FATHERHOOD IN AMERICA

social work perspectives on a changing society

Carl Mazza, DSW, LMSW
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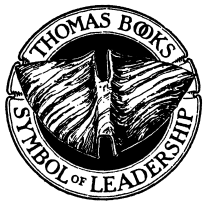

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To the boys I helped raise into men and the men who raised me from a boy.
C.M.

To everyone who truly understands that being a father is the highest calling that a man can have here on earth. I salute you.
A.R.P.

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PREFACE

We often take our own personal lives for granted. Growing up I was blessed with a loving, caring father who spent his life providing for and protecting his family. As a boy and a young man I didn't recognize how fortunate I was; assuming everyone had the same type of father. Then I became a social worker. My first position as a social worker was in child welfare where I worked with children who were abused and neglected. The abuse and neglect was at times so severe it was difficult to comprehend. An example: At that time New York City had emergency foster homes where the City placed children entering care in the middle of the night. I was a foster care-adoption worker and had no experience with the emergency foster homes, however the assigned worker went on vacation and I was asked to cover the homes. I would call the emergency homes in the morning and if they received any new children during the night I was to go to the homes and meet the children and speak to the foster mothers. Later in the day I would talk to NYC's Bureau of Child Welfare and coordinate planning for the children. On Wednesday I call Ms. Jenkins and she tells me she received a four-year-old boy the night before. I go to the home and was greeted by Ms. Jenkin's eighteen-year-old son. He tells me that his mother is giving the boy, Michael, a bath and calls up the stairs to his mother. Ms. Jenkins tells me to come upstairs. I climb the stairs and stand by the open bathroom door. Ms. Jenkins is bent over the bathtub washing Michael's hair. Michael sees me and immediately jumps out of the tub, yells "Daddy!!!" and runs into my arms. I'm self-conscious but Michael buries his head into my chest and I momentarily put my arms around him. I look down unto his back and I see four deep lash marks on his back. I'm shocked, angry, disgusted, and sad all at the same time. How could anyone do this? Why did Michael call me "Daddy?" Michael's story ended up well, his birth mother eventually surrendered him for adoption and he was adopted by his long-term foster family.

Two other events impacted me in terms of my interest in fathers. First, before I was married I was working with juvenile delinquents, most of the

boys had no consistent male figure in their lives. I applied for and became licensed as a foster parent. In those days it was very difficult for single men to become foster parents, questions initially surrounded me as to my motivation (many of which implied negative motivation). I eventually was approved and received my foster son Jose, age 14. Jose stayed with me until he was 21. I consider him my son and believe he considered me his father, but every day was a struggle. As a result of my experience, I have never made a blanket criticism of foster parents. Their job is unbelievably stressful and we as social workers must never forget the struggles they go through in an attempt to provide a loving home.

Second, in 1995 Governor George Pataki ended college programs in prison in New York State. From 1980 through 1995 I was an adjunct professor teaching college courses in a maximum security prison. When the college programs ended, I contacted reentry programs and told them how much I enjoyed teaching in prison and if an opportunity arose to continue to do that I would be available and grateful. The Osborne Association had recently begun a 16-week parenting program to incarcerated fathers and needed a new instructor. I taught the class for the next twelve years. In prison, "headquarters of the deadbeat dads" my classes were filled with men who wanted to be a positive influence in their children's lives. The stereotype of men in prison and "deadbeat dads," evaporated as soon as anyone entered the classroom. These were low-income men (many of whom had no real relationship with their own fathers), who wanted a loving connection with their children, but unsure how to start. I learned so much from them and thankful that they allowed me to be part of their lives.

C.M.

PREFACE

It was a sunny day in the spring of 2003. Despite my title as a "Senior Social Worker," I was less than a year into my job as a case manager coordinating family reunification and independent living services for teenagers in foster care. Although as those who have worked in child protective services (CPS) can attest, there is no such thing as a typical day. However, my plans for the day involved entering case notes, checking in with a few providers and attending one of my kids' individualized education plan (IEP) meetings. However, upon arrival to my office, the green and white carbon copy computer printout from the Child Welfare Information System notified me of my requirement to file a termination of parental rights (TPR) petition to free one of my kids to be adopted within the next three months. Given that this was my first TPR, my supervisor who always proved to be firm, but supportive walked me through the protocol. She directed me to the appropriate form, helped me complete it, and even called our court liaison to let her know that the petition would soon be filed. A few weeks later, the court date was scheduled and I was told that I had one more task to complete in preparation for the upcoming TPR hearing. It was this additional task that changed the course of my professional life. All birth parents had a right to contest TPR petitions and in cases where birth mothers and fathers were not married nor romantically involved, they were each assigned independent attorneys to represent their interests. However, since the agency had no relationship with the birth father, and the mother would not assist us by providing any of his contact information, our agency was compelled to make *reasonable efforts* to contact the father. Inexplicably, our agency's court-approved policy dictated that when we could not contact birth parents (usually fathers) to inform them of their right to contest TPR petitions, reasonable efforts were defined as taking out an ad in a local publication. When I was told that this is what I had to do, I was mortified. After being trained to respect confidentiality and self-determination and to promote social justice and the dignity and worth of all persons, I found it difficult to justify being responsible for doing anything to further stigmatize the clients we served who were already disproportionately low-income people residing in marginalized neighborhoods. However, I

was able to reconcile the ad as a last ditch, shot-in-the-dark attempt at working towards reunification. This was until I realized that rather than purchasing the ad in a widely recognized newspaper, our agency purchased the ad in what could only loosely be described as a newsletter that was printed inside of a house with a printing press in the living room. After ringing the doorbell and dropping off the ad transcript and payment disbursement, it hit me. Our reasonable effort had very little, if anything to do with advocacy or self-determination or reunification. Rather than a reasonable effort to notify birth fathers, our effort was merely window dressing to avoid a lawsuit by giving the appearance of reaching out to engage fathers in the process that would end in them having their legal rights to their children severed. As I pulled into the parking lot of our office, I came to terms with the fact that by following policy, I was complicit in a system of oppression that was responsible for dividing families. This is not to suggest all fathers were viable placement options. In fact, in many cases, fathers were responsible for the abuse and neglect that led to their children being removed and placed into foster care. However, for every father who had an indicated child abuse and neglect allegation, there was another father who was unknown to the agency because neither he, nor his extended family had been systematically engaged or recruited in the case planning activities. In discussing these issues with co-workers, I quickly learned that fathers were not viewed as parents with whom children could be placed or reunified. Instead, the narrative surrounding the fathers of our kids was that they were "deadbeats" and "sperm donors" who were selfish, narcissistic, and too childish themselves to be interested in their children's welfare. I found these characterizations particularly troubling given that immediately preceding the barrage of labels used to describe fathers, many of my co-workers would acknowledge that they had never met their client's birth father. The combination of the policy surrounding reasonable efforts and the informal anti-father culture that not all, but too many of my colleagues subscribed to, led me to conclude that our agency did not value fathers as potential resources capable of contributing to children's development. Instead, in the eyes of our agency, the fathers were themselves problems or obstacles that needed to be neutralized so that children could grow and develop. Upon coming to this conclusion, I decided that my time would be better served if I could position myself to train the next generation of social workers to internalize the notion that all people, even the disproportionately minority, low income and nonresident fathers had value, and the capacity to make meaningful contributions to their families. To be specific, upon coming to this conclusion, I began drafting my personal statement to return to graduate school in hopes of pursuing an academic career.

A.R.P.

INTRODUCTION

THE STATE OF FATHERHOOD IN AMERICA

The structure and composition of American families has been changing since the second half of the twentieth century. Macroeconomic forces such as the disappearance of manufacturing jobs and the steady erosion of the middle class combined with social revolutions including the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation Movements, have contributed to the emergence of family forms beyond the traditional, married male-female nuclear model. Women continue to examine and redefine their familial roles and men are being forced to do the same. As a consequence, the social scripts for men as fathers have expanded to include historically nontraditional activities.

Lamb's (1986) seminal work is often credited with beginning the conversation regarding the changing roles of fathers as it reconceptualized paternal involvement into a multidimensional construct. Since then, both public discourse and social science have increased the amount of attention paid to fathers and their involvement with their children. In contemporary American society, the bar for high quality fathering has been raised and the label of a "good dad" is now reserved for those active in both instrumental and affective parenting (Heilman, Cole, Matos, Hassink, Mincy, & Barker, 2016; Pew Research, 2013) or what Marks & Palkovitz (2004) termed, the new, involved father. However, there are many intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental factors shaping fathers' parenting capacity and the extent to which that capacity is actualized as involvement (Perry & Langley, 2013). It is against this backdrop that we present *Fatherhood in America: Social work perspectives on a changing society,* as a sourcebook for professionals whose work interfaces with fathers, families, and the varied contexts influencing their functioning. Applicable in both classrooms and also in treatment situations, *Fatherhood in America* bridges the gap between research and practice through chapters authored by some of the country's foremost fatherhood scholars, emerging academics offering fresh perspectives, and clinicians sharing keen insights borne out of extensive field experience working with fathers.

In bridging the research-practice divide, *Fatherhood in America* contributes to the literature in multiple fields and provides both primary and supplementary readings in social work, family studies, marriage and family therapy, counseling, sociology, psychology, gender studies, anthropology, cultural and ethnic studies, urban studies, and health. With regard to its layout, *Fatherhood in America* is comprised of five parts. Part I is related to fathers and family composition. This part contains chapters on fathers with infants, fathers with daughters, fathers with sons, single-parent fathers, and adolescent fathers. Part II is dedicated to nonresident fathers. This part contains chapters on never married, non-resident fathers, homeless fathers, and incarcerated fathers. Part III addresses issues of fathering that are biological and beyond. This part contains chapters on foster fathers, adoptive fathers, stepfathers, and gay fathers. Part IV examines cultural dimensions of fatherhood. This part contains chapters on Native American fathers, African American fathers, and Latino fathers. Part V concludes the book in its discussion of fatherhood service delivery. This part contains chapters on conducting needs assessments for organizations working with fathers, measuring fathers' involvement, and initiatives to support fathering.

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FATHERHOOD IN AMERICA

Part I

FATHERS AND FAMILY COMPOSITION

Chapter 1

BECOMING A FATHER IN AMERICA: FATHERS OF INFANTS

KAREN E. MCFADDEN, JACQUELINE D. SHANNON,
MARK LAUTERBACH, AND CATHERINE TAMIS-LEMONDA

Infancy is a critical time in the formation of fatherhood. Research on men's involvement with their children strongly points to the importance of children's first years in determining whether fathers will play a long-term role in their children's lives (Cabrera, Fagan, & Farrie, 2008; Lerman, 1993; Perloff & Buckner, 1996; Shannon, Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, & Lamb, 2009). But what are the expectations and beliefs that frame and shape the fathering role? *Fatherhood in the United States* is somewhat unique in the sense that expectations governing men's roles as fathers vary substantially as a function of their cultural background and other sociodemographic factors. Due to the ethnically diverse population of men and fathers in America, culture and context frames the nature of fathering and shapes the set of expectations that determines what fathers can and should do with respect to their children. Specifically, it is the nexus of culture and contextual factors that sets particular expectations for each father within a cultural milieu. For example, if a father is unemployed and unable to bring financial resources into his infant's home, the implications of such a situation may be entirely different depending on a father's cultural background; in some cultural contexts, financial provisioning is seen as paramount to the fathering role, whereas in others, there is a perception that other resources fathers may provide–such as the potential to provide direct child care–are equally important. In the latter case, the involvement of an unemployed father may be perceived as highly valuable despite his minimal potential to contribute monetary resources to the child's household, whereas in the former case, the involvement of that father may be deemed of lesser value.

Similarly, expectations regarding who fathers are varied across cultures–in some cultural contexts, fathers are expected to be married to the mother of their child in order to fulfill the role of father, whereas in other cultural contexts, sharing a home with their child, or even living apart but regularly spending time with a child is more normative with regards to cultural expectations surrounding the father role. The evidence of such cultural mandates can be found in studies that profile rates of father involvement within and across racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2010; Flanagan & West, 2004; McFadden & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013; McLanahan, Garfinkel, Reichman, & Teitler, 2001).

Though differences in expectations governing the fathering role are often set *within* cultural groups, large-scale trends in America over the last half-century have generated shifts in cultural norms that have had implications for virtually all fathers *across* cultural groups. In particular, changes regarding the maternal role in child-rearing have engendered correspondingly momentous changes in the fathering role for men living in the United States across its history. In the early formative years of America, fathers typically filled a fundamental role as the head and moral center of the family and were highly involved in decisions regarding the rearing of children (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). During the nineteenth century however, the industrial revolution spurred major changes in parental roles, as men largely spent the majority of their time in work outside the home and primarily left care of the home and the rearing of children to mothers. These practical and logistical changes in the typical division of labor in American households engendered changes in cultural expectations surrounding the role of the father, which were subsequently cemented in the paternal archetype of the father as "breadwinner" and mother as caregiver (Amato, 1998; LaRossa, 1997).

Change would come again in the latter half of the twentieth century, however, when the United States witnessed large-scale expansion of workplace opportunities for women and progress in the women's movement. Whereas just over 10 percent of married women with young children participated in the workforce in 1950, a full two-thirds of those women were working outside the home by the end of the twentieth century (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1997). Concurrently, sharp increases in out-of-wedlock childbearing–from less than 5 percent to a full third of all births–suggested that child-rearing and family formation did not necessarily include marriage for many American children and their parents (Heuveline & Timberlake, 2004; Ventura & Bachrach, 2000). Perhaps as a result, gradual but simultaneous redefinition and expansion of fathers' (and mothers') roles also occurred (Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 1999; Thornton, 1989).