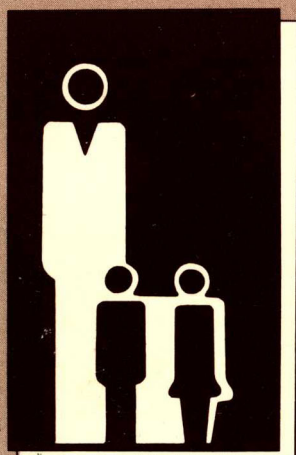
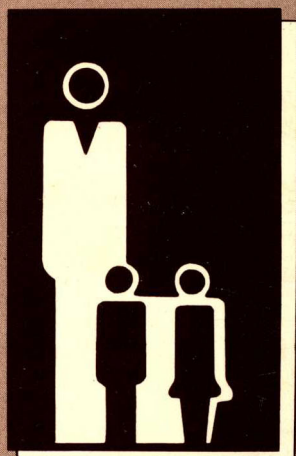
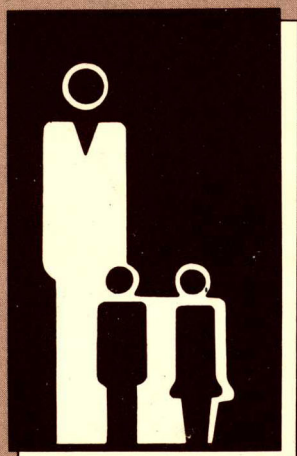


DIMENSIONS OF FATHERHOOD



Shirley M.H. Hanson
Frederick W. Bozett



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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

To the memory of my father, Clifton Charles, and to Robert and Evan, who have become the kind and sensitive young men I had hoped for . . . with love.

—F. W. B.

To the important people in my life who taught me about parenting:

My mother, who demonstrated the importance of family unity, my father, who is the epitome of a loving parent, my husband, who became a caring father, and my children, Gwen and Derek, who kept me humble.

—S. M. H. H.

This book is also dedicated to all nurturing fathers everywhere.

—S. M. H. H.

F. W. B.

Foreword

Fathers are no longer strangers to social scientists. Over the past decade they have been rediscovered, and the study of fathering has assumed a permanent place in social science. Much has been learned about fathers in recent years, and the current volume is a welcome and timely addition to our growing body of knowledge about them.

To begin with, these writings reflect an important shift in how social scientists think about fathers. The shift is part of a general developmental progression followed by any new field of inquiry as the field grows, expands, and matures. Only in the early 1970s did the father emerge as an object worthy of direct study, and these early ventures into the father field were radical departures from previous studies when fathers were studied only through their absence. Moreover, these early studies were modest beginnings and limited in scope. The kinds of questions being asked and the types of theories being used to guide the research were largely derived from earlier studies of mothers. Questions concerning the capabilities of fathers in comparison with mothers and issues of whether or not fathers as well as mothers are objects of attachment for infants dominated this beginning era. To a large degree, the father-child paradigm simply took its place alongside the mother-child paradigm, with little sense of the dynamic interplay among the participants as part of a family system. A disciplinary parochialism characterized this early period as well. Under the influence of development psychology, the main focus was on the father's role in child development or, more correctly, in infant development. Finally, the early studies were characterized by a cultural narrowness. Little attention was given to the diversity of forms that fathering can take in a complex, modern society. Instead, the married, middle-class father dominated the early literature. Clearly only a small portion of the

problem of fathers and fathering was being addressed in these early investigations.

Many things have changed over the past decade in social science in general and in the study of fathers in particular. Fathers are viewed increasingly as being embedded in a set of social systems both within and outside the family. Inside the family, it is recognized that fathers can be understood only by considering their other roles in the family, including spouse and parent. For example, the nature of the husband-wife relationship is an important determinant of the quality of the father-child relationship. This interdependence among family members implies that fathers often affect their children indirectly through the mediation of other family members as well as directly through their **face-to-face interaction with their offspring**. This is clearly recognized by a number of authors in this volume, particularly in the chapter on the transition to fatherhood.

Nor can fathers be understood without recognizing their ties to a variety of formal and informal systems outside the family. A father's relationships with his own parents and other relatives, as well as with friends and neighbors, are important determinants of how the father role is enacted. And the impact of employment outside the home is increasingly recognized as an important but often neglected determinant of fathering as well as mother role enactment. The chapter on dual-career families highlights this issue.

Implicit in the organization of this volume is the editors' endorsement of a **life-span perspective—a viewpoint that has provided a number of new insights into our conceptualization of fathers**. This viewpoint alerts us to the phases of development in adult life and reminds us that the ways in which fathering is implemented varies considerably with the father's point in his own developmental trajectory. Recent findings that older fathers are more involved than younger fathers, probably as a **result of their place in their occupational career, illustrate the importance of this issue**. This viewpoint also alerts us to the importance of intergenerational relationships in the study of fathers. The chapter on grandfathers, for example, is a welcome addition and a reminder that men play multiple father roles throughout the life cycle.

The endorsement of a life-span view, however, does not imply that phases of children's development are unimportant. In fact, this volume sensitizes us not only to the need for considering how fathers change throughout their own life cycle but also to the importance of recognizing that a father's role changes across children's developmental phases as well. As a healthy corrective to the exclusive emphasis on infancy and early childhood, the editors have wisely included chapters on how fathers relate to preschool and school-age children as well as adoles-

cents. And the attention to the ways in which fathers relate to their adult children and to their grandchildren reminds us once again that a developmental perspective continues to be valuable well beyond childhood.

Another facet of a life-span viewpoint is the attention to historical change. Neither fathers nor mothers are insulated from the secular changes that occur in societies over time. This volume reflects a healthy awareness of these shifts; it documents the ways in which fathers' roles have shifted over the past century and correctly notes that those changes are continuing. This perspective leads to a cautious stance about the meaning attached to any descriptive material. The current information about fathers is a portrait of fathers at a particular point in history. Social changes must be monitored on a continuing basis in order to determine their impact on changes in fathers. This volume is a progress report of the fathering role—a time-bound snapshot. Continuing pictures need to be taken across time in order to discover which aspects of fathering behavior are susceptible to secular shifts.

Fathers are defined in multiple ways, and the diversity that characterizes the contemporary scene is evident in this volume. The chapters on fathers with and without custody, as well as the new research on widower fathers, are important contributions. Fathers, like mothers and other agents, are highly variable in their enactment of their roles. This has always been true historically, but only recently have we come to recognize this diversity in the fathering enterprise. Recognition of this diversity leads to research that can document both the differences across fathers as well as the implications of different fathering arrangements on children and families. Just as important, this recognition has helped undermine some of the myths and stereotypes that have guided earlier work on fathers. These explorations into variations in fathering are important, not only as descriptive information about fathering roles in modern society, but also as natural experiments that permit us to examine the impact of naturally occurring alterations in family structure on fathering behavior. Examination of primary fathers who are rearing children as a result of divorce or widowhood, for example, may begin to illuminate the variables that affect single fatherhood.

Nor is the study of fathers any longer the concern of a few disciplines. As this volume reflects, interdisciplinary strategies and perspectives are necessary to fully appreciate the role of fathers. The attention of historical contexts in each chapter reflects the growing awareness of the interdisciplinary character of this topic.

The volume reflects an increasingly accepted assumption; namely, the need for multiple methods in our study of fathers. Rather than assuming that one or another approach is "correct," researchers use

many strategies because different approaches yield different perspectives on the same problem.

The study of fathers has social and policy implications as well. This volume takes this issue seriously, and in each chapter the authors spell out the implications of the research findings for social policy. These are reflected not only in the legal sphere but in the educational and work arenas as well. As a number of the contributors note, just as mothers benefit from instruction, guidance, and support, so, too, can fathers profit from changes in educational institutions that can better prepare them for the tasks of fathering. Similarly, changes in the world of work are needed to accommodate men's changing roles as fathers.

These concerns with intervention and modification illustrate another important discovery of recent years: The plasticity of father behavior. Fathers, as shown by their responsiveness to social changes as well as the success of intervention efforts to modify or change the style or level of father behavior, are clearly malleable. Nor is this malleability limited to a particular point in development. Just as we now know that intervention need not occur in early infancy to be effective, so we realize that fathering behavior can be modified at a variety of points in development.

Finally, this volume is more than a scholarly report of the state of knowledge about fathers; it is also a call for further research on certain topics. Although some chapters are better grounded in theory and empirical data than others, the authors have alerted the readers to these limitations and at the same time focused attention on those areas that most urgently require better documentation. Our awareness of the complexities of fatherhood is becoming evident, even though our data and conceptual advances are still lagging. Provision of a blueprint for future researchers is a valuable service to the field.

In summary, fathers are changing and so is the literature. The present volume is a useful guide to our current knowledge of this area and an interesting glimpse into the future.

—Ross D. Parke
Urbana, Illinois