5981

# RESPONSIBLE FATHERING: AN OVERVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

**William J. Doherty, Ph.D.**
Department of Family Social Science

**Edward F. Kouneski, M.A.**
Department of Family Social Science

**Martha Farrell Erickson, Ph.D.**
Children, Youth, and Family Consortium

**UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**
1985 Buford Ave.
St. Paul, Minnesota 55 108

**Final Report**
**September 1996**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A consensus is emerging that responsible fathering means establishing paternity, being present in the child's life (even if divorced or unmarried), sharing economic support, and being personally involved in the child's life in collaboration with the mother. The research literature on fathering has been long on empirical studies of specific fathering behaviors and notably short on theory and the bigger picture. And while innovative programs to promote better fathering have multiplied in the past decade, they are often not connected to either research or theory. This report summarizes the research on factors that influence fathering and presents a systemic, contextual framework that highlights multiple interacting influences on the father-child relationship: father factors, mother factors, child factors, coparental factors, and broader contextual factors.

A principal finding of this report is that fathering is influenced, even more than mothering, by contextual forces in the family and the community. A father who lacks a good relationship with the mother is at risk to be a nonresponsible father, especially if he does not reside with the child, as is a father who lacks adequate employment and income. On the other hand, this contextual sensitivity means that fathering can change in response to shifts in cultural, economic, institutional, and interpersonal influences.

The principal implication for fathering programs is that these programs should involve a wide range of interventions, reflecting the multiple domains of responsible fathering, the varied residential and marital circumstances of fathers, and the array of personal, relational, and ecological factors that influence men as fathers. In particular, fathering programs should:

a) involve mothers where feasible and, especially for unmarried fathers, families of origin;

b) promote collaborative coparenting inside and outside marriage;

c) emphasize critical transitions such as birth of the child and divorce of the parents;

d) deal with employment, economic issues, and community systems;

e) provide opportunities for fathers to learn from other fathers; and

f) promote the viability of caring, committed, and collaborative marriages.

# RESPONSIBLE FATHERING:

# AN OVERVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

**William J. Doherty, Ph.D.**

**Edward F. Kouneski, M.A.**

**Martha Farrell Erickson, Ph.D.**

For more than a century, American society has engaged in a sometimes contentious debate about what it means to be a responsible parent. Whereas most of the cultural debate about mothers has focused on what, if anything, mothers should do outside the family, the debate about fathers has focused on what fathers should do inside the family. What role should fathers play in the everyday lives of their children, beyond the traditional breadwinner role? How much should they emulate the traditional nurturing activities of mothers, and how much should they represent a masculine sex role model to their children? Is fatherhood in a unique crisis in late twentieth century America (Blankenhorn, 1995; Doherty, in press; Griswold, 1993; LaRossa, in press; Popenoe, 1996)?

The recent upsurge of interest in fathering has generated concern among supporters of women's and mothers' rights that the emphasis on the important role of fathers in families may feed longstanding biases against female-headed single parent families, that services for fathers

might be increased at the expense of services for single mothers, and that the pro-fatherhood discourse might be used by the 'fathers' rights" groups who are challenging custody, child support, and visitation arrangements after divorce. On the other hand, feminist psychologists have recently argued for more emphasis on fathering, suggesting that involved, nurturing fathers will benefit women as well as children (Phares, 1996; Silverstein, 1996). Only an ecologically sensitive approach to parenting, which views the welfare of fathers, mothers, and children as intertwined and interdependent, can avoid a zero-sum approach to parenting in which fathers' gains become mothers' losses.

These cultural debates serve as a backdrop to the social science research on fathering, because researchers are inevitably influenced by the cultural context within which they work (Doherty, Boss, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993). In their recent re-analysis of the historical trends of American fatherhood ideals, Pleck and Pleck (in press) see the emerging fatherhood ideal of the late twentieth century as being that of father as equal coparent. (From 1900-1970, the dominant cultural ideal was the genial dad and sex role model, and from 1830-1900, the distant breadwinner.) Research on fathering, then, has attained prominence in the social sciences during an era of historically high expectations of men's involvement in the everyday lives of their children. Not surprisingly, a good deal of that research has compared levels of fathers' involvement with their children to mothers' involvement, since mothers have become the benchmark for norms for fathering (Day and Mackey, 1989).

This post- 1970s academic and programmatic interest in fathering has been fueled by

the re-appraisal of family roles for women and by unprecedented demographic changes in the American family. In other words, scholarly, professional, and public policy interest in fathering has crystallized during the time that the foundation of traditional fathering--the physically present father who serves as the unique family breadwinner--has been eroding rapidly. With more than half of mothers in the work force, with new marriages breaking up at a 50% rate, and with nearly one-third of births now to single women, the landscape of fathering has been altered substantially in the late twentieth century (Bumpass, 1990; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994a).

Sociological and historical work on fathering makes it clear that fathering (at least beyond insemination) is fundamentally a social construction. Each generation molds its cultural ideal of fathers according to its own time and conditions, and each deals with the inevitable gap between what LaRossa (1988) terms the "culture" of fatherhood and the "conduct" of fathers in families. Sociological and historical analyses also make it clear that fathering cannot be defined in isolation from mothering and mothers' expectations, and from social expectations about childrearing in the society, and that these social expectations have been fairly fluid in the United States from decade to decade in the twentieth century. LaRossa (in press) has demonstrated how the culture of fatherhood and the conduct of fathers change course from decade to decade as social and political conditions change.

In addition to this historical and social constructivist perspective, fathering also lends itselfwell to a systemic framework which views fathering not primarily as a characteristic or

behavioral set of individual men, or even as a dyadic characteristic of a father-child relationship, but as a multilateral process involving fathers, mothers, children, extended family, and the broader community and its cultures and institutions. Fathering is a product of the meanings, beliefs, motivations, attitudes, and behaviors of all these stakeholders in the lives of children. Indeed, this report will suggest that fathering may be more sensitive than mothering to contextual forces, forces which currently create more obstacles than bridges for fathers but which could potentially be turned in a more supportive direction.

With these historical, social constructionist, and, systemic perspectives as a backdrop, this report will: a) examine the concept of "responsible fathering," b) summarize findings from the major areas of research on responsible fathering, c) offer a conceptual framework to guide future research and program development, and d) describe implications for programs to promote responsible fathering. Because of the vastness of the literature on fathering and the presence of a number of recent and forthcoming reviews, the review of the literature in this report will be selective rather than comprehensive, focusing on major recent work and pointing out continuing gaps in the literature such as cultural issues in fathering. The goal is one of synthesis rather than comprehensive documentation.

## Responsible Fathering

The use of the term "responsible fathering" reflects a recent shift among academics and professionals away from value free language toward a more explicit value advocacy approach. "Responsible" suggests an "ought," a set of desired norms for evaluating fathers' behavior.

The term also conveys a moral meaning (right and wrong), since it suggests that some fathering could be judged "irresponsible" or "nonresponsible." The willingness to use explicitly valuing and moral terms reflects a change in the social climate among academics, professionals, and policy makers, who until recently embraced the traditional notion that social science, social policy, and social programs could be value free. In the late twentieth century, there is more appreciation of the inevitability of value and moral positions being part of social science and social interventions, and a greater willingness to be explicit about value positions so that they can be openly debated and their influence on social science and policy can be made clear rather than being covert (Doherty, 1995a; Wolfe, 1989). Indeed, there has always been a strong but implicit value advocacy undercurrent in fathering research, with much of it conducted by men and women with interests in promoting more committed and nurturing involvement by men in their children's lives. Similarly, there has always been a moral undertone to the focus on fathers' deficits that has characterized much of the literature on absent, "deadbeat," and emotionally uninvolved fathers (Doherty, 1990).

Now the value advocacy approach has become more explicit (Dollahite, Hawkins & Brotherson, in press). But with explicitness comes the need for clarity about how one defines responsible fathering. James Levine and Edward Pitt (1995) have made an important start in their delineation of what they mean by responsible fathering. They write:

A man who behaves responsibly towards his child does the following:

- He waits to make a baby until he is prepared emotionally and financially to

support his child.

- He establishes his legal paternity if and when he does make a baby.

- He actively shares with the child's mother in the continuing emotional and physical care of their child, from pregnancy onwards.

- He shares with the child's mother in the continuing financial support of their child, from pregnancy onwards.

Levine and Pitt's (1995:) elements of responsible fathering have the advantage of referring to both resident and nonresident fathers, a reflection of the diversity of fathers' situations. The authors also assert that commitment to this ethic of responsible fatherhood extends beyond the father to the mother, to professionals who work with families, and to social institutions entrusted with supporting families. We employ Levine and Pitt's definition in this report, but narrow our scope to men who are already fathers; we do not address the issue of postponing fatherhood.

The developmental backdrop for the discussion of fathering reflects children's needs for predictability, nurturance, and appropriate limit setting from fathers and mothers, as well as for economic security and a cooperative, preferably loving relationship between their parents (Hetherington & Parke, 1993). Furthermore, children's specific needs vary by their developmental stage, with higher levels of physical caregiving by parents required during infancy and greater levels of parental conflict management skills when children become adolescents. Although this report does not review the literature on the effects of active

fathering on children, an assumption behind this report, and a value stance, is that children need and deserve active, involved fathers throughout their childhood and adolescence. The prime justification for promoting responsible fathering is the needs of children.

## Major Areas of Research on Responsible Fathering

The major areas of research on responsible fathering reflect the domains outlined by Levine and Pitt (1995), with the addition of differential attention to fathers inside and outside the home with the child. These domains can be categorized as follows: a) establishing legal paternity; b) nonresidential fathers' presence versus absence; c) nonresidential fathers' economic support for their children; and d) residential fathers' level of involvement with their children. There are not many theoretical models or research studies that cross over between residential and nonresidential fathers. offering such a model is one of the goals of this report. The review of literature, however, will be organized by the four research traditions delineated above. In order to delimit the review, we focus on biological fathers and not stepfathers, adoptive fathers, or father surrogates-groups deserving considerably more research and programmatic attention.

Fathers and Legal Paternity

Declaring legally that one is a father is the *sine qua non* of responsible fathering. With legal paternity comes a variety of economic, social, and psychological benefits to the child, and some degree of protection of the father's rights. Tangible benefits include health care benefits if the father is employed, social security benefits, mandated child support benefits, and Armed

Forces benefits if the father is in the military. They also include the intangible benefit of knowing one's biological heritage and having a clearer sense of social identity (Wattenberg, 1993).

Unfortunately, only about one-third of nonmarital births in the United States are followed by paternity adjudication (Adams, Landsbergen & Hecht, 1994). There is limited research on the reasons, but they appear to involve lack of information about the benefits of legal paternity, the dynamics of the couple relationship, opposition from mothers, cultural issues, social policy barriers, and low priority actions on the part of social institutions (Anderson, 1993; Wattenberg, 1993). Wattenberg (1993), in a study of new unmarried parents, documented the faulty and incomplete information the young couples had. Nor were they informed by health personnel or social service personnel, who themselves had major knowledge gaps about the advantages of paternity determination. What's more, current institutional practices encourage unmarried fathers in welfare families to remain "underground' because the state generally keeps a substantial portion of the child support the father pays; if he does not declare paternity, any informal, under-the-table payments he makes go directly to the mother and child (Achatz & MacAllum, 1994).

Anderson ( 1993) and Wattenberg ( 1993) have also explored the ambivalence of the mother and father themselves about establishing paternity. Young fathers sometimes feel tricked and trapped by the mother, and the mother may feel both protective of the father (not wanting him to be harassed by authorities) and reluctant to tie herself to him in the future.

Extended family on both sides may have mixed feelings about legal paternity and father involvement. Social service personnel too have been found to have the same ambivalence and reluctance to encourage the mother and father to establish paternity. Recently, however, federally-mandated reforms have required states to implement programs for paternity acknowledgment. The results thus far have been mixed: Paternity establishment rates have increased, but paternity is still not acknowledged in the majority of cases, for reasons cited in prior studies (Sorenson & Turner, 1996).

The available research on the process of establishing legal paternity supports an ecological model that emphasizes how contextual forces in the community combine with mother-father relationship factors and individual father factors to create a situation where too many fathers stumble on the first step in responsible fathering.

Father Presence Versus Absence

After the declaration of paternity, the bedrock of fathering is presence in the child's life. The two major structural threats to fathers' presence are nonmarital childbearing and divorce. In 1993, 6.3 million children (9% of all children) were living with a single parent who had never married, up from 243,000 in 1960 (.4% of all children). In terms of percentages of all births, nonmarital births have risen from 4% of births in 1940 to 3 1% in 1993, with the biggest increases occurring in the 1970s and 1980s. The nonmarital birth rate for women over age 20 has increased substantially since the late 1970s. For teenagers, although the overall birth rate has actually remained steady for decades, the decision to not marry has led to a dramatic

increase in the nonmarital birth rate (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1995).

In nearly all cases, children born outside of marriage reside with their mothers. If fathers do not live with the mother and child, their presence in the child's life is frequently marginal, and even when active for a time, tends to be fragile over time. Until recently, studies in this area have been hampered by small, non-representative samples. Lerman (1993), using data from a nationally representative group of over 600 unwed fathers, found that about three-fourths of young fathers who diid not reside with their children at birth never lived in the same household with them. About 50% of these fathers visited their child once a week, but about 20% never visited or visited once a year. The pattern over time was towards less contact as the children got older. There were racial differences in these findings, however, with African American unmarried fathers being more likely to live close to their children and see them more frequently than were white and Hispanic fathers. The figures for fathers who rarely or never visited their children were as follows: African-American (12%), Hispanic (30%), and White (37%). A.&an-American unmarried fathers also had a slightly higher frequency of support payments (Lerman, 1993).

A number of qualitative studies have documented how mothers and grandmothers serve as gatekeepers for the father's presence in the child's life, and how institutional practices create barriers, particularly for young fathers (Allen & Doherty, 1995; Wattenberg, 1993). Many of these fathers relinquish involvement, and many who try to stay involved face strong structural and relationship barriers.

Overall, there appears to be a strong overall negative effect of nonmarital fathering on the father-child bond. Furstenberg and Harris (1993), reporting on their 20-year follow up of new unmarried parents among African Americans in Baltimore (a group who were generally representative of African American unmarried parents nationally) found that only 13% of the young adults reported a strong bond with their biological father if he had not lived with them. The figure was 50% for fathers who lived with the child. These investigators also examined bonds with stepfathers and other male figures in the child's life. Here too the findings were sobering: "Taking all these father figures into account, just 1 percent of the children had a strong relationship with two or more fathers; 30% reported a strong tie with at least one; and 69% had no father figure to whom they were highly attached" (Furstenberg & Harris, 1993, p. 126). Note that this study focused on the quality of father-child bonds among young adult children, not the frequency of contact.

In more than 25% of nonmarital births, although the parents are not married, they are cohabiting (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1995). In these cases, fathers are much more present in their children's lives. However, studies indicate that cohabiting couples have high breakup rates, and those who go on to marry have higher divorce rates (Bumpass, Sweet & Cherlin, 1991; DeMaris & Rao, 1992). Therefore, even when the father lives with the mother of the child, his ongoing presence in the child's life is often fragile.

While the number of nonmarital births has been increasing, an even greater number of children (6.6 million) live with a single parent subsequent to divorce (U.S. Bureau of the

Census, 1994b). In about 90% of cases, these children reside with their mothers. Research has

documented a decliig presence of noncustodial fathers over the years after a divorce. One

national study of school age children found that, two years after a divorce, about half had not

seen their father for a year (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985). A more recent study, using 1990

data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation, reported that about one-third of

divorced fathers did not spend time with their children in the previous year (Nord & Zill, 1996).

In general, although father involvement after divorce seems to be increasing and some fathers

are quite involved with their children after a divorce, including the 10% who are custodial

parents, the predominant pattern is one of gradual withdrawal from their children's lives

(Amato & Rezac, 1994; Kelly, 1996; Seltzer, 1991).

The sequelae of divorce for the quality of father-child relations is also quite sobering.

Zill, Morrison & Coiro (1993) followed a large national sample of children and parents through

the young adulthood of the children. After adjusting for a variety of demographic factors and

vocabulary test scores, the authors found increasing alienation of divorced fathers from their

children, as measured by the children's descriptions of these relationships. Among 18-22 year

olds, 65% of those whose parents had divorced reported a poor relationship with their father,

as compared to 29% of those whose parents had not divorced. The data also showed poorer

relationships with mothers after divorce, but the effect for fathers was stronger. Remarriage of

one of the parents made things worse; 70% of children of divorce and remarriage reported a

poor relationship with their father.

Much of the research on fathers' involvement with their children **after** divorce has focused on the outcome of children's well being.  Although some studies have found that higher levels of father involvement were associated with greater psychological adjustment among children, other studies, especially those with nationally representative samples, have failed to support that conclusion (Guidubaldi, Cleminshaw, Perry, Nastasi, **&** Lightel, 1986; Hetherington, Cox, **&** Cox, 1982; Furstenberg, Morgan, **&** Allison, 1987; Kalter, Kloner, Schreier, **& Okla,** 1989).   A number of scholars who report no effects for father involvement have suggested that, while contact with both parents is desirable in principle, the benefits of father involvement for the child may be **neutralized** when there is significant coparental conflict. That is, when there is a good deal of inter-parental conflict, higher contact with the father might create additional strains on the child, strains which offset the advantages of seeing the father more fkquently (Hetherington et al., 1982).

Amato and **Rezac** (1994) tested this hypothesis directly with data **from** the National Survey of Families and Households.  They found that higher levels of nonresidential parent involvement (mostly fathers), as measured by **frequency** of contacts, was associated with less problem behavior in children only in the presence of low inter-parental conflict.  In other words, when the parents got along well, high contact of fathers with their children had positive behavioral outcomes. When the parents had more serious conflict, however, high contact between father and child was associated with worse behavioral outcomes.  This finding, which was statistically significant for boys but fell short of significance for girls, supports the

importance of a systemic and contextual model for fathering, rather than a dyadic model that focuses only on the father-child relationship.

Recent analyses of national data by Nord and Zill(1996) also sheds light on the complexities of nonresidential father involvement. They found that joint custody and voluntary visitation agreements were associated with better health among adolescents than were sole custody and court ordered agreements. Generally, while more contact with the nonresident father was associated with better reports of health, the status of the parents' divorce agreements was an important moderating factor.

Overall, it appears that there are many barriers to father presence outside of a marital context. Residential status alone, of course, cannot account for this situation. Although there is a dearth of studies in this area, noncustodial mothers appear to do a better job of maintaining presence in their children's lives. For instance, more noncustodial mothers than fathers live in the same state as their children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995) and have more contact with their children than noncustodial fathers do (Amato & Rezac, 1994). It appears that there are personal, relational, cultural, and institutional barriers specific to fathering that inhibit father presence in the lives of children whom they do not live with.

Fathers' Payment of Child Support

For many policy specialists, the principal concern with fathering outside of marriage lies with the payment of child support. The term "deadbeat dad" was coined to communicate moral indignation at the number of fathers who do not contribute to their children's economic

well being after a divorce. The research data are clear and consistent on the subject. According to a report on child support by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1995), only 48% of mothers who are awarded child support by the courts receive the full amount due. The remainder are divided more or less equally between those who receive partial payment and those receiving nothing. Furthermore, other research has found that the amounts awarded and paid are not adequate to support a child, given mothers' often low incomes, even if the full amounts are forthcoming (Rettig, Christensen, & Dahl, 1991).

This economic struggle is even more common for nonmarital childbearing than for postdivorce situations, especially when the fathers have lost contact with their children (Lerman, 1993). In 1993, 38% of children living with divorced mothers but 66% of those living with never-married mothers were living below the poverty line, as compared to 10.6% of children living in two-parent families (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994b). Only 27 percent of never-married custodial mothers have a child support award (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). Since many children born to never-married parents have not had legal paternity established, the prospects of establishing awards for these children are limited.

Researchers have examined factors in nonpayment of child support by fathers. One important predictor is having joint custody and/or visitation privileges; those with these arrangements pay all or part of the payment more often than those who do not (79% versus 56%) (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). When asked about their lack of economic support, many fathers point to resentment towards mothers for misusing the funds and for withholding

the children from the father (Furstenberg, Sherwood, & Sullivan, 1992; Kurdek, 1986).

Indeed, studies have documented that more frequent contact is associated with more child

support (Seltzer, 199 1). Similarly, a tug of war over visitation and other contacts with children

is associated with lower child support payments (Dudley, 1991; Seltzer, Schaeffer, & Charng,

1989).

Researchers and policy makers have tended to assume that failures of noncustodial

parents to provide economic support is primarily a problem specific to fathers. Absent studies

of noncustodial mothers' child support, many assumed that noncustodial mothers would be

better payers of child support in the same way they maintain more contact with their

nonresidential children. This appears not to be the case. The most recent U.S. Bureau of the

Census (1995) report on child support offered the first national data on child support payments

of noncustodial mothers as well as fathers The findings showed that noncustodial mothers,

like noncustodial fathers, do not pay all the child support that is owed. Custodial fathers

receive about 53 percent of the child support owed, and custodial mothers receive about 68

percent. Slightly more than half of the noncustodial fathers (52%) and less than half of the

noncustodial mothers (43%) pay all of what they owe. Mothers' non-payment cannot be

dismissed as stemming from their lower incomes than fathers, since child support awards by the

court are partly calibrated to income.

These findings of nonsupport among noncustodial mothers suggest that there is

something in the structure of nonresidential parenting, rather than in the culture of fatherhood,

which is the principal inhibitor of economic support for children outside of marriage. Structural aspects of nonresidential parenting that may inhibit economic support might include having to send funds to an ex-spouse or ex-partner, having to provide economic support in the absence of day-to-day contact with one's children, and having no influence over how child support funds are spent. Naturally, since there are far more noncustodial fathers than noncustodial mothers, the greater social and policy problem is lack of paternal support. But the solutions should reflect the possibility that there are inherent diiculties in paying money to an ex-spouse or ex-partner when not living with and not having daily contact with one's children.

Residential Father Involvement with Children

A striking aspect of research on father involvement with the residential children has been its emphasis not on the traditional father responsibility of economic support, but on the father's face-to-face interaction with his child in the family setting. However, it is clear that the quality of fathers' interactions with their children is tied to the father's success, real or perceived, as a breadwinner. The classic studies documenting this phenomenon are Glen Elder's and colleagues reports on the effects of unemployment during the Great Depression on the quality of father-child relations for men who became unemployed or who perceived themselves as less than adequate providers. These men increased quantity of time with their children, but showed decreased parenting quality through more arbitrariness and rejecting behaviors. Elder and his colleagues found that the impact of unemployment on fathering was

greater than for mothering, a finding replicated by other studies as well (Elder, Van Nguyen, &

Caspi, 1985; Elder, Liker and Cross, 1984; McLoyd, 1989). Other studies with more recent

cohorts of fathers have shown the same results, and have emphasized that the father's

perception of his financial situation, even more than his actual situation, influenced his fathering

behavior (Harold-Goldsmith, Radin, & Eccles, 1988; LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

It appears that feeling like a failure in the core breadwinning role is associated with

demoralization for fathers, which causes their relationships with their children to deteriorate

(McLoyd, 1989). This phenomenon has particular relevance for African American and other

fathers of color, who often face serious barriers to success in the provider role, with deleterious

consequences for the ability to father (McLoyd, 1990; Taylor, Leashore, & Toliver, 1988). At

a conceptual level, this connection between fathering and providing opportunities demonstrates

the importance of taking an ecological approach to fathering, in which the influences of

contextual factors can be made visible (Allen & Connor, in press).

As for research on the kinds of father involvement inside the home, prior to Michael

Lamb's and Joseph Pleck's influential typology, research on father-child interactions was

dispersed into a variety of content categories such as warmth, control, sex role modeling,

playfulness, and independence training. Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine (1985) introduced

the content free dimensions of paternal engagement (direct caregiving, leisure, or play),

paternal accessibility (availability to the child) and paternal responsibility (knowing what the

child needs and making decisions about how to respond). Subsequently, research began to

18

focus more heavily on the extent of paternal involvement in these three domains (especially the first two, since responsibility proved hard to operationalize). In addition to examining fathers' absolute levels of involvement with their children, researchers also concerned themselves with measuring the proportion of father involvement relative to mother involvement, and with assessing the predictors and child outcomes of diierent levels of paternal involvement with children of different ages.

Lamb and Pleck also introduced an often used model of the determinants of father involvement: motivation, skills, social support, and institutional practices (Lamb, 1987a; Lamb, et al., 1985). They proposed that optimal father involvement will be forthcoming when these four determinants are present.

Recently, the literature on father involvement among residential fathers has been comprehensively reviewed and analyzed by Pleck (ii press) for the third edition of Lamb's classic book The Role of the Father in Child Development. The following summary relies heavily on Pleck's review.

Pleck's (ii press) summary of studies during the 1980s and 1990s indicates that fathers' proportional engagement (relative to mothers) is currently somewhat over 40%, and their accessibility is nearly two-thirds. (This indicates a level of engagement of less than half of mothers' level, with 100% meaning an equal level of involvement with mothers.) These figures are higher than those found in studies during the 1970s and early 1980s--by about one-third for engagement and one-half for accessibility.

As for absolute levels of engagement anti accessibility (as opposed to the proportion relative to mothers), Pleck (ii press) reports that the age of the child and day of the week were important factors in the available studies. For example, McBride and Mills (1993), using a guided interview procedure to determine time of activities, found that paternal engagement time for young children was 2.0-2.8 hours per day, with 1.9 hours for weekdays and 6.5 hours for weekends.  Hours with adolescents tend to be lower, with U.S. studies ranging from .5-1.O hours for weekdays, and 1.4-2.0 hours for Sundays, with more time spent with sons than with daughters.   Accessibility estimates are higher across a number of studies, ranging from 2.8-4.9 hours per day for younger children, and 2.8 hours per day with adolescents (Pleck, in press). Pleck notes that these well documented amounts of time are markedly different than the figure of 12 minutes per day which is often cited in the media.

The best data on paternal accessibility are derived from federal surveys of child care arrangements of employed mothers.   These studies indicate that fathers are a significant source of primary child care when mothers are working outside the home.  They are as common a source as child care centers and family day care homes, with figures in the range of 23% of families with a working mother have a father who serves as the primary parent while the mother works. These figures are up substantially from the 1970s, although recent findings indicate that fathers' involvement as primary caregivers changes in response to the larger U.S. economy and the availability of jobs (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996).

Overall, Pleck (in press) concludes that, in keeping with the shift towards a cultural

ideal of the highly involved, co-equal parent, there is good evidence of increasing engagement, accessibility, and responsibility of fathers in the lives of their children over the past 20 years. However, there remains a large gap between fathers' involvement levels and those of mothers.

Research on child and sociodemographic predictors of residential fathers' involvement may be summarized from Pleck's (in press) review as follows:

a)     fathers tend to be more involved with their sons than their daughters, particularly with older children;

b)     fathers are less involved with older children than younger children, although the decline of father' involvement as children get older is proportionately less than mothers' decline in involvement;

c)     fathers with larger numbers of children contribute proportionately more child involvement, although the research in this area is somewhat mixed;

d)     fathers are more involved with first born than later born children, and with infants born prematurely and who have difficult temperaments-these trends are true for mothers as well; and

e)     fathers' socioeconomic characteristics and race and ethnicity have not been found consistently related to their involvement with their children.

Theory and research on residential fathers' involvement with their children has not explicitly used the framework of "responsible fathering," although this value advocacy position clearly comes through in the literature. Indeed, engagement, accessibility and responsibility are

21

ways to operationalize Levine and Pitt's (1995) notion of responsible fathering as involving

"continuing emotional and physical care of their child."' Unresolved is the issue of the utility of

comparisons between mothers' and fathers' levels of involvement with children. In much of the

literature on fathers, the behavior of mothers is the benchmark for evaluation (Levine, 1993).

This leads to what feminist psychologist Vicky Phares (1996) termed a "matricentric" approach

to parenting research, family therapy, and parent education, in which mothers are considered

the standard parent and fathers are either ignored or studied for how they differ from mothers

or how they neglect or abandon children. What is needed is a systemic, ecological approach to

parenting in which the behaviors and beliefs of children, fathers, and mothers are viewed within

an interdependent web of personal, relational, and community influences.

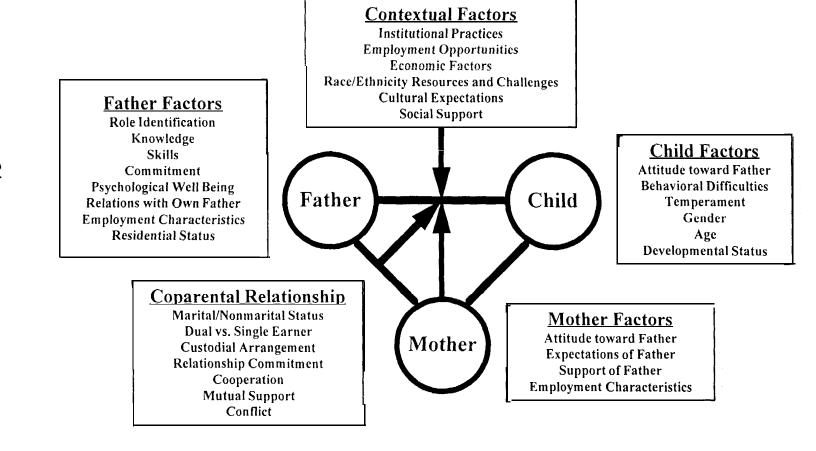## Influences on Fathering: A Conceptual Model

The fathering literature has been long on empirical studies and notably short on theory.

Researchers have mostly adapted concepts from social sciences to fit their particular empirical

research area, but work is beginning on overarching conceptual frameworks to guide research

and program development. In his review of theory in fathering research, Marsiglio (1995)

mentions a) life course theory (which emphasizes how men's experience of fatherhood changes

with life transitions); b) social scripting theory (which emphasizes the cultural messages that

fathers internalize about their role); and c) social identity theory (which focuses on how men

take on the identity of a father in relation to their other social roles). Hawkins, Christiansen,

Sargent, & Hill (1995), Hawkins & Dollahite (in press), and Snarey (1993) have used

Erickson's developmental theory in their work on how fathering can promote generativity among adult men. Other scholars have explored the utility of economic theories to understand fathers' decisions to invest or withdraw from their children (Becker, 199 1).

The most specific conceptual model frequently used in the fatherhood literature is Lamb's and Pleck's four factor model of father involvement, which is not explicitly grounded in a broader theory such as Erickson's theory or social identity theory (see Lamb et. al., 1985). As mentioned previously, Lamb and Pleck proposed that father involvement is determined by the following factors: motivation, skills and self confidence, social support, and institutional practices. These factors may be viewed as additive, building on one another, and interactively, with some being necessary prior to others-for example, motivation beiig necessary for the development of skills. Ihinger-Tallman et al. (1995) proposed an eight-factor model of mediators between father identity and actual involvement after divorce: mother's preferences and beliefs, father's perception of mother's parenting, father's emotional stability, mother's emotional stability, sex of child, coparental relationship, father economic well being, father economic security, and encouragement from others.

Based on the research literature, the systemic ecological orientation described earlier, and prior theoretical work on fathering, we present in Figure 1 a conceptual model of influences on fathering. Unlike prior work, the model is intended to be inclusive of fathering inside or outside of marriage and regardless of co-residence with the child. The focus is on the factors that help create and maintain a father-child bond. The model attempts to transcend the

Figure 1

# Influences on Fatherhood
## A Conceptual Model

**Contextual Factors**
Institutional Practices
Employment Opportunities
Economic Factors
Race/Ethnicity Resources and Challenges
Cultural Expectations
Social Support

**Father Factors**
Role Identification
Knowledge
Skills
Commitment
Psychological Well Being
Relations with Own Father
Employment Characteristics
Residential Status

**Child Factors**
Attitude toward Father
Behavioral Difficulties
Temperament
Gender
Age
Developmental Status

Father

Child

Mother

**Coparental Relationship**
Marital/Nonmarital Status
Dual vs. Single Earner
Custodial Arrangement
Relationship Commitment
Cooperation
Mutual Support
Conflict

**Mother Factors**
Attitude toward Father
Expectations of Father
Support of Father
Employment Characteristics

24

dyadic focus of much traditional child development theory by emphasizing first the child-father-mother triad and then larger systems influences.

The model highlights individual factors in the father, mother, and child; mother-father relationship factors; and larger contextual factors in the environment. Within each of these five domains the model outlines a number of specific factors that can be supported by the research literature. The center of the model is the interacting unit of child, father, and mother, each formulating meanings and enacting behaviors that influence the others. The three are embedded in a broader social context that affects them as individuals and the quality of their relationships.

As we describe the model, we are particularly interested in highlighting factors that especially pertain to fathers, since one of the goals of this report is to guide father-specific research, program development, and public policy. All of the factors in the model affect the mother-child relationship as well, because they are generic to parenting (see Belsky, 1984), but many of them have particular twists for fathers. Because so often theory and research on parenting have been derived from work on mothers, it seems particularly important to illuminate the distinctive influences on fathering. The arrows point to the father-child relationship, in particular to the four domains of responsible fathering covered in this review--paternity, presence; economic support, and involvement. Although the model can depict fathers' indirect influence on their children through their support for the mother, the focus here is on direct father-child interaction and behavior. And although the influences depicted in the

model can also be viewed as influencing the father directly, we prefer to focus on effects on father-child relations since enhancing those relations, and therefore the well being of children, is the ultimate goal of programs for fathers.

The research reviewed for this report supports the notion that father-child relations are more strongly influenced than mother-child relations by three of the dimensions of the model: the coparental relationship, factors in the other parent, and larger contextual factors.

Coparental Relationship

A number of studies have shown that the quality of father-child relations both inside and outside marriage is more strongly correlated with the quality of the wparental relationship than is true for the mother-child relationship (Belsky & Volling, 1987; Cox, Owen, Lewis, & Henderson, 1989; Feldman Nash, & Aschenbrenner, 1983; Levy-Shiff & Israelashvili, 1988). Fathers appear to withdraw from their child when they are not getting along with the mother, whereas mothers do not show a similar level of withdrawal. This is one way to understand the tendency of fathers to remove themselves from their children's lives after a breakup with the mother, especially if they have a negative relationship with the mother (Ahrons & Miller, 1993). As Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991) have asserted, for many men, marriage and parenthood are a "package deal." Or one might say that in American culture, a woman is a mother all of her life, but a man is a father if he has a wife. Furthermore, if he has a wife but does not get along with her, he may be present as a father, but the quality of his relationship with his children is apt to suffer.

One reason that fathering is particularly sensitive to the marital or wparental relationship is that standards and expectations for fathering appear to be more variable than those for mothering. There is more negotiation in families of what fathers will do than what mothers will do, and hence more dependence among fathers on the quality and outcome of those negotiations (Backett, 1987). As Lewis and O'Brien (1987) state, men have a less clear "job description" as fathers than women do as mothers. Therefore, fathers' behavior will be strongly influenced by the meanings and expectations of fathers themselves, as well as mothers, children, extended family, and broader cultures and institutions.

One of the most sensitive areas of research on fathering is the importance of fathers being married to the children's mothers. Since many fathers are not married to the mother, it can seem prejudicial to these men and their children-and perhaps to single parent mothers- to emphasize the importance of marriage. On the other hand, an implication of our review of the research and our conceptual framework is that, for most American fathers, the family environment most supportive of fathering is a caring, committed, and collaborative marriage. This kind of marriage means that the father a) lives with his children, and b) has a good partnership with their mother. These are the two principal intrafamilial determinants of responsible fathering, and they are most likely to be found in a caring, committed, and wllaborative marriage.

Some of the controversy over the role of marriage in responsible fathering can be circumvented by specifying the quality of the marriage as we have done. It is the quality of the

marital process, rather than the legal status, that most affects fathering. One might argue, then,

that being married is not important, because cohabiting wuples could have the same

relationship qualities. While in principle this is true, the research on cohabitation clearly

indicates that cohabitation is a temporary arrangement for most heterosexual couples; they

eventually either marry or break up (Bumpass et al., 1991). We conclude that in practice the

kind of mother-father relationship most conducive to responsible fathering in contemporary

U.S. society is a caring committed, collaborative marriage.

<u>Mother Factors</u>

Among external influences on fathering, the role of the mother has particular salience,

since mothers serve as partners and sometimes as gatekeepers in the father-child relationship,

both inside and outside marriage (De Luccie, 1995) Mother factors in the conceptual model,

of course, interact with the wparental relationship, since the mother's personal feelings about

the father no doubt influence the wparental relationship. But there is also evidence that, even

within satisfactory marital relationships, fathers' involvement with their children, especially

young children, is often contingent on the mother's attitudes towards, expectations of, and

support for the father, as well as by the extent of her involvement in the labor force (De Luccie,

1995; Simons, Whitbeck, Congar, & Melby, 1990). Marsiglio (1991), using the National

Survey of Families and Households data set, found that mothers' characteristics were more

strongly correlated with fathers' involvement than fathers' own characteristics were. Indeed,

studies have shown that many mothers, both inside and outside marriage, are ambivalent about

the fathers' active involvement with their children (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Cowan & Cowan, 1987).  Given the powerful cultural forces that expect absorption by women in their mothering role, it is not surprising that active paternal involvement would threaten some women's identity and sense of control over this central domain of their lives.  The evolution of a social wnsensus on responsible fathering, therefore, will necessarily involve a wnsensus that responsible mothering means supporting the father-child bond.

Contextual Factors

Research reviewed earlier in this report demonstrates the particular vulnerability of fathering to contextual and institutional practices, from the establishment of legal paternity to the greater impact of unemployment on fathering than on mothering.  Lack of income and poor occupational opportunities appear to have a particularly negative effect on fathering (Thomson, Hanson, & McLanahan., 1994).  The prevalence of the abandonment of economic and psychological responsibilities among poor, unemployed men, and among other men who undergo financial and employment crises, is partly a function of the unique vulnerability of fathering to perceived success in the external environment (Jones, 1991; McLoyd, 1989). This analysis suggests that fathering is especially sensitive to changes in economic forces in the work force and marketplace, and to shifts in public policy. It also suggests that fathering suffers disproportionately from negative social forces such as racism which inhibit opportunities in the environment.  McLoyd (1990), in a review and conceptual analysis of economic hardship in African American families, describes how poverty and racism combine to create psychological

distress, which is in turn associated with more negative parenting styles and more diiculty in the wparental relationship.

Our conceptual model also depicts the positive contribution of ethnic and cultural factors to fathering. One aspect of responsible fathering, that of economic support, is nearly universally expected of fathers by their cultures (Iamb, 1987b). LaRossa (ii press), in his historical analysis, has demonstrated how changing cultural expectations in the first part of the twentieth century led to more nurturing father involvement in the United States. Allen & Connor (in press) have examined how role flexibility and wncem for children in the African American community create opportunities for men to become involved in surrogate father relationships with children who lack day-to-day contact with their biological fathers. But unfortunately there has not been much empirical research examining fathering in its cultural context, using representative samples of fathers to explore how cultural meanings and practices influence fathers' beliefs and behaviors.

The final contextual factor in the model is social support, which Belsky (1984) has emphasized in his theoretical model of parenting and which McLoyd (1990) has documented as a crucial factor in diminishing the negative effects of poverty on parenting behavior. Most of the research on social support specifically for fathers, however, has focused on mothers as sources of social support. Pleck (in press) reviewed the limited research on extrafamilial social support for fathering and found the studies skimpy and inconsistent, except for the pattern that highly involved fathers tend to encounter negative attitudes from acquaintances, relatives, and

fellow workers.  Clearly there is need for studies examining the sources and influences of social

support on fathering, particularly the role of other fathers.

From the perspective of both the contextual factors and the mother factors discussed

thus far, fathering can be conceptualized as a more contextually sensitive process than

mothering is. Not that mothering is not also contextually sensitive, but the cultural norms are

stricter on the centrality and endurance of the mother-child dyad, regardless of what is

happening outside that relationship. Father-child relations, on the other hand, are culturally

defined as less dyadic and more multilateral, requiring a threshold of support from inside the

family and from the larger environment.  Undermining from the mother or from a social

institution or system may induce many fathers to retreat from responsible fathering,  unless

their own individual level of commitment to fathering is quite strong.

This point about the ecological sensitivity of fathering is a principal conclusion of this

report.   It suggests that fathering programs and policy initiatives that focus only on fathers will

benefit mainly those fathers who already have a supportive social and economic environment.

Fathers whose context is less supportive-for example, fathers who do not live with their

children, have strained relations with the mother, or are experiencing economic stress-will

need more extensive and multilateral efforts to support their fathering.

Child Factors .

Individual child factors are included in the model for completeness, but the child factors

studied in the research literature do not appear to be as salient as the other dimensions in

influencing fathering. As reviewed earlier, fathers do appear to find it easier to be more

involved with their sons, especially older sons, presumably because they identify with them and

are more comfortable communicating with them (Marsiglio, 199 1). Most of the other child

factors such as age appear to influence mothers equally as much as fathers, although Larson

(1993) and Larson and Richards (1994) have documented how fathers withdraw more fi-om

parent-adolescent conflict than mothers do, More research is especially needed on the

influence of the child's temperament and developmental status on relations with nonresidential

fathers. Similarly, research is needed on how the child's beliefs and meanings about father

involvement influence fathers' and mothers' expectations and behavior.

Father Factors

Father role identification, skills, and commitment are important influences on fathering

(Baruch & Bamett, 1986; Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995; Pleck, in press). These three factors

also appear to be quite variable among fathers, fluctuating from low to high levels along with a

number of interpersonal and contextual factors such as the mother's expectations and the

father's residential status with his children (Marsiglio, 1995; Ihinger-Tallman et al., 1995). And

as mentioned before, in American culture, fathers are given more latitude for commitment to,

identification with, and competence in, their parental role. This latitude brings the price of

confusion among many fathers about how to exercise their roles (Daly, 1995).

The variability of the individual father factors suggests two important implications of

our conceptual model: a) that the positive support from mothers and the larger context can

move men in the direction of more responsible parenting even in the face of modest personal investment; and b) that'strong individual father commitment, knowledge, and skills are likely to be necessary to overcome negative maternal, coparental, and contextual influences. This latter point is similar to Lamb's (1987a) hypothesis that high levels of father motivation can override lack of social support and institutional barriers.

As for the father's own family of origin experiences, some research suggests that the father's relations with his own father may be a factor, either through identifying with his father or compensating for his father's lapses, in contributing to his own role identification, sense of commitment, and self efficacy (Cowan & Cowan 1987; Daly, 1995). Snarey (1993), in an impressive longitudinal study, has documented the role of multigenerational connections between fathers.

The final father factors, psychological well being and employment characteristics, have been studied extensively. Studies examining psychological adjustment and parenting quality consistently show a positive relationship between fathers' (and mothers') psychological well being and their parenting attitudes and skills (Cox et al., 1989; Levy-Shiff & Israelashvili, 1988; Pleck, in press). The research on job loss and economic distress has generally examined declines in psychological well being as mediating factors leading to poorer fathering (Elder et al., 1984; Elder et al., 1985; Jones, 1991). And fathers' work situations have been shown to have mixed relationships with involvement with children. Specific work schedules are not strongly related to involvement, but greater flex tie and other pro-family work setting

practices are associated with more father involvement (Pleck, in press). Indeed, consistent with much other research on fathering, mothers' employment characteristics are more strongly associated with father involvement than father employment characteristics; when mothers are employed, fathers' proportionate share of parenting is greater, although studies are inconsistent about the absolute level of father involvement (Pleck, in press).

The conceptual model outlines the multiple factors that influence fathering, from individual to relational to contextual. The factors can be viewed as additive. For example, low paternal role identification combined with low expectations from the mother would be strongly associated with low father involvement in both residential and nonresidential contexts. Conversely, high parental role identification combined with high expectations from the mother would lead to greater father involvement in any residential context.

The factors in the model can also be viewed as interactive. For example, high role identification and good employment and income might be sufficient to offset low expectations from the mother. Similarly, not living with the child could be offset by the father's strong commitment to his children and the support of the mother. And strong institutional support through public policies could mitigate unmarried fathers' and mothers' reluctance to declare paternity.

Although the conceptual framework is intended to apply to the four domains of responsible fathering covered in this review (paternity, presence, economic support, and involvement), most of the research has focused on one or another of these areas; indeed, the

bulk of the empirical research has been on father involvement. Researchers have tended to assume that economic contextual factors uniquely influence economic support and that father factors uniquely influence father involvement. Rutting a wide range of factors into one model challenges researchers to examine how all the factors might influence all the domains of responsible fathering. We acknowledge, however, that some components of the model are likely to influence some aspects of fathering more than others.

Finally, the model should be seen as depicting a dynamic set of processes rather than a set of linear, deterministic influences. Systemic, ecological models run the risk of reducing the target behavior, in this case responsible fathering, to a contextually determined phenomenon stripped of individual initiative and self-determination. Therefore we want to emphasii the pivotal role of fathers themselves in appropriating or discarding cultural and contextual messages, in formulating a fathering identity and developing fathering skills with their own children, in working out their feelings about their own fathers, and in dealing collaboratively with their children's mother. The social construction of fatherhood is an evolving creation of all stakeholders in the lives of children, and contemporary fathers have a central role in this creation. The active construction of fathering by fathers themselves is not a prominent theme in the research literature, although it is crucial to programs that work with fathers. More qualitative research is needed to explore the kinds of identity development and social negotiation that constitute the experience of fathering in contemporary society.

## Implications for Fathering Programs

This review and conceptual model have a number of implications for the development and evaluation of fathering programs. The overarching implication is that fathering programs should involve a wide range of interventions, reflecting the multifaceted influences on fathering. In fact, many of the best programs already use a systemic, ecological approach. This section delineates a number of specific. implications and recommendations.

Unfortunately, there is a paucity of research evaluating the effectiveness of these programs. Evaluation research on fathering programs .has largely been confined to one-time father education groups, which have been found effective in increasing fathers' involvement and sense of competence with their young children (McBride, 1990, 1991), and to limited interventions to enhance specific fathering behaviors such as infant care (Pfannenstiel & Honig, 199 1). Other evaluations have focused on pilot projects aimed at young unwed fathers and unemployed noncustodial fathers (Achatz & MacCollum, 1994; Bloom & Sherwood, 1994). Absent a solid body of research on multifaceted fathering programs, the recommendations that follow are based on the research literature, our conceptual model, conversations with practitioners and experts in the field, and a review of descriptions of leading fathering programs and consensus strategies for promoting responsible fathering (Levine & Pitt, 1995; Ooms, Cohen and Hutchins, 1995).

A notable effort to organize the implications of research for practice is underway at the National Center on Fathers and Families. Several literature reviews have been completed,

36

along with extensive abstracts of the literature (Arendell, 1996; Davis & Perkins, 1995; Sorenson & Turner, 1996). These reports address the following "core learnings" from the experience of agencies and programs working with fathers: how fathers care for children, the benefits of father presence, the negative effects of unemployment, systemic factors inhibiting father involvement, the need for extra support for coparenting, the developmental needs of young fathers, and intergenerational influences on fathering attitudes and behaviors.

There is an important need for dialogue and mutual education between researchers and practitioners in the fathering area. Practitioners in particular have been at the forefront of emphasizing the effects of unemployment and family-of-origin relationships on fathers, and the importance of peer support. They also understand better than most researchers the subjective experience of men struggling with their fatherhood identity. On the other hand, researchers can offer practitioners a theoretical base for their work, important information about fathering from representative samples of fathers, and evaluation methods to help determine whether policies and programs are helpful to fathers in the community.

Following are the specific programmatic recommendations stemming from this report. Each recommendation will not apply to all programs and every population. For example, an employment dimension is most salient for programs that work with unemployed fathers, and directly involving mothers, while potentialiy useful for all programs, might be especially important for fathers with tenuous relationships with their children's mother. Furthermore, programs can still be useful even if they are not fully comprehensive.

1. <u>Fathering programs should target all the domains of resuonsible fathering that need remediation or enhancement: paternity, presence, economic support, and involvement</u>. Given the potential fragility of father-child bonds outside of marriage or cohabitation with the mother, declaring legal paternity and paying regular child support are likely to be preconditions for a father's ongoing presence and active involvement in his child's life. Absent legal paternity, he is not likely to have institutional support for fathering, and absent providing economic support, he is not likely to have either institutional or maternal support.

2. <u>Fathering programs should involve mothers when feasible</u>. In contemporary families, mothers are the "senior partner" in parenting. For residential tithers, the support, encouragement, and partnership of the mother are likely to be important enhancements to his learning fathering skills and to his ongoing connection with his children. Furthermore, involving a mother actively in a fathering program may offset the potential threat she may perceive to her centrality in parenting. For nonresidential fathers, winning the cooperation of the mother can be the key to his access to his child.

3. <u>Fathering programs should promote the well being of mothers and of the mother-father partnership</u>. Whether inside or outside of marriage, the father-child relationship is bound up with the mother and the mother-father relationship. In addition to involving mothers in promoting responsible fathering, programs should help fathers to actively support mothers. And they should provide vehicles for fathers and mothers to learn the skills of parental partnership both inside and outside marriage and co-residency. Absent such a pro-mother and

38

pro-partnership orientation, fathering programs can create further splintering of male-female

bonds in caring for children.

    4.  <u>Fathering **programs** should take into account the influence of families of origin</u>.

Some studies and much applied experience with fathers suggest that the father's family and the

mother's family may be key influences on fathering. For residential fathers, his parents and

other relatives may undermine his nontraditional efforts at parenting particularly with infants.

For nonresidential fathers, especially unmarried fathers, the acceptance by the mothers' parents

of his fathering role can be crucial. The support of his own parents and other relatives can be

equally crucial for fathers, especially adolescent fathers, in developing a father identity and

learning the skills of fathering. For these fathers in particular, directly involving members of his

family might be important to provide him support.

    5.  <u>Fathering **programs** should **emphasize** critical transition points for fathers and</u>

<u>children.</u>  Pregnancy and childbirth clearly are crucial times in the development of a father's

role identity and for the mobilization of social support for fathering. Similarly, becoming a

father as an adolescent is a critical **life** transition for the new father. The transition from

marital/residential fathering to divorce/nonresidential fathering is another key point for

intervention. In this situation, the father must contend with developing more autonomous

parenting skills, with less frequent contact with his children, with potential strains in the

coparenting relationship, and with institutional practices that **marginalize** him as a father.

Marital separation should be viewed as a high risk transition for fathers and children that merits

immediate and intensive programmatic help. Some counties in the United States are now experimenting with mandated parenting classes for divorcing parents to provide this kind of assistance. Finally, transitions in the lives of children, such as entry into preschool, elementary, middle school and high school,, are optimal times to help fathers (both residential and nonresidential) to understand bow their role changes along with the developmental needs of their children.

6. Fathering programs should involve an employment dirnension. Employed fathers often deal with how to balance work and parenting responsibilities. Unemployed fathers, both in residential and non-residential contexts, are at even greater risk for under-responsible fathering. Unemployed residential fathers are apt to withdraw emotionally from their children and become more punitive. Unemployed nonresidential fathers are at risk of becoming irregular in their contact with their children, of f&g behind in child support payments, of losing parenting support from the mother, and of losing contact completely. Comprehensive fathering programs already involve assistance for unemployed fathers in fmding paid work and, if necessary, developing the skills that successful employment requires. Some fathering programs have noticed that when a nonresidential father becomes more involved with his child, he often becomes more motivated to find employment. This possible effect of fathering programs merits research consideration as an alternative to the traditional viewpoint that nonresidential fathers must have adequate employment before being motivated to have regular contact with their children. For residential fathers, fathering programs should also emphasize

the work/f&y connection and the transition from work to home, both of which are frequent

sources of stress for fathers, mothers, and children.

7. Fathering programs should deal with the father's relation&s with community

systems. Many nonresidential fathers must deal successfully with a variety of systems-courts,

child support enforcement agencies, hospitals or clinics, social service agencies, and schools-in

order to remain responsibly involved with their children.  Comprehensive fathering programs

coach fathers on how to deal with these systems and sometimes actively broker and advocate

for fathers when they face opportunities or encounter problems with systems such as prenatal

clinics, hospitals, schools, and youth programs.

8. Fathering programs should train all staff who work with children and families to

promote responsible fathering.  The matricentric culture of parenting affects most professionals

and paraprofessionals who work with children and families. Until recently, "parent

involvement" has meant "mother involvement." Absent specific training on working with

fathers, staff are apt to either ignore fathers or have inconsistent expectations of them.  This is

especially the case for nonresidential fathers. Successful child and family programs that involve

fathers as active participants have developed staff with high expectations of fathers and good

skills in working with them.   New training models are needed to enhance staff knowledge and

skills to work intensively with fathers and mothers.

9. Fathering programs should involve fathers working with fathers. Although there is

a lack of empirical research on the subject of fathers supporting other fathers, the consistent

experience of fathering programs has been that father-t.o-father support groups are centrally important aspects of their programs. For example, the Parents Fair Share Demonstration Project for unemployed nonresidential fathers found that the peer support component of the program was the glue that held the whole project together. This kind of connection can be grounded conceptually in two aspects of a systemic, contextual model of fathering: the importance of father role identification and relations with their own fathers, and the importance of social support. There may be a kind of support for fathering that only other fathers can provide, just as one can imagine certain support for mothering that only other mothers can provide. This support might be particularly essential in the face of coparental or contextual barriers to fathering.

10. Programs should be created to promote the viability of caring, committed. and collaborative marriage. We expand more on this implication because of its potential controversial nature and the lack of focus on it in most. current fathering programs. All of the previous nine implications were intended for married and unmarried fathers alike, and for residential and nonresidential fathers alike. Responsible fathering is possible inside or outside marriage, and not being married does not remove men's responsibilities to their children. But this report concludes that a caring, committed, and collaborative marriage is the optimal environment in contemporary U.S. society for the father-child relationship.

This conclusion suggests two programmatic initiatives. First, comprehensive programs for married fathers should involve a component of marriage enrichment, which can be done

42

along with parent education.  This could mean, for example, stressing the importance of

maintaining couple connections in the face of the demands of parenting, and of having couple

enjoyment rituals that do not involve the child.  Second, programs should take a long view of

promoting responsible fathering by teaching males and females who are not yet parents the

attitudes and skills necessary to create a caring, committed, and collaborative marriage.  These

programs would have a broader reach than fathering or parenting programs, and would

involve a number of private and public institutions such as schools and religious

communities.  If a high quality marriage is the optimal environment for fathering, and for

the development of children, and if such marriages are threatened in contemporary society,

then fathering programs and other community programs that wish to do primary

prevention of nonresponsible fathering should take on the task of promoting these kinds of

marriages in their communities--while not pulling back from services to the large number

of fathers and children who are not in this situation.

# CONCLUSION

This report has delineated a conceptual model of influences on fathering that can serve as a stimulus for future: research, programming, and policy development. The main premise, which is supported by a variety of studies, is that fathering is uniquely sensitive to contextual influences, both interpersonal and environmental. Fathering is fundamentally a multilateral relationship in addition to a one-to-one relationship. A range of influences including mothers' expectations and behaviors, the quality of the coparental relationship, economic factors, institutional practices, and employment opportunities all have potentially powerful effects on fathering. These contextual factors shape the major domains of responsible fathering discussed in this report: acknowledgment of paternity, willingness to be present and provide economic support, and level of involvement with one's children. When these influences are not supportive of the father-child bond, a man may need high identification with the father role, strong commitment, and good parenting skills to remain a responsible father to his children, especially if he does not live with them.

An encouraging implication of this systemic, contextual analysis is that there are many potential pathways to enhancing the quality of father-child relations. Fathering can potentially be enhanced through programs that help fathers relate to their coparent, that

foster employment and economic opportunities if needed, that change institutional

expectations and practices to better support fathers, and that encourage personal and

economic involvement with their children.

## REFERENCES

Achatz, M., & MacAllum, C. A. (1994). <u>Young unwed fathers: Report from the field.</u> Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

Adams, C.F., Landsbergen, & Hecht, D. (1994). Organizational impediments to paternity establishment and child support. <u>Social Science Review, 72</u>, 109-126.

Ahrons, C.R., & Miller, RB. (1993). The effect of the postdivorce relationship on paternal involvement: A longitudinal analysis. <u>American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 63</u>, 441-450.

Allen, W.D., & Connor, M. (in press). An African American perspective on generative fathering. In A.J. Hawkins & D.C. Dollahite (Eds.), <u>Generative fathering: Beyond deficit perspectives.</u> Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Allen, W.D., & Doherty, W.J. (1996). The responsibilities of fatherhood as perceived by African American teenage fathers. <u>Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services. 77</u>,142-155.

Amato, P.R., & Rejac, S.J. (1994). Contact with nonresident parents, inter-parental conflict, and children's behavior. <u>Journal of Family Issues. 15</u>, 191-207.

Anderson, E. (1993). Sex codes and family life among poor inner-city youths. In R.I. Lerman & T.J. Ooms (Eds.), <u>Young unwed fathers: Changing roles and emerging policies.</u> Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Arendell, T. (1996). Coparenting: A review of the literature. National Center on Fathers and Families.

Backett, K. (1987). The negotiation of fatherhood. In C. Lewis & M. O'Brien (Eds.), <u>Reassessing fatherhood: New observations on fathers and the modem family.</u> Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Baruch, G.K., & Barnett, R.C. (1986). Consequences of fathers' participation in family work: Parent's role strain and well-being. <u>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 5 1</u>,983-

992.

Becker, G.S. (1991). A treatise on the family. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Belsky, J. (1984). The determinants of parenting: A process model. Child Development. 55, 83-96.

Belsky, J. & Volling, B.L. (1987). Mothering, fathering, and marital interaction in the family triad during infancy. In P.W. Berman & F.A Pedersen (Eds.), Men's transitions to parenthood: Longitudinal studies of early family experience, (pp. 37-63). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Blankenhorn, D. (1995). Fatherless America: Confronting our most urgent social problem. New York: Basic Books.

Bloom, D., & Sherwood, K. (1994). Matching opportunities to obligations: Lessons for child support reform from the Parents' Fair Share pilot phase. New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

Bumpass, L.L. (1990). What's happening to the family: Interactions between demographic and institutional change. Demography, 27, 483-498.

Bumpass, L.L., Sweet, J.A., & Cherlin, A. (1991). The role of cohabitation in declining rates of marriage. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 53, 913-927.

Cowan C.P., & Cowan P.A (1987). Men's involvement in parenthood: Identifying the antecedents and understanding the barriers. In P.W. Berman, & F.A Pedersen (Eds.), Men's transitions to parenthood: Longitudinal studies of early family experience, (pp. 145-174). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Cox, M.J., Owen, M.T., Lewis, J.M., & Henderson, V.K. (1989). Marriage, adult adjustment, and early parenting. Child Development. 60, 1015-1024.

Daly, K.J. (1995). Reshaping fatherhood: Finding the models. In W. Marsiglio (Ed.), Fatherhood: Contemporary theory, research and social policy, (pp. 21-40). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Davis, J., & Perkins, W.E. (1995). Fathers care: A review of the literature. Philadelphia: National Center on Fathers and Families.

Day, R.D., & Mackey, W.C. (1989). An alternate standard for evaluating American fathers.

Journal of Family Issues. 10, 401-408.

De Luccie, M.F. (1995). Mothers as gatekeepers: A model of maternal mediators of father involvement. The Journal of Genetic Psychology, 156, 115-131.

DeMaris, A., & Rao, V. (1992). Premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability in the United States: A reassessment. Journal of Marriage and the Family. 54, 178-190.

Doherty, W.J. (1990). Beyond reactivity and the deficit model of manhood: A commentary on articles by 'Napier, Pittman, and Gottman. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy. 17, 29-32.

Doherty, W. J. (1995a). Soul searching: Why psychotherapy must oromote moral resuonsibilitv. New York: Basic Books.

Doherty, W.J. (in press). The best of times and the worst of times: Fathering as a contested arena of academic discourse. In A.J. Hawkins & D.C. Dollahite (Eds.), Generative fathering: Beyond deficit perspectives. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Doherty, W.J., Boss, P.G., LaRossa, R., Schumm, W.R., & Steinmetz, SK. (1993). Family theories and methods: A contextual approach. In P.G. Boss, W.J. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W.R. Schumm, & S.K. Steinmetz (Eds.), Family theories and methods: A contextual approach. New York: Plenum Press.

Dollahite, D.C., Hawkins, A.J., & Brotherson, S.E. (ii press). Fatherwork: A conceptual ethic of fathering as generative work. In A. J. Hawkins & D.C. Dollahite (Eds.), Generative fathering: Beyond deficit perspectives. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Dudley, J.R. (199 1). Exploring ways to get divorced fathers to comply willingly with child support agreements. Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 14, 12 1 - 13 5.

Elder, G., Liier, J., & Cross, C. (1984). Parent-child behavior in the Great Depression: Life course and intergenerational influences. In P. Baltes & 0. Brim (Eds.), Life span development and behavior, (Vol. 6, pp. 109-158). Orlando, FL: Academic Press,

Elder, G., Van Nguyen, T., & Caspi. A. (1985). Linking family hardship to children's lives. Child Development. 56, 361-375.

Feldman, S.S., Nash, S.C., & Aschenbrenner, B.G. (1983). Antecedents of fathering. Child Development, 54, 1628-1636.

Furstenberg, F.S., & Cherlin, AJ. (1991). <u>Divided families: What happens to children when parents part</u>.   Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Furstenberg, F.F., Jr., & Harris, K.M. (1993). When and why fathers matter: Impacts of father involvement on the children of adolescent mothers. In RI. Lerman & T.J. Ooms (Eds.), <u>Young unwed fathers: Changing roles and emerging policies</u>. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Furstenberg, F.F., Jr., Morgan, S.P., & Allison, P.D. (1987). Paternal participation and children's well-being after marital dissolution. <u>American Sociological Review. 52,</u> 695-701.

Furstenberg, F.F., Jr., & Nord, C.W. (1985). Parenting apart: Patterns of childrearing after marital  disruption.  <u>Journal of Marriage and the Family, 47</u>, 893-904.

Furstenberg, F.F., Jr., Sherwood, K.E., & Sullivan M.L. (1992). <u>Caring and paying: What fathers and mothers say about child support</u>. New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

Griswold, RL. (1993). <u>Fatherhood in America</u>. New York: Basic Books.

Guidubaldi, J., Clerninshaw, H.K., Perry, J.D., Nastasi, B.D., & Lightel, J. (1986). The role of selected family environment factors in children's post-divorce adjustment, <u>Family Relations,</u> 35, 141-151.

Harold-Goldsmith, R., Radin, N., & Eccles, J.S. (1988). Objective and subjective reality: The effects of job loss and financial stress on fathering behaviors. <u>Family Perspective. 22</u>, 309-325.

Hawkins, A J., Christiansen, S.L., Sargent, K.P., & Hill, E.J. (1995). Rethinking fathers' involvement in child care. In W. Marsiglio (Ed.), <u>Fatherhood: Contemporary theory, research, and social policy,</u> (pp. 41-56). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Hawkins, AJ., & Dollahite, D.C. (in press). <u>Generative fathering: Beyond deficit perspectives.</u> Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Hetherington, E.M., Cox, M., & Cox, R (1982). Effects of divorce on parents and children. In M. Lamb (Ed.), <u>Nontraditional families: Parenting and child development</u>. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hetherington, E.M., & Parke, R.D. (1993). <u>Child psychology: A contemporary view</u>. New

York: McGraw-Hill

Ihinger-Tallman, M., Pasley, K.., & Buehler, C. (1995). Developing a middle-range theory of father involvement postdivorce. In W. Marsiglio (Ed.), Fatherhood: Contemporary theory, research and social policy, (pp. 57-77). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Jones, L. (1991). Unemployed fathers and their children: Implications for policy and practice. Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 8, 101-116.

Kalter, N., Kloner, A., Schreier, S., & Okla, K. (1989). Predictors of children's postdivorce adjustment. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 59, 605-618.

Kurdek, L.A. (1986). Custodial mothers' perceptions of visitation and payment of child support by noncustodial fathers in families with low and high levels of preseparation inter-parental conflict. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 7, 307-323.

Lamb, M.E. (1987a). Introduction: The emergent American father. In M.E. Lamb (Ed.), The father's role: Cross-cultural perspectives, (pp. 3-25). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Lamb, M.E. (Ed.) (1987b). The father's role: Cross-cultural perspectives. Hillsdale: NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Lamb, M.E., Pleck, J., Charnov, E.L., & Levine, J.A. (1985). Paternal behavior in humans. American Zoologist. 25, 883-894.

LaRossa, R. (1988). Fatherhood and social change. Family Relations. 36, 451-458.

LaRossa, R. (ii press). The modernization of fatherhood: A social and political history. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

LaRossa, R., & Reitzes, D. (1993). Continuity and change in middle class fatherhood: 1925-1939. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 55, 455-468.

Larson, RW. (1993). Finding tie for fatherhood: The emotional ecology of adolescent-father interactions. In S. Shulman, & Collins, W.A. (Eds.), Father-adolescent relations-, (pp. 7-25). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Larson, R.W., & Richards, M.H. (1994). Divergent realities: The emotional lives of mothers, fathers. and adolescents. New York: Basic Books.

Lerman, R.I. (1993). A national profile of young unwed fathers. In R.I. Lerman & T.J. Ooms

(Eds.), Young unwed fathers: Changing roles and emerging policies. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Levine, J.A. (1993). Involving fathers in head start: A framework for public policy and program development. Families in Society, 74, 4-21.

Levine, J.A., & Pitt, E.W. (1995). New expectations: Community strategies for responsible fatherhood. New York: Families and Work Institute.

Levy-Shiff, R, & Israelashvili, R (1988). Antecedents of fathering: Some further exploration. Developmental Psychology, 24, 434-440.

Lewis, C., & O'Brien, M. (1987). Constraints on fathers: Research, theory and clinical practice. In C. Lewis, & M. O'Brien, (Eds.), Reassessing fatherhood: New observations on fathers and the modem family, (pp. 1- 19). London: Sage Publications.

Marsiglio, W. (199 1). Paternal engagement activities with minor children. Journal of Marriage and the Family. 53, 973-986.

Marsiglio, W. (1995). Father's diverse life course patterns and roles: Theory and social interventions. In W. Marsiglio (Ed.), Fatherhood: Contemporary theory, research and social policy, (pp. 78-101). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

McBride, B.A (1990). The effects of a parent education/play group program on father involvement in child rearing. Family Relations. 39, 250-256.

McBride, B.A. (1991). Parent education and support programs for fathers: Outcome effects on paternal involvement. Early Child Development, 67, 73-85.

McBride, B.A., & Mills, G. (1993). A comparison of mother and father involvement with their preschool age children.- Early Childhood Research Quarter, 8, 457-477.

McLoyd, V.C. (1989). Socialization and development in a changing economy: The effects of paternal job loss and income loss on children. American Psychologist, 44, 293-302.

McLoyd, V.C. (1990). The impact of economic hardship on black families and children: Psychological distress, parenting, and socioemotional development. Child Development. 6 1, 3 1 1-346.

Nord, C.W., & Zill, N. (1996). Non-custodial parents' participation in their children's lives: Evidence from the Survey of Income and Program Participation. (Available from the

Department of Health & Human Services, 370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20447.)

Ooms, T., Cohen, E., & Hutchins, J. (1995). Disconnected dads: Strategies for promoting responsible fatherhood. Washington, DC: The Family Impact Seminar.

Pfannenstiel, AE., & Honig, A.. S. (199 1). Prenatal intervention and support for low-income fathers. Infant Mental Health Journal, 12, 103- 115.

Phares, V. (1996). Conducting nonsexist research, prevention, and treatment with fathers and mothers: A Call for change. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 20, 55-77.

Pleck, J.H. (in press). Paternal involvement: Levels, sources, and consequences. In M.E. Lamb (Ed.), The role of the father in child development. edition. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Pleck, E.H., & Pleck, J.H. (in press). Fatherhood ideals in the United States: Historical dimensions. In M.E. Lamb (Ed.), The role of the father in child development. Third edition. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Popenoe, D. (1996). Life without father. New York: Free Press.

Rettig, K.D., Christensen, D.H., & Dahl, C.M. (1991). Impact of child support guidelines on the economic well-being of children. Family Relations. 40, 167- 175.

Seltzer, J.A. (1991). Relationships between fathers and children who live apart: The father's role after separation. Journal of Marriage and the Family. 53, 79-101.

Seltzer, J.A., Schaeffer, N.C., & Chamg, H.W. (1989). Family ties after divorce: The relationship between visiting and paying child support. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 51, 1013-1032.

Silverstein, L.B. (1996). Fathering is a feminist issue. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 20, 3-37.

Simons, R., Whitbeck, L., Congar, R., & Melby, J. (1990). Husband and wife differences in determinants of parenting: A social learning and exchange model of parental behavior. Journal of Marriage and the Family. 52, 375-392.

Snarey, J. (1993). How fathers care for the next generation: A four-decade study. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sorenson, E., & Turner, M. (1996). Barriers in child support policy: A literature review. Philadelphia: National Center on Fathers and Families.

Taylor, R., Leashore, B., & Toliver, S. (1988). An assessment of the provider role as perceived by black males. Family Relations, 37, 426-43 1.

Thomson, E., Hanson, T., & McLanahan, S.S. (1994). Family structure and child well-being: Economic resources versus parent socialization. Social Forces. 73, 22 1-242.

U.S. Bureau of the Census (1994a). Household and family characteristics. Current Population Reports, Series P20-483. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U.S. Bureau of the Census (1994b). The diverse living arrangements of children: Summer. 1991. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U.S. Bureau of the Census (1995). Child support for custodial mothers and fathers: 1991. Current Population Reports, Series P60-187. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U.S. Bureau of the Census (1996). Who's minding our preschoolers? Current Population Reports, Series P70-53. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1995). Report to Congress on out-of-wedlock childbearing. DHHS Pub. No. (PHS) 95-1257-1. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Wattenberg, E. (1993). Paternity actions and young fathers. In R.I. Lerman & T.J. Ooms (Eds.), Young unwed fathers: Changing roles and emerging policies. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Wolfe, A (1989). Whose keener? Social science and moral obligation. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Zill, N., Morrison, D.R., & Coiro, M.J. (1993). Longterm effects of parental divorce on parent-child relationships, adjustment, and achievement in young adulthood. Journal of Family Psychology, 7, 9 1- 103.