Link Fathering and Child Outcomes

Work that has focused on fathers’ special style of interacting, namely play, reveals processes through which fathers influence children’s development (see Leidy, Schofield, and Parke, 2013; Paquette, 2004, for reviews). As noted in Figure 3.1, three sets of mediating processes link father–child involvement and child outcomes, namely, emotional, attentional regulatory, and cognitive representational processes. Parke and his colleagues, for example, examined the relation between father–toddler play and children’s adaptation to peers. In one study (MacDonald and Parke, 1984), fathers and their 3- and 4-year-old girls and boys were observed in 20 minutes of structured play in their homes. Teachers ranked these sample children in terms of their popularity among their preschool classmates. For both girls and boys, fathers who were rated as exhibiting high levels of physical play with their children, and who elicited high levels of positive affect in their children during the play sessions, had children who received the highest peer popularity ratings. For boys, however, this pattern was qualified by the fathers’ level of directiveness. Boys whose fathers were both highly physical and low in directiveness received the highest popularity ratings, and the boys whose fathers were highly directive received lower popularity scores. Mize and Pettit (1997) found that preschool children whose play with fathers is characterized by mutuality or balance in making play suggestions and following partners’ suggestions were less aggressive, more competent, and better liked by peers. Similarly, Hart et al. (1998, 2000) found that greater playfulness, patience, and understanding with children, especially on the part of the father, are associated with less aggressive behavior with peers among both Western and Russian children. Flanders and colleagues (2009, 2010) found that rough-and-tumble play was associated with less aggression in preschoolers but only when the fathers control the flow of play and keeps the play from exceeding the fathers’ acceptable level of excitability. It is not any kind or level of physical play but modulated and regulated physical play that is positively linked to social outcomes such as less aggression and better emotional regulation.

Emotional Processes

Possibly, children who interact with a physically playful father learn how to recognize and send emotional signals during these play interactions. Several studies reveal a link between children’s emotional
encoding and decoding abilities that are presumably acquired, in part, in these playful interchanges and children’s social adaptation to peers (Parke et al., 1988, 1992). In addition, fathers’ affect displays, especially anger, seem to be a potent correlate of children’s social acceptance. In studies in both the laboratory (Carson and Parke, 1996) and the home (Boyum and Parke, 1995), fathers’ negative affect is inversely related to preschool and kindergarten children’s sociometric status. By contrast, when fathers help their children cope with negative emotions, such as sadness and anger, at age 5, their children were more socially competent with their peers at age 8 (Gottman et al., 1997). Later work isolated other emotional processes such as emotional regulation (McDowell, Kim, O’Neil, and Parke, 2002; Parke, McDowell, Kim, and Leidy, 2006) and knowledge and use of display rules (McDowell and Parke, 2000) that, in turn, are influenced by paternal interaction patterns and are predictive of children’s social acceptance. Other aspects of children’s development that may be influenced by fathers’ arousing and unpredictable play style include risk-taking (Kromelow, Harding, and Touris, 1990; Le Camus, 1995), the capacity to manage unfamiliar situations (Grossmann et al., 2002), and the skill to manage competition (Bourcois, 1997). However, these topics have received less attention than the issue of social competence with peers.

**Attention Regulation**

Closely related to emotional regulatory processes are a distinct but important additional mediator between fathering and child outcomes, namely, attention regulatory abilities. These processes include the ability to attend to relevant cues, sustain attention to refocus attention through such processes as cognitive distraction and cognitive restructuring and other efforts to purposely reduce the level of emotional arousal in stressful situations. Attentional processes organize experience and play a central role in cognitive and social development beginning in early infancy (Rothbart, 2011). It has been proposed that attention regulatory processes serve as a “shuttle” linking emotional regulation and social–cognitive processes because attentional processes organize both cognitions and emotions, and thus influence relationship competence (Katz, Wilson and Gottman, 1999). Using a national longitudinal study (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2008), it was found that both mother and father relationship quality at 54 months predicted children’s ability to sustain attention (using an independent laboratory–based measure) as well as ratings of attentional problems in first grade and, in turn, mediated the links between parenting and higher social skills ratings in first and third grade. Maternal and paternal interactions accounted for unique variance in these outcomes. In summary, the ability to regulate attention is a further important mediating factor through which paternal (and maternal) behavior may influence children’s social competence.

**Cognitive Processes**

In addition to learning to manage emotions in social encounters, children also develop cognitive representations or cognitive scripts that serve as guides to social exchanges with peers. Attachment theorists offer cognitive working models, whereas social and cognitive psychologists have suggested scripts or cognitive maps, as guides for social action. Research within the attachment tradition has found support for Bowlby’s argument that representations vary as a function of child-parent attachment history (working models Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton and Munholland, 2008; Sroufe et al., 2005). For example, children who had been securely attached infants were more likely to represent their family in their drawings in a coherent manner, with a balance between individuality and connection, than children who had been insecurely attached. In turn, securely attached children have better peer relationships (Sroufe et al., 2005).

Research in the social interactional tradition reveals links between parent and child cognitive representations of social relationships and, in turn, their peer relationships (Burks and Parke, 1996;
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McDowell, Parke, and Spitzer, 2002). For example, children of fathers with confrontational strategies and goals for dealing with interpersonal conflict dilemmas were lower in peer competence. In contrast, children of fathers with relational goals were rated higher in social competence by peers and teachers. Similarly, Rah and Parke (2008) found that children who had positive interactions with their fathers in fourth grade had fewer negative goals and strategies for solving interpersonal problems with either their fathers or their peers in fifth grade. In turn, they were more accepted by their peers, which suggests that positive father-child interaction can lead to more constructive social scripts for dealing with peers. Other work suggests that father-child interaction is related to children’s “theory of mind” competence, a clear asset for achieving social skills (LaBounty et al., 2008).

More recently, another cognitive mediator between father behavior and children’s outcomes has received attention, namely, father mattering. This aspect of the parent-child relationship is children’s appraisal of how much they “matter” to their parents (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1979). Beliefs that one is important to one’s parent may give children and adolescents a sense of security in their relatedness and connectedness to others which, in turn, may have important implications for their mental health (Elliot, 2009). In support of this expectation, parental mattering is related to fewer internalizing and externalizing problems, more self-esteem, healthier self-concepts and sense of efficacy, and reduced intrafamilial violence and suicidal ideation in adolescents (e.g., Elliott, Cunningham, Colangelo, and Gelles, 2011; Marshall, 2001, 2004; Wu and Kim, 2009). Suh et al. (2016) explored relations between parental mattering and adolescent mental health in the context of stepfather families (i.e., adolescents living with biological mothers and stepfathers but who also had a nonresidential biological father). Mattering to residential stepfathers or to nonresidential biological fathers was associated with adolescent mental health problems, over and above mattering to mothers. Results showed that mattering to nonresidential biological fathers significantly predicted fewer internalizing problems; mattering to residential stepfathers significantly predicted fewer internalizing and externalizing problems. For teacher-reported externalizing problems specifically, mattering to the two father types interacted such that mattering to either father predicted lower externalizing problems; perceived mattering to the second father did not predict a further reduction in problems. These data suggest that mattering to residential stepfathers and to nonresidential biological fathers is important for adolescent mental health and—for teacher-observed externalizing problems—that a sense of mattering to one father can buffer an adolescent against the potential negative effects of feeling unimportant to the second father (see also Stevenson et al., 2014). Further, it appears that children and adolescents make sense of their relationships with their fathers by forming attributions to explain his behaviors (Finlay et al., 2014) and by engaging in guided cognitive reframing with mothers, fathers, and others (Cookston et al., 2012; Cookston et al., 2015).

Although father involvement in infancy and childhood is quantitatively less than mother involvement, the data suggest that both fathers and mothers have important and possibly unique impacts on their offspring’s social-emotional development. Just as earlier research indicated that quality rather than quantity of mother-child interaction was the important predictor of cognitive and social development, a similar assumption appears to hold for fathers. At the same time, there is a long history of documentation that maternal involvement is related to child outcomes independent of paternal effects (Parke and Buriel, 2006). More interesting is evidence suggesting that mothers’ verbal style of interaction may enhance children’s intellectual development including memory, problem-solving, and language advancement (Bornstein, 2002; Cabrera, Shannon, West, and Brooks-Gunn, 2006) as well as emotional understanding. For example, mothers’ emotional expressiveness is related to children’s understanding of emotions (LaBounty et al., 2008). Perhaps children’s knowledge of internal emotional states—a consequence of maternal labeling of emotions and feeling states during social and caregiving interactions—is learned through mother-child exchanges (Denham, Basset, and Wyatt, 2014).
Remaining Issues and Future Trends for Fathering Scholarship

A number of issues remain to be examined in future research if we are to describe fully the complexities, specify the determinants and processes, and outline the consequences of father-child relationships. These include the choice of the levels of analysis, unit of analysis, the effects of family variation, types of developmental change, the role of secular trends, the need for interdisciplinary perspectives, increased attention to context, and methodological issues.

Levels of Analysis: Beyond Individual Levels Toward Multilevel Models

In spite of calls for recognizing the multiple-levels of influence on fathering, most studies focus on single or, at most, several levels of analysis. However, as this review underscores a wide range of factors from biological to individual, couple, family, community, and culture operate together in determining father behavior. We need more studies that sample across levels of analysis and, in turn, analytic models that begin to reveal the complex mediating and moderating role of factors at these many levels of influence (see Feldman, 2016; Holmes and Huston, 2010).

Unit of Analysis

Current work clearly recognizes the importance of considering fathers from a family systems perspective. However, our conceptual analysis of dyadic and triadic units of analysis is still limited (Barrett and Hinde, 1988; McHale and Lindahl, 2011; Parke, 1988). Considerable progress has been made in describing the behavior of individual interactants (e.g., mother, father, child) within dyadic and to a lesser extent triadic settings, but less progress has been achieved in developing a language for describing interaction in dyadic and triadic terms. However, such terms as “reciprocity,” “synchronicity,” and “co-regulation” are receiving empirical operationalization and evaluation in recent work (e.g., Feldman, 2007). In addition, greater attention needs to be paid to the family as a unit of analysis.

Fathers and Family Variation

An advance of the last decade is recognition of the importance of individual differences in children; one of the next advances will be the recognition of individual differences among families and fathers. Recognition of individual variability across families implies the necessity of expanding sampling procedures. In spite of our greater awareness of family diversity, the range of family types that are studied is still relatively narrow. Although progress has been made in describing fathers and children in different cultures (Shwalb et al., 2013; Roopnarine and Hossain, 2013) and in different ethnic groups and social classes in the United States (Cabrera et al., 2013; Furstenberg, 2014) more detailed description as well as process-oriented work is necessary if we are to achieve an understanding of how cultural beliefs and practices influence fathering behaviors. Finally, recent work on gay and lesbian families has raised provocative issues for fatherhood research. The evidence suggests that children in families of same-gendered parents develop adequately in terms of socioemotional adjustment (Golombok, 2015; Patterson, 2016). As Parke (2013, p. 105) has argued:

Our focus on the gender of the parent may too narrow; instead, it could be helpful to recast the issue and ask whether it is the extent to which exposure to males and/or females is critical or whether it is exposure to the interactive style typically associated with either mother or father that matters.
Perhaps the style of parenting and gender of the parent who enacts the style can be viewed as partially independent. More attention to the kinds of parenting styles evident in same-gendered parental households will help us address the uniqueness of father and mother roles in the family and help provide needed clarity on the important issue of how essential opposite-sex parental dyads are for children’s development (Parke, 2013; Silverstein and Auerbach, 1999).

**Types of Developmental Change**

Moreover, we need to move beyond childhood and examine more closely father relationships with their adult children—if we are to achieve a life-span view of fathering. Although development traditionally has marked change in the individual child, this perspective is too limited, and fathers, as well as children, continue to develop across time (Elder et al., 2015; Parke, 1988). Fathers’ management of a variety of life-course tasks, such as marriage, work, and personal identity, will clearly determine how they will execute parental tasks; in turn, these differences may find expression in measures of father–child interaction. Because developmental shifts in children’s perceptual, cognitive, and social development, in turn, may alter parental attitudes and behaviors and/or the nature of the adults’ own developmentally relevant choices, such as work and family commitment, we need to recognize two developmental trajectories—a child developmental course and an adult developmental sequence. The description of the interplay between these two types of developmental curves is necessary to capture adequately the nature of developmental changes in a father’s role in the family.

**Monitoring Secular Trends**

There is a continuing need to monitor secular trends and to describe their impact on father–child interaction patterns (Furstenberg, 2014). “Family is not a static institution but one that is constantly being re-worked, reshaped, reimagined and reenacted in complex and dynamic ways” (Goldberg, 2010, p. 186). Clearly, a historical perspective on fathers and families is necessary, because changing economic, social, political, and technological changes have real and measurable effects on family organization, form, and functioning. As historical events such as the Great Depression, the Midwest farm crisis of the 1980s, the tragedy of 9/11, and the recent Great Recession illustrate, families are altered by these secular events, and we need to continually monitor their effects. While these events are potential disruptive forces on families, these changes can be viewed as natural experiments that can be useful in evaluating theoretical models of family functioning, coping, and resilience. Secular change is complex and clearly does not affect all individuals equally or all behavior patterns to the same extent. In fact, it is a serious oversimplification to assume that general societal trends can isomorphically be applied across all individual fathers and families. Moreover, better guidelines are necessary to illuminate which aspects of processes within families are most likely to be altered by historical events and which processes are less amenable to change (Parke and Elder, in press).

A variety of technological advances from the new reproductive technologies to new forms of electronic communication continues to play a major role in shaping fathers’ roles. Just as the introduction of television and phones altered family interaction patterns, new advances in communication technologies (i.e., internet, cellphones, instant messaging, video conferencing, social media) are reshaping the ways that families interact. Our understanding of the impact of these new advances on father relationships and processes is limited and lags behind the adoption of these new strategies by families themselves. As families become increasingly geographically dispersed, communication technologies offer new forms of “at-a-distance” contact that can benefit families. Advances such as video conferencing allow “face-to-face” contact with extended family members, such as distant grandparents or other relatives and for fathers who are separated from their children due to mobility,
divorce, military deployment, incarceration, and fragmented immigration patterns. More systematic examination of these issues is needed.

Even more profound is the potential impact of the new reproductive technologies on parenting in general and fathering in particular (Parke, 2013). New reproductive technologies are expanding the ways in which individuals become parents and opening up new possibilities for infertile as well as same-sex couples (Golombok, 2015; Paulson and Sachs, 1999). The implication of these recent advances including in vitro fertilization, sperm and egg donors, and surrogate mothers for our definitions of parenthood, including fatherhood, are only beginning to be explored. Although knowledge about the impact of these alternative pathways to fatherhood on children’s development is limited, to date, the effects on children’s development are generally benign (Golombok, 2015). Increasingly, our definition of fatherhood is becoming divorced from biology and instead is recognized as a socially constructed category.

Methodological Issues

No single methodological strategy will suffice to understand the development of the father’s role in the family. Instead, a wide range of designs and data collection and data analysis strategies is necessary. To date, there is still a paucity of information concerning interrelations across molar and molecular levels of analysis. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that a microanalytic strategy is not always more profitable in terms of describing relationships among interactive partners; in fact, in some cases, ratings may be a more useful approach. A set of guidelines concerning the appropriate level of analysis for different questions would be helpful.

More attention to tasks used for the assessment of the effects of fathers on their children is needed in light of the work of Grossman et al. (2002) and Paquette and colleagues (Flanders et al., 2009, 2010; Paquette, 2004), which suggests that challenging situations may be well suited to uncovering the unique effects of father interaction on children. The continued utilization of similar tasks for mothers and fathers may, in fact, undermine our efforts to better understand the distinctive ways that fathers and mothers influence their children’s development.

To address the important issue of direction of effects in work on the impact of fathers on children and families, experimental strategies are necessary. By experimentally modifying either the type of paternal behavior or level of father involvement, firmer conclusions concerning the causative role that fathers play in modifying their children’s and their wives’ development will be possible. Intervention studies (e.g., Doherty, Erickson, and LaRossa, 2006; Holmes et al., 2013) aimed at modifying fathering behavior provide models for this type of work, and studies (Pruett et al., 2017) that include measures of child, mother, and father development are providing evidence of the impact of changes in fathering behavior on developmental outcomes. Moreover, these experimentally based interventions have clear policy implications by exploring the degree of plasticity of fathering behavior and can serve as a vehicle for evaluation of alternative theoretical views of fatherhood.

An Interdisciplinary Perspective on Fatherhood

In many ways, a psychological approach to fathering has a unique identity, with its focus on intrafamilial processes, such as actor attitudes, cognitions, and beliefs and the dynamic interchanges between and among family members. However, it is unlikely that we can fully understand fathers without recognizing the contributions of other disciplines. Sociologists inform us about issues of ethnicity, class, inequality, and demographic shifts (Edin and Nelson, 2013), anthropologists alert us to cross-cultural variations (Hewlett and Macfarlan, 2010), and economists document shifts in economic opportunities and struggles (Bishai, 2013). Medical professionals provide insights about family illness, disease, and wellness-promoting strategies (Yogman and Garfield, 2016), and legal scholars offer glimpses
into the ways in which families can be helped or hindered by laws and social policies that directly affect families (Sugarman, 2008). Historians remind us that cross-time shifts in family forms, beliefs, and practices are constantly under revision (Pleck, 2004). Beyond these traditional contributors to the study of fathers, some disciplines have not received sufficient attention, namely, architecture and urban design (Parke, 2013). The effects of living in multifamily households or in intergenerational housing on father roles is poorly understood. Our challenge is to examine how innovations in housing arrangements alter various aspects of family life. Father scholars need to better understand how these cross-disciplinary insights modify process-oriented explanations of father functioning. Clearly, solutions to the problems facing contemporary families need scholars and practitioners from many disciplines.

Contextual Issues

Greater attention needs to be paid to the role of context in determining father-child relationships. How do father-child interaction patterns shift between home and laboratory settings and across different types of interaction contexts such as play, teaching, and caregiving? Moreover, it is important to consider the social as well as the physical context. Recognition of the embeddedness of fathers in family contexts is critical, and, in turn, conceptualizing families as embedded in a variety of extrafamilial social settings is important for understanding variation in father functioning (Parke, 2013). The legal system is one of many institutions that affect father functioning as illustrated by the legal issues surrounding custody, adoption, and the regulation of the new reproductive technologies. The family links with educational institutions including schools as centers of academic learning and schools as social service systems (i.e., childcare centers and after-school programs) need more attention. Medical settings and social service providers all play central roles in family life and need more systematic scrutiny, especially in light of the need to make fathers more welcome in these settings. Work contexts have historically received attention beginning with maternal employment issues, but as work patterns have changed, new issues have emerged such as time management, work schedules and stress, and family leave policies for fathers as well as mothers. As intergenerational perspectives become more prevalent, family leave for both parents needs to accommodate not only infants and ill children but also elderly relatives as well because it is likely as family roles shift fathers as well as mothers will be called on to provide elder care. Another topic, fathers and religion, has not yet been fully embraced by our field in spite of some exceptions (e.g., Bollinger and Palkovitz, 2003; Bornstein et al., 2017; Vermeer, 2014). We still do not fully appreciate the myriad ways religious beliefs and practices and religious institutions and leaders play in family life as both moral guides and social supports. Nor are the attitudes, practices, and organization of family life across different religious groups such as Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims, who are becoming increasingly part of contemporary Western culture, fully understood. Clearly, the links among fathers, families, and community institutions continue to merit our attention.

Conclusion

In spite of a relatively brief recent history of serious research devoted to fatherhood, considerable progress has been achieved in our understanding of the paternal role and the impact of fathers on themselves and others. Several conclusions are warranted. First, some modest increases over the past several decades have occurred in the level of father involvement with children. However, not all types of involvement shown have been equally affected, and managerial aspects of family life remain largely a maternal responsibility. Moreover, not all fathers have increased their involvement and the variability in involvement across social class, education and ethnicity needs to continue to be explored. Second, fathers are clearly competent caregivers and playmates in spite of
their limited overall involvement in childcare. Third, stylistic differences in interaction with children especially in play between mothers and fathers continue to be evident in spite of recent shifts toward greater father involvement in children’s daily lives, although some cross-cultural evidence suggests that the paternal physical play style may not be as universal as previously assumed. Fourth, the father role appears less scripted than the mother role, which may account for the variability that characterizes enactments of fathering. Fifth, evidence continues to suggest that fathers impact children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development. However, quality of fathering remains an important determinant of paternal influence on children’s development, and the independent contribution of fathers relative to mothers remains only weakly documented. Sixth, recent evidence suggests that fathering activities alter men’s marital relationships as well as men’s own sense of self and their societal generativity.

The study of father-child relationships has matured in the last several decades and is now a more fully contextualized issue. Fathers in the context of their social relationships both within and beyond the family are increasingly the appropriate point of entry for understanding the issue of both paternal roles and their impact on themselves and others. Because our conceptual paradigms continue to outstrip our empirical understanding, reducing this gap is the challenge of the next decades of research. Children, fathers, and families will benefit from this increased understanding.

References


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