

WILEY SERIES ON PERSONALITY PROCESSES

THE ROLE OF THE FATHER IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Second Edition
Completely Revised and Updated

Edited by

MICHAEL E. LAMB

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TO THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER

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Series Preface

This series of books is addressed to behavioral scientists interested in the nature of human personality. Its scope should prove pertinent to personality theorists and researchers as well as to clinicians concerned with applying an understanding of personality processes to the amelioration of emotional difficulties in living. To this end, the series provides a scholarly integration of theoretical formulations, empirical data, and practical recommendations.

Six major aspects of studying and learning about human personality can be designated: personality theory, personality structure and dynamics, personality development, personality assessment, personality change, and personality adjustment. In exploring these aspects of personality, the books in the series discuss a number of distinct but related subject areas: the nature and implications of various theories of personality; personality characteristics that account for consistencies and variations in human behavior; the emergence of personality processes in children and adolescents; the use of interviewing and testing procedures to evaluate individual differences in personality; efforts to modify personality styles through psychotherapy, counseling, behavior therapy, and other methods of influence; and patterns of abnormal personality functioning that impair individual competence.

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Preface

Since the first edition of *The Role of the Father in Child Development* was published in 1976, the paternal role has elicited a great deal of attention from both theorists and researchers. In fact, the interest has been so great that it has become necessary to prepare a revision of the book. The present volume reflects the manner in which the field is currently approached and the ways in which this has changed in recent years. Let me briefly enumerate those changes that seem most important.

A considerable effort has been made in the last few years to explore and understand the ways in which the father's relationships with various members of the family supplement and interact with one another in mediating both direct and indirect influences on child development. Three of the chapters in this anthology reflect a special sensitivity to the fact that many paternal influences may be indirectly mediated through the husband-wife relationship. Pedersen (Chapter 8) focuses exclusively on the interface between the spousal and parent-child relationships, and Parke and Tinsley (Chapter 12) discuss this interface from the perspective of research on early parent-infant interactions. Lewis, Feiring, and Weinraub (Chapter 7) consider direct and indirect influences more generally. The importance of these considerations is also underscored by the number of references to them in other chapters throughout the book.

A second area of widespread concern today has to do with fathers who play nontraditional roles within the family. Although most fathers continue to see themselves as primary breadwinners and their wives as primary caretakers, a small but increasing number of couples are reversing or sharing breadwinning and caretaking roles. In addition, a substantial number of children spend at least part of their childhood without fathers, and a smaller number are raised by single fathers. Biller (Chapters 9 and 14) reviews the extensive research on the effects of father absence and divorce, and several other contributors discuss findings from studies of nontraditional families. Two other chapters, those by Valsiner (Chapter 5) and Katz and Konner (Chapter 4), provide further re-

mindsets that most research has been done on traditional, modern, American families despite the fact that 95 percent of the people in the world are raised in families that differ substantially from this pattern.

Studies of both indirect effects and nontraditional paternal roles have been concerned largely with development in infancy. This tendency is so marked that I have included not just one but two reviews of the research on father–infant relationships. Parke and Tinsley (Chapter 12) emphasize the interactions that occur in the first months of life, whereas Lamb (Chapter 13) emphasizes studies of older infants and their parents.

Advances since 1975 have not been limited to studies of indirect effects, infancy, or nontraditional families. So great has been the interest in father–child relationships, in fact, that all of the chapters in this book have been written especially for this anthology. It is a mark of the field's rapid development that many chapters bear little resemblance to the chapters on the same topics published in the first edition—even when the authors are the same as before. Thanks to the energetic efforts of a coterie of researchers and theorists, we have seen more progress between the publication of the first and second editions than in the preceding decades. We are slowly coming to understand the role of the father in child development.

As before, the book will be of greatest use to professionals, researchers, and graduate students interested in the study of the family and the study of socialization. In addition to the topics already mentioned, the book includes timely syntheses concerned with paternal influences on sex role, moral, and intellectual development, as well as reviews of psychoanalytic theory, paternal behavior among primates, and historical changes in popular portrayals of fathers. The contributors have provided up-to-date summaries of the theories and research findings bearing on their topics. Their integrative reviews are likely to prove invaluable to those planning to enter the area as well as to those who are already active. The heuristic impact of the first edition is demonstrated by the need for a revised edition within several years: there is every reason to expect that the scholarly papers included in the present edition will have a comparable impact.

Finally, I would like to thank Nancy Becker for her fine typing, and Karen Boswell for assistance in the preparation of the index.

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*Salt Lake City, Utah
August 1981*

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CHAPTER 1

Fathers and Child Development: An Integrative Overview

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Taken together, the chapters in this book provide an analysis of current thinking and knowledge concerning paternal contributions to socialization and personality development. Each of the later chapters focuses on a specific perspective or topic; the purpose of this chapter is to provide an integrative review of the entire area. Although I review a variety of diverse perspectives, the resulting synthesis represents my personal views on a sprawling and somewhat undisciplined field of endeavor.

The first edition of this book (Lamb, 1976e) was published at a time of suddenly increased interest in the father-child relationship. This newfound interest was manifest in a flurry of books aimed at the professional and lay markets (e.g., Benson, 1968; Biller, 1971a, 1974d; Biller & Meredith, 1974; Broderick, 1977; Daley, 1978; Dodson, 1974; Gilbert, 1975; Green, 1976; Hamilton, 1977; Lamb, 1976e; Levine, 1976; Lynn, 1974; Pedersen, 1980; Roman & Haddad, 1978; Shedd, 1975; Stafford, 1978; Stevens & Mathews, 1978). Although the spate of activity appears to have died down, the contemporary literature reveals a new maturity: Fathers are now accorded serious attention in textbooks and treatises on socialization; theorists and researchers ponder the patterns of influence within the family rather than independent maternal and paternal "effects"; and parenting manuals are directed to a mixed readership of mothers and fathers. The chapters written for this revised edition reflect the increasing maturity and sophistication of the field.

In the first section of this chapter, I consider possible reasons for the long neglect and deemphasis of father-child relationships and speculate about the source of the renewed interest we are now witnessing. I then turn to the major theoretical frameworks that have guided the interpretation of research findings for several decades (namely, psychoanalysis, attachment theory, Parson's theo-

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ry, and social learning theory). The section concludes with a critique of these four approaches.

In the third section, the focus shifts from theory to empirical endeavors as I review evidence concerning the father–child relationship:—when does it form? What are its salient characteristics? How does it differ from (or appear similar to) the mother–child relationship?

The bulk of published research has been directed toward the issue discussed in the fourth section: the aspects of personality development that fathers appear to influence. Paternal effects on sex role, moral, and intellectual development have all been studied, as have influences on general personality adjustment. The effects of father absence and marital disharmony are then reviewed in the fifth and sixth sections, respectively. Finally, in a summary section, I survey what we know, what we could do better, and what we have yet to investigate. Since there is much that we do not yet know, I attempt to identify issues toward which further investigation might profitably be directed. I also wish to draw attention to the dangers of overspecialization and the related need to appreciate the interdependencies among aspects of development (e.g., cognitive, emotional, social) and among agents of influence (e.g., mothers, fathers, peers). It is important to recognize that the father's role is defined by, and must be seen in the context of, a network of significant relationships within and outside the family. It is also necessary to see continuity within the life cycle and to recognize that the father–infant, father–child, and father–adolescent relationships represent different stages in the evolution of a developing relationship between two individuals.

FATHERHOOD: DISAPPEARANCE AND REDISCOVERY

Cultural presumptions and cultural change probably account for both the devaluation of the paternal role and the recent ascendant interest in it. The industrialization of western societies brought with it a stricter division of labor and roles within the family than had previously existed. Industry demanded that laborers work long fixed hours at central locations that were often far removed from the workers' homes. At least initially, furthermore, it was brawn and endurance they sought, rather than facility and skill. The preference was thus for male workers, whose wives in turn assumed an increasing responsibility for domestic chores and child-rearing. Fathers became unavailable to their children, and the nature of work was such that they could no longer train their young children to help in the way they had helped in agricultural communities. Roles within the family were strictly differentiated very rapidly; mothers changed from having responsibility for early caretaking to responsibility for childrearing, while fathers changed from influential agents of socialization to

economic providers. Katz and Konner (Chapter 4) indicate in their chapter that in nonindustrial cultures fathers retain an important and active role in socialization despite rigidly defined sex roles.

It is interesting that industrialized societies maintained strict distinctions between maternal and paternal roles even after the labor market changed, making it no longer necessary for fathers to work long hours away from home. By this time, fathers had lost their responsibility to train children in the family occupations, be they farming, blacksmithing, or hunting, because the world of work was no longer receptive to (or appropriate for) young apprentices. Within the home, meanwhile, mothers clung to their responsibility for socialization as the number of economically productive tasks they could perform dwindled in the face of urbanization, labor-saving appliances, and consumerism.

Cultural realities alone were not responsible for the emphasis that psychological theorists placed on maternal influences. An influential and disparate group of scholars drawn from anthropology, behavioral biology, comparative psychology, ethology, and a new field, sociobiology, argued that the traditional division of parental roles and responsibilities should not be viewed as accidents of cultural organization. Instead, they argued that these roles were "natural"—that is, they were determined at least in part by biological predispositions and imperatives. The facts that women alone lactate and that males tend to be little involved in childcare throughout mammalian species were viewed as sufficient reason for concluding that women were biologically destined to assume primary responsibility for both caretaking and socialization. Lehrman, a pioneer in research on the biological/hormonal determinants of parental behavior, wrote perceptively that such arguments involved "using what look like scientific considerations to justify our social prejudices" (1974, p. 194). As Lehrman implied, most arguments concerning the biological bases of sex differences in parental behavior drew on evidence concerning the role of hormones in the establishment of maternal behavior in rats (see Lamb, 1975b, for a review); few even acknowledged that the relevance of this evidence was questionable. The variability among rodent species, the stereotypic nature of rodent parenting compared with the complexity of socialization and parenting in humans, the frequent incidence of maternal behavior in nulliparous human males and females, and the absence of data demonstrating that females are biologically designed (lactation excepted) to be exclusive socializers, or indeed that they perform this task more competently (L. Hoffman, 1974; Parke & Sawin, 1977), combine to make the rodent model totally inappropriate (see also Bernal & Richards, 1973). Ford and Beach (1951) pointed out many years ago that the role of hormones in the display of sexual behaviors decreases as one ascends the phylogenetic scale, whereas culturally learned factors increase in importance. There is every reason to believe that, among humans, societal prescriptions are *at least* as important in the regulation of parental as of sexual

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behavior. There is no reason to believe that a specific constellation of hormones is either necessary or sufficient for the elicitation of human parental behavior.

As I have argued elsewhere (Lamb, 1980b; Lamb & Goldberg, 1982), most biological predispositions are biases or tendencies rather than imperatives. The biological tendencies are such that they would be trivial if not supplemented by social forces; they could be reversed readily if they were contradicted rather than reinforced by cultural influences. In fact, however, societies tend to employ mechanisms that capitalize on and exaggerate biologically based tendencies. The resulting behavior patterns or sex differences are the joint product of biological influences and social learning. As in past eras, unfortunately, social scientists remain rather in awe of biological influences.

Thus the psychologists who began studying socialization themselves lived in societies in which mothers "naturally" assumed primary responsibility for parenting while fathers pursued advancement and money outside the home (see, for example, Briffault, 1927; Demos, 1974; Favez-Boutonier, 1955; Gorer, 1948; MacCalman, 1955; Metraux, 1955; Nash, 1965; Sunley, 1955; Westermarck, 1921). The paternal role was widely devalued (Birdwhistell, 1957; Brenton, 1966; Foster, 1964; Kluckhohn, 1949; Rohrer & Edmondson, 1960). It is not surprising that all the major theories focused on maternal influences; nor is it surprising that when parental attitudes or behaviors were of interest, it was mothers who were interviewed or observed. By the late 1960s, however, things began to change as several social scientists had predicted (Bernhardt, 1957; Christopherson, 1956; Moge, 1957; Olsen, 1960). There are several apparent reasons for this.

First, the focus on mother-infant and mother-child relationships became so extreme and imbalanced that researchers were forced to ask whether fathers could legitimately be deemed irrelevant entities in socialization. A second reason for the ascendant interest in both fathers and families was that the traditional family structure itself appeared to be in mortal danger of displacement. The rapidity and extensiveness of recent changes in children's rearing environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1975c, 1979) forced social scientists to reevaluate the presumed strengths and weaknesses of the traditional social structure and to consider the likely consequences of the changes taking place. Unfortunately, social scientists found themselves knowing little about family influences or the father-child relationship, even though it was the father-child relationship that was most frequently disrupted (Bronfenbrenner, 1975c; Clausen, 1966; Herzog & Sudia, 1970, 1973; Wynn, 1964).

Third, it is increasingly apparent that modern fathers do not want to be peripheral figures in the lives and socialization of their children. Recent surveys, such as that described by Sheehy (1979), find that the vast majority of young men want to be integrally involved in relationships with their children. The

women's movement has raised the consciousness of both men and women and has led women to demand that their husbands play a more active role within the family so that they too can pursue their own aspirations outside the home. National surveys conducted in the 1960s found that the husbands of employed women did not spend more time on household and childcare chores than the husbands of full-time mothers, but more recent data indicate that the husbands of working mothers are now more involved (Pleck, 1977, 1979, in press; Feshbach, 1980; Baruch & Barnett, 1979; Gold & Andres, 1978a, 1978b; Oakley, 1972; Hoffman & Nye, 1974; Lamouse, 1969; Haavio-Mannila, 1971; but see Gold, Andres, & Glorieux, 1979). They still leave primary responsibility to their wives, but the trend to greater participation is undeniable (see also Hoffman, 1977). Levine, Klein, and Owen (1967) reported that modern African fathers were also more affectionate and intimate than traditional fathers.

Fourth, although full-time mothers obviously spend more time with their children than working fathers do, there is a tendency to exaggerate the extent of interaction between mothers and young children. The evidence suggests that even when mother and child are in the same room, interaction can be relatively infrequent (Clarke-Stewart, 1973). Goldberg (1972) and Leiderman and Leiderman (1974, 1975, 1977) note that little social interaction takes place in African cultures even when the infant is being carried almost continually by its mother. Much of the time involved in caretaking is taken up by activities (e.g., laundering, food preparation) that do not involve interpersonal interaction (Fitzsimmons & Rowe, 1971; Stone, 1970).

Fifth, students of both cognitive and social development have come to realize that the amount of time adults spend with children is not linearly related—perhaps not related at all—to the amount of influence they have. Empirical and theoretical considerations indicate that the amount of time spent with the parent is a poor predictor of the quality of the infant's relationship with either mother or father (Feldman, 1973, 1974; Pedersen & Robson, 1969; Schaffer & Emerson, 1964). Perhaps the best evidence of this is the fact that daily separations from mothers such as those demanded by daycare attendance do not appear to disrupt the infant-mother attachment (Belsky & Steinberg, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1975a; Caldwell, Wright, Honig, & Tannenbaum, 1970; Doyle, 1975; Doyle & Somers, 1975; Feldman, 1973; Ragozin, 1975; Ramey & Mills, 1975; Ricciuti & Poresky, 1973; Roopnarine & Lamb, 1978; Kagan, Kearsley, & Zelazo, 1978), and there is no reason that the daily separations from a working father need be more disruptive.

The quality of the interaction and of the adult's behavior (Ainsworth et al., 1971, 1974; Bossard & Bell, 1966; Pedersen & Robson, 1969; Schaffer & Emerson, 1964) are far more important than the quantity: A few hours of pleasurable interaction may be much more conducive to the formation of strong and secure attachments than hours of cohabitation with a dissatisfied, har-

passed, or ignoring mother (Birnbaum, 1971; Lamb, Chase-Lansdale, & Owen, 1979; Yarrow, Scott, DeLeeuw, & Heinig, 1962). With fathers as with mothers, there is no necessary correlation between the quantity of time together and the quality of interaction. Even though fathers spend relatively little time with their children, therefore, they may still have a significant impact on the children's development. This realization increased the pressure to study fathers, the "forgotten contributors to child development" (Lamb, 1975a).

Further, as several chapters in this book explain, important influences do not have to be direct (see the chapters by Lewis, Feiring, and Weinraub [Chapter 7], Pedersen [Chapter 8], and Parke and Tinsley [Chapter 12], especially). There exists within the family a network of relationships and influences that make it possible for any one individual (e.g., the father) to influence any other (e.g., the child) by way of the former's relationship with and influence on another family member (e.g., the mother). Thus even when a father interacts rarely with his child and has little direct influence on it, he may still exert a significant influence indirectly.

Finally, there has been a revolution in the way in which children—especially infants—are conceptualized. Whereas theorists once portrayed infants and children as the passive recipients of social influences, they now recognize that children play an active role in eliciting and shaping social interactions and in constructing subjective conceptualizations of the social world. This realization has led social scientists, particularly in the study of infant social development, to wonder whether they have underestimated the capacity of infants to establish formatively significant relationships with persons other than their mothers.

MAJOR THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Psychoanalytic Theory¹

The most influential characterization of the father-child relationship was provided by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which is reviewed more thoroughly by Mächtlinger in Chapter 3. Although Freud acknowledged that infants did become cathected to and identified with both parents (Burlingham, 1973; Freud, 1948, 1950), he stressed that both boys and girls formed their first and most important relationships with their mothers. (This emphasis on the formative significance of the mother-infant relationship represented a late evolution in Freud's thinking. For most of his life, he regarded the Oedipal phase as especially important, and he tended to exaggerate the father's role.)

¹Although Jung (1949) published a book on the father's role, he consistently placed greater emphasis on the mother and on archetypal representations of the father (Von Der Heydt, 1964). Consequently, little will be said about his theory.