

# == Chapter 1 ==

## The Landscape

EXITING the school building on a sunny afternoon, Dwight's eyes find his adorable six-year-old son fidgeting next to his mother, Dwight's wife, as he waits for "daddy time." Dwight, a family man with a steady paycheck, has just completed his interview about working in this alternative school for "problem" kids as a teacher's aide. Beaming an infectious smile, the boy's face glows with joy—the kind that marks a child's attachment to a loving, caring parent. He lunges at his dad to give and get a hug. Clearly, Dwight's conviction to be an involved father is paying huge dividends. In his words:

[My son] needs me as much as I can give. Work is important, I enjoy work, but you know I gotta make sure I take care of my family first. And I need to kinda be all ears to just listen to him, or help with homework, or we going out and play ball, or whatever.

This thirty-six-year-old African American father draws inspiration to be an engaged father from lessons his hardworking father ingrained in him many years ago. Earlier, sitting in his office reminiscing about his "great" childhood, Dwight spoke fondly of his father's imprint.

Being around him and listening to the different stories that he had to tell, it taught me about being respectful and having respect for others as well as myself. And one of his main things was that if you do right no matter what the situation is, if you do right then good things will come to you.

Aside from reaping the long-term benefits of the loving attention he received from his parents and neighbors while growing up in a small neighborhood, this lower-middle-class father realizes that his own work with disadvantaged youth in an alternative school has made an indelible impression on him. Witnessing his students' daily dilemmas, Dwight sees that love and parental time are critical for child development. Dwight is convinced that the kids he teaches receive little, and very poor, parental supervision. Consequently, Dwight is determined to spend lots of quality time with his son. That's why he signed his son up for Cub

Scouts and has faithfully attended the various meetings and events during the past two years.

Dwight is often reminded that many of his students turn to him as a father figure because their own fathers are unsupportive, unavailable, or both. But even though he says that his job is sometimes “stressful” it also

brings tears of joy to your eyes just to be able to step into a child’s life that doesn’t have a father and just show him some of the basic things, just a little time that we have together here, and that carries on for years. . . . Some of ‘em would call me Daddy right now. . . . And to build that relationship with [a] child and to still see them from time to time and see what they’ve grown into, I mean it’s just like being a father.

This story reminds us that fathers in contemporary society have increasingly complex values and desires. In part, they aspire to be acknowledged for all of the successes that mark “good” fatherhood. For decades, “good” fathers have been defined as men who provide for and reside with their spouses and children. Dwight has a stable job with good wages, and he can support his family—this is one measure of a good father. He is also married to his son’s mother. As a member of a committed couple, Dwight represents a role model for his son and for the boys in the alternative school.

Images of “good” fathers have been etched onto the public consciousness through Hollywood movies, documentaries, and news stories and by other means.<sup>1</sup> For decades, policymakers have defined successful fathers as those who are married breadwinners and coresiding with a wife and children.<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Townsend refers to this bundle of elements as the “package deal.”<sup>3</sup> He states that most men in the United States aspire to a related set of experiences, as husbands, worker-providers, homeowners, and fathers. Among these varied dimensions Townsend associates with fathering, emotional closeness and intimacy with their children was the dominant theme that came up in his interviews with middle-class fathers living in northern California. Policymakers assess successful fathers against these yardsticks, with “good” or responsible fathering being equated most clearly with the ability to provide a reasonable paycheck while living with wives and children. The vast majority of fathers, regardless of their economic status, their education, or their marital status, aspire to provide for and reside with their children.

But increasingly, the diverse family landscape of the United States has generated a kaleidoscope of fathering. Identifying the typical father has become more challenging. Men in many different parenting contexts—family men, divorced and remarried fathers, unwed fathers, fathers who work and live apart from their children—have pushed the boundaries of

the basic provide-and-reside definitions of “good” fathering.<sup>4</sup> As Dwight illustrates, men want more out of fatherhood than being a breadwinner or a spouse. Many have worked to redefine “good” fathering to include hands-on care of their children.<sup>5</sup> Men like these embody the “growing spirit among new dads to be accepted, both at home and in the workplace, as whole persons.”<sup>6</sup>

Efforts to redefine fathering in this way have come with costs. Some recent commentators suggest that men are grappling with a “new male mystique”<sup>7</sup>—the male version of the “feminine mystique,”<sup>8</sup> the term coined by Betty Friedan in the early 1960s. Friedan reasoned that assumptions about women’s finding fulfillment in traditional domestic roles created conflict for those who wanted to pursue and psychologically invest their identities in meaningful paid work. Now, traditional assumptions about the father-as-wallet mentality increasingly coexist alongside of and conflict with newer ideals of men participating more actively in family life.<sup>9</sup> Because workplace culture and public policy fail to support men sufficiently in their attempts to balance these competing expectations, more men feel pressure to do it all. Indeed, whereas in 1977 only 35 percent of fathers in dual-earner couples reported work-family conflict, 60 percent of fathers did so in 2008.<sup>10</sup>

What some researchers and popular media have coined “new fatherhood” may not be as modern as we perceive.<sup>11</sup> But the choices that contemporary fathers (and mothers) have made are clear: their visions of successful fathering must include strong, close relationships with their children over the life span. What is striking is that the dual ideal of providing and caring that exemplifies “new fathering” is not just a middle-class vision.<sup>12</sup> Fathers, regardless of income, marital status, or education, value these priorities, although those with good jobs can more readily achieve them. In the United States and in many countries in the world today, high status is often accorded to men who can both provide financially for their children and care for them in close relationships. Some commentators even suggest that nurturance is a core value for cultural definitions of masculinity in many societies.<sup>13</sup> In addition, men and families increasingly sense that fathers’ nurturance is not only beneficial to children and mothers, it is also viewed as enriching men’s own development.

In this book we consider this important shift in the view of “good” fathering: from a focus on material contributions and a presumption of marriage to a focus on relationships that include a close father-child bond, as well as a new style of coparenting in which fathers and mothers negotiate how care is to be provided for their children. The shift to relational engagement, toward nurturance, is relevant for all fathers in contemporary society. We show how our agenda for changing the institution

of fathering is connected to initiatives that promote opportunities for all fathers to nurture their children.

Using an assortment of men's firsthand accounts we've collected over the years, we highlight how practical and cultural forces often complicate men's visions of themselves as fathers and their ability to nurture their children. The examples focus on diverse fathering contexts and constraints, particularly those that deviate from a mainstream model of fatherhood: the biological dad who is heterosexual, married, resident, and working full time. By incorporating a broad sampling of fathering circumstances outside this mainstream vision, we position ourselves to examine shortcomings of fatherhood policy more generally. Our approach also assumes that much can be learned about fathering by studying men who are challenged by atypical fathering circumstances. It may be that the most critical innovations take place in the lives of fathers who use nurturance to transform their roles, thereby altering conventional perceptions of fatherhood in the United States.

Lest one think that this book is primarily about disadvantaged fathers struggling to be involved with their children, our message is relevant to all fathers and to those anticipating fatherhood. The four frames that anchor our analysis—fatherhood as a social arrangement, paths of fathering over time, trust building, and the notion that place matters to how fathers see themselves and interact with their children—touch every father and the families that claim them. In the appendix we describe how our previous theoretical work and our joint assessment of men's stories for this project led us to develop these key frames. The resident father of minor children living in a two-parent household is perhaps only one lapse of infidelity away from being uprooted from his routine of fathering at home. Or, the single man with no immediate thoughts of having children may find himself unexpectedly enthralled with a romantic partner who comes packaged with children from a previous relationship. Or, the middle-class army reservist who has never been away from his children may, once deployed, quickly learn the challenges of fathering from a distance. Or, the successful businessman who operates as the family's sole breadwinner may suddenly find himself an unemployed, anxious father. So even though many of our examples depict fathers outside the mainstream images of fatherhood, common threads of the human, fatherly experience transcend any specific setting.

## **Nurturance**

By no means are we the first scholars to champion the idea that fathers can and should express more nurturing relationships with their children.<sup>14</sup> We embrace the legal scholar Nancy Dowd's recommendation that the

definition of fatherhood be flexible and linked more directly to the fundamental concept of nurturance than is the case in the mainstream vision of fatherhood.<sup>15</sup> We concur with her call for fatherhood to be defined in terms of social qualities so that hands-on caregiving will typically be considered more central to the definition of fatherhood than biological or legal status. Dowd works to change expectations about who fathers are and what they do, and we believe her concept of nurturance reflects the real lives of the men we interviewed and observed in our own research. Thus, this approach does not tie a definition of fatherhood simply to biology, marriage, or financial support. In Dowd's words:

Nurture means care—physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual—gauged by one's conduct and the consequences for children's positive development. It is responsive to the different needs of children at different ages. Thus nurture is not a static conception. It means more than simply doing; it also means the manner in which things are done, and their results for children.<sup>16</sup>

In particular, we stress that care should be viewed as a human experience rather than a woman's responsibility. Men's capacity to care for children will be deepest when they are able to nurture their children's well-being and development in a holistic fashion.

A cultural and policy shift that significantly elevates the relative value of fathers' nurturance compared to financial provisioning would reshape what is known as fathers' conditional commitment to children.<sup>17</sup> For decades, men have linked their participation in fathering to their participation in marriage. In effect, fathers' commitment to their children was contingent on their romantic involvement with the mothers of the children. An emphasis on fathers' nurturance problematizes this commitment, calls it into question. In a society in which fathers competently practice nurturance, there is an unconditional commitment of men to children—a commitment that does not depend on a marital or romantic relationship, but one that depends solely on the quality of the close bonds between fathers and children.<sup>18</sup>

To be a nurturing father a man presumably must recognize some of his child's specific needs. Responsiveness—the degree to which a man recognizes and responds to his child's and the mother's needs—varies and can have implications for the child and family.<sup>19</sup> Although gender norms, power dynamics and partner influences, work schedules, and emotional tradeoffs can affect a father's responsiveness, we suspect that progressive social initiatives could help some men develop this interpersonal skill as well. A more attuned and responsive father is likely to express nurturance in timely, developmentally appropriate, and effective ways.

For most fathers, the decision to become engaged in more intimate, responsive relationships with their children seems to be a personal choice. But fathers' decisions are often shaped by less obvious social, economic, and political circumstances not necessarily under their immediate control.

In figure 1.1 we begin to highlight the policy implications of this larger context by sketching how conventional and more progressive

**Figure 1.1 Transforming Expectations for Current Fathering Policies and Programs**

	Conventional Approach	Progressive Approach
	Breadwinning and Marriage (Material Expectations)	Nurturance (Relational Expectations)
 Provider fathers (family men, married and residential)	Lack of current policies	Nurturance and healthy relationships as direct goals
Nonresident provider fathers	Single targeted policy to secure financial support	Nurturance, financial support, and healthy relationships as direct goals
Nonprovider fathers (unmarried, nonresident fathers, tangential links to jobs) 	Multiple targeted policies to encourage employment and marriage	Nurturance, employment, and healthy relationships as direct goals

Source: Authors' figure.

approaches frame public interest in fathering. Conventional expectations for fathers stress material contributions, and the interventions differ for fathers according to how far removed they are from the traditional notion of the married, coresident father. In the public's eye, men who are clearly good providers, "family men" who are married and live with their kids, have typically been viewed as successful fathers. Although in many countries the idea of new fatherhood has been the driver of new laws and policy initiatives, in the United States a policy "silence" surrounds breadwinning fathers who already live up to cultural expectations as "good" fathers.<sup>20</sup> Existing policies and programs are scarce and too limited in scope.

Increasingly, though, fathers, mothers, and children expect more from family life and the institutions that touch their lives. The cultural narrative surrounding child care still portrays it as largely "women's work," but recent evidence shows that contemporary fathers not only value more involvement with their children, they are also getting more involved.<sup>21</sup> One national survey in 2007 indicates that 59 percent of men and 62 percent of women think that being a father today is more challenging than in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>22</sup> Many resident as well as nonresident fathers are frustrated that they have to choose work over family.

Are there policies that could more readily support these men's efforts to be close to their children? Remarkably, the United States is out of step with most advanced countries around the world in not having a federal policy on parental leave. Elsewhere—in Canada, Germany, and Sweden, to name just three countries—policymakers recognize the need to support paternal caregiving by offering incentives to take time for family relationships.

In contrast, wide-ranging public debates and initiatives in the United States target men who do not fulfill expectations of provision or residence with their families.<sup>23</sup> Reactions emanate from across the political spectrum, varied academic disciplines, activist organizations and social movements,<sup>24</sup> and myriad sources of pop culture. Professionals who direct community-based programs offer their own proposals enriched by their firsthand experience working with men—fathers especially—and families.<sup>25</sup> Researchers for their part have contributed a wide range of empirical analyses to shed light on how fathers might make a difference in children's lives.<sup>26</sup> Conventional strategies for nonresident provider fathers and nonprovider fathers tend to emphasize either a one-size-fits-all policy or multiple policies that stress employment and marriage. Most important, the conventional approach has produced few initiatives that promote nurturance for fathers irrespective of their breadwinning efforts.

The right side of figure 1.1 depicts our proposal for a more progressive approach that highlights the value of nurturance and relational

expectations. To a large extent, expectations about nurturance augment the conventional approach. Ideally, a progressive approach would transform the way fathers, regardless of social class, race/ethnicity, or sexuality, interact with their children. Although marriage would still be valued, efforts to foster healthy relationships between resident or nonresident parents irrespective of marital status would be more critical than marriage per se. Initiatives to enhance all parents' ability to become and remain effective coparents are key ("coparents" refers to parents who negotiate parenting responsibilities in either a cooperative or contentious manner). Our progressive view is also premised on the assumption that attempts to realize a more engaged and nurturing style of fathering need to be coupled with more comprehensive efforts to establish a cultural narrative that stresses men's commitment to all children.<sup>27</sup>

In 2001, the federal government's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) provided a detailed "guidance" document, "Meeting the Challenge: What the Federal Government Can Do to Support Responsible Fatherhood Efforts," that outlined organizational and individual responses that could enhance father involvement.<sup>28</sup> It emphasizes that fathers are very different from one another, noting that their needs must be linked to differences in residence, marital, and relationship status; experience with incarceration; and age (including teen fathers and grandfathers). Clearly, there is no one model of engagement and training for fatherhood programs. The summary statement also encourages policymakers and practitioners to recognize that "the whole family" should be engaged in any effective program or policy aimed at supporting responsible fathering.<sup>29</sup> In the past decade, the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as related federal fathering initiatives (such as the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse created by the Bill Clinton administration), have been informed by the principles articulated in the 2001 document that echo the inclusive range of fathering experiences (see chapter 8 for further discussion).<sup>30</sup>

However, the history of initiatives aimed at disadvantaged fathers shows that policymakers have chosen a different strategy than that suggested by the DHHS guidance document. Policymakers who conceptualize federal policies intended to affect these disadvantaged fathers and children seek to transform disadvantaged fathers through marriage and employment opportunities.<sup>31</sup> Recent federal initiatives for low-income fathers emphasize ideals and legal implications related to marriage promotion, the establishment of paternity, financial responsibility, and child custody.<sup>32</sup> At the national and state levels, assistance to fathers is usually guided by short-term fixes, such as job training and placement or a marriage course, to shift outcomes quickly. This approach contrasts

sharply with a sustained investment of social services and financial resources that may lead to real, lasting change in father involvement.

Thus far no specific recipe has emerged outlining a coherent set of promising practices for working with this diverse set of men. Recent initiatives were broadened by the George W. Bush administration to prioritize “healthy marriages” and to use marital and relationship education programs.<sup>33</sup> The Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2007 was introduced with the diverse aims of restructuring child support laws, expanding Earned Income Tax Credit programs to fathers, and providing additional funding for domestic violence.<sup>34</sup> In the 2011 budget, the Barack Obama administration replaced funding for marriage promotion programs with the Fatherhood, Marriage, and Families Innovation Fund. This initiative prioritizes the need for state and local program collaborations that lower obstacles to finding work and that enhance family well-being and best parenting practices.<sup>35</sup>

Evaluations of the federal initiatives have produced diverse findings related to fathers’ nurturance. Interventions have taken the form of couple relationship programs or father intervention programs. Unfortunately, in the absence of random controls and experimental designs, few have been systematically evaluated as model programs. Findings are also limited because the interventions have distinctly different goals. Some aim to improve work skills, self-sufficiency, or employment; some attempt to encourage marriage or coparenting skills; and others are designed to reduce incarceration and drug or alcohol use.<sup>36</sup> Each of these goals, researchers and policymakers assume, may indirectly affect the quality of the father-child relationship.

At this point, results from efforts to promote men’s nurturance in close father-child relationships are mixed, though promising.<sup>37</sup> Fatherhood intervention programs tend to foster increased child support payments, particularly in low-income families. A few of the more systematic evaluations report that father-child relationship quality was improved by the interventions, although mostly for middle-class fathers. Only one recent program for low-income Mexican American and European American families has demonstrated significant changes in father-child relationship quality. In contrast, relationship skills interventions have been shown to improve couple relationship quality, coparenting skills, and fathers’ engagement in parenting. However, evaluations have identified that fathers increase their nurturance only in couple interventions with middle-class fathers and mothers.<sup>38</sup>

Some research indicates that there is promise in bridging these distinct programs by integrating healthy families, responsible fatherhood, and domestic violence services.<sup>39</sup> Thus far, the competing aims of these programs have discouraged federal initiatives, or even local initiatives,

from pushing for programs that would target fathers' nurturance of children. If the goals of employment and healthy relationships do not result in positive father-child relationships, nurturance may offer an alternative model for intervention and family policy.

## **Fathers' Choices in Constrained Circumstances**

Cultural discourses and social policies that accentuate only fixed images of father types—such as the “provide and reside” father or the “dead-beat dad”—distort men's lives as fathers. Fathers are likely to exemplify many different types of fathering over the course of their lives, and eventually most will face formidable challenges to living up to the new ideals of fatherhood. Despite growing public concern over a wide range of fatherhood issues, all too often formal strategies for dealing with them are tied to conventional frameworks, thereby providing only a partial response to the assorted needs of fathers, children, and families.

We move beyond a focus on father types and focus on policies and programs that are more responsive to fathers' daily experiences. How are the threads for men's orientation toward nurturing children sewn into the fabric of their boyhood years? What are men's vulnerabilities, needs, challenges, and opportunities as fathers? How do fathers' interpersonal networks that include coparents, family, friends, coworkers, and adults charged with monitoring children in the community affect how fathers perceive and relate to their children? How do men manage critical transitions that affect their fathering? In our own research we have talked to a wide range of fathers who are in constrained circumstances. We focus on these circumstances to get a better understanding of how men's lives are disconnected from policies and programs that might help them become more nurturing fathers.

Roughly twenty-five years ago scholars writing about fatherhood and social change stressed the importance of considering how four types of conditions or factors affect father involvement: motivation, skills, social supports, and institutional barriers.<sup>40</sup> These four conditions are salient in each of the three paths of fathering that we touch on in chapters 2, 3, and 4. For example, within a discussion of the meaning of fatherhood, we find that personal motivation is a critical factor in promoting men's involvement with children and that policies and programs may focus on how to shape men's motivation as fathers. We extend the typology to examine how specific skills, possibly gained through fathering programs, can support father-child bonds so that men become more nurturing, engaged fathers in diverse fathering contexts. These conditions also influence how fathers acquire human capital (credentials, knowl-

edge, financial resources, and interpersonal skills), access social supports, and navigate transitions when confronted by institutional barriers.

The theoretical insights we use to frame our policy-relevant analysis of social fatherhood highlight the value of understanding how social structures intersect with men's volition and ability to act. In other words, men often grapple with making choices in constrained circumstances<sup>41</sup> that sometimes limit their visions of fathering or impede their options to interact with or provide for their children in particular ways. Thus, the framework of constrained circumstances is closely linked to the four-factor model of father-child relations. We selectively use the framework of constrained circumstances, initially designed to inform debates about gender and health, to show how modes of fathering are shaped by decisionmaking processes at multiple levels: the nation and state, community, workplace, family, and individual. Our analysis of these processes, then, underscores how the socially constructed worlds of fathers and families are embedded within larger cultural, historical, political, and physical contexts. Like Dowd, we stress men's gendered experiences as fathers while noting how conditions associated with race and ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation intersect with gender to shape the fathering landscape.

Alongside cultural ideologies that define caregiving as women's work, we recognize that structural forces in a stratified society help produce scores of men who represent the "not-so-good father."<sup>42</sup> Today, of most concern to policymakers are the men who are not sufficiently involved in their children's financial support or are involved in abusive ways. For many fathers, limited educational opportunities, employment struggles and poverty, and restricted sexual and reproductive education increase the probability that men will be involved with unplanned pregnancies and births and thus place many in precarious situations to which they never adequately adapt. Add to the equation, as we do, concerns about men who may be involved with their children but do little in the way of nurturing them. By creating conditions that often result in fathers spending less time with their children, large-scale forces also tend to hinder fathers' chances to develop a nurturing style of fathering.

Again, the fathers represented in this book have a great deal in common with fathers in every community in the United States. In order to understand how fathering actually unfolds, we focus on daily challenges American fathers face as providers and caregivers. Contentious negotiations arise in the throes of divorce and remarriage; job loss and job change; health problems; and fathering at a distance, in the military or in correctional facilities. In these contexts, men must on a daily basis work and rework to make themselves into the fathers they want to be. Insights can be gleaned about how all men strive to nurture their children when

they are faced with these challenges, whether they are family men who want to have more time to care for children or nonresident unwed fathers who want to provide loving care as well as to financially support their children. Most important, lessons about fathers' daily lives can inform policies that are too often disconnected from fathers' real-world experiences.

## Men's Stories

Ultimately, a systematic analysis of how men are, and can be, affected by policies in their everyday lives must take account of all three inter-related layers of the process—policy creation, program implementation, and individuals' reactions to the real-world application of a policy—while considering the full range of procreative and fathering experiences.<sup>43</sup> The intimate effects, or projected consequences, of policy and programmatic processes reveal themselves in the powerful stories of the individuals most directly touched by the presence or absence of particular initiatives. They play out even in the lives of fathers such as Andy, whose story reflects the aspirations and challenges of generations of hardworking men who believed that fatherhood was primarily about being good providers for their families.

At age thirty-two, Andy, a tall, quiet, white man with boyish looks, has already spent thirteen years working blue-collar jobs. His ten years as a shipping manager and supervisor on a line assembly for industrial plating follows the long line of manufacturing work in his family; his father has just finished twenty-five years as a maintenance worker at the largest production plant in the small Midwestern community. Andy does not see the demands of his workplace as anything uncommon or stressful, stating, "I never run myself down as far as a lot of hours. I mean, fifty-five, sixty hours a week ain't really a whole lot. I was always at home with the kids, and I've always worked overtime, from day one." However, he began to drink five years ago, and his increasing addiction to alcohol began to overwhelm his day-to-day life with his wife and three preschool-age children.

Things started changing about the time when our first little girl came. My responsibilities became more, to where I took it upon myself to start working more hours and stuff with a kid . . . to try to make sure there was always enough money, so she would have nice things. I fell into that mode. That's what I always thought it was like to raise a kid.

Five months ago, after a string of charges of driving under the influence, Andy was taken into custody and sentenced to a work-release facility.

He admits that the first few months demanded that he do some soul searching and come up with a plan to change his life. "Being locked up is easy," he laughs, in comparison to the tough decisions he must make about his addiction and the rocky relationship with his wife. In spite of this, Andy is committed to having close relationships with his children. The promise of reuniting with them drives him to make positive changes in his life.

I call my kids every night from the pay phone there, but I've never been one of those guys who can really talk through a phone. My three-year-old daughter, she don't talk a lot and it's hard—the emotions may come up down the road with her. My five-year-old daughter knows that Daddy says he's done drinking this time, and can't drink no more. She said if she sees me have a beer, she's gonna kick me in the shins. I'll have a lot of eyes watching me.

Andy's interaction with the courts, and the work-release guidelines that limit contact with his children, are policies that have directly affected his fathering. However, if policies had been in place to support parenting and working families these circumstances might have been avoided. For example, wage supplements to "make work pay" could have eased Andy's drive to work overtime and secure enough money to support his family. Resources to return to school and earn a college degree or a skilled training certificate could have promoted his efforts as a provider. There were no paternal leave policies available at his job, which in part led to his wife's taking on all caregiving for their children, although the family needed her financial contribution. Finally, social policies that support fathers and families in navigating transitions are also lacking. Reentry, or "second chance," programs for incarcerated parents only received initial federal funding in spring 2008. Andy attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, but an effective health-care system with a substance treatment program as well as access to mental health services to address early signs of depression for young parents who struggle with stress over employment could form the basis of a proactive prevention strategy. Ideally, the goal should be to stop family crises from developing in the first place.

Andy and Dwight are two of the 317 men who shared their personal stories with us between 1997 and 2006. Our pooled sample includes men who participated in one of the seven qualitative studies we conducted separately. Of these, 229 are fathers or stepfathers and another 15 have pregnant partners and are expecting to become fathers for the first time. A large percentage of the fathers can be characterized as either disadvantaged in terms of human capital or more likely to live apart from their children and have less regular contact than the average father.

Although some may have little motivation to be “good” fathers, our studies include men who are doing well for themselves and some who display either moderate or high levels of motivation and involvement as fathers. We also tap into the experiences of seventy-three men who are neither fathers nor expecting a child but who have thought about what this transition would mean for them. Unfortunately, our data have limitations as well. For example, the interviews were not designed to explore the experiences of abusive fathers or fathers with special needs children.<sup>44</sup>

Generally speaking, our earlier research has examined the context, process, and meaning of fathering with men of varied ages and social backgrounds on the basis of family structure, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, and social class. More specifically, our writings have explicitly dealt with the growing diversity of fathering models, including biological fathers and stepfathers; resident and nonresident fathers; men with children in multiple families; straight and gay fathers; low-income, working-class, and middle-class fathers; and men in correctional facilities and in military deployment.

Our seven data sets enable us to explore a wide range of issues relevant to understanding the negotiated and transitional aspects of fathering that are conducive to policy and programmatic interventions. Although we describe each data set in the appendix as well as in other publications, several general points warrant mention here in order to place our analyses in perspective. First, two of our data sets, Young Males’ Procreative Identity (YMPI) and Social Supports for Young Fathers (SS), are particularly helpful in highlighting how teenage and young adult men thirty or younger think about their ability to procreate, describe their degree of readiness to become fathers, and discuss their handling of the challenges of being young fathers. Second, the SS study and the Responsible Fathering Program (RF) offer a sense of what men aged seventeen to forty-two who are involved with community-based fathering programs think about specific interventions. Third, the Incarcerated Fathers (IF) project, and to a lesser extent the Fathering in Communities (FC) study, serve as useful resources for exploring how fathers cope with serving prison time. Fourth, the Stepfathers (SF) study uniquely extends our ability to consider features of the father-child bonding process that are not tied to DNA. Fifth, we use the Male Youth Workers (MYW) study to expand our vision of fathering and men’s mentoring while linking family activities to community-based settings. By integrating these seven projects, we position ourselves to work with a unique qualitative data source to explore and illustrate numerous aspects of fathering that, collectively, touch the lives of most fathers.

We make liberal use of men’s stories as fathers and use a modified case study approach to shed light on the expanding array of demographic,

cultural, political, and economic changes affecting men in families. When appropriate, we also reach beyond our own qualitative studies to discuss other evidence that reveals insights about fathers' motives, joys, struggles, and aspects of involvement related to initiatives that could enhance outcomes for fathers and families.

The accounts we highlight vary and include descriptions of things fathers have done with and for their children as well as comments about what the fathers would like to do. Ultimately, our view of men's lives is shaped by what they tell us because we seldom directly observe them acting as fathers. Our studies use qualitative methods (in-person interviews and life-history techniques) that have the advantage of generating insights about meanings, contexts, and processes associated with men's unique experiences—observations that could not emerge from more common survey research. Although we do not present men's comments uncritically, we generally assume that the fathers reasonably portray the types of things they do as fathers with and for their children.<sup>45</sup> We recognize, too, that some fathers may never realize their visions either because they lack the motivation or they struggle against external circumstances. Nonetheless, we explore men's hopes and dreams because they are central to how many men express their expectations and desires as fathers. Much can be learned about fathers by paying attention to what men envision for themselves, even if their visions do not match their everyday realities.

Among the many issues our participants touch on, they are best positioned to do the following:

- Describe how they become aware of their ability to procreate and then manage their identity while navigating their fertility-related interactions with partners
- Explain how they manage the transition to adulthood as teenage fathers and how they rely on kin networks as sources of social capital for children and as social support systems to help them with their fathering
- Discuss how they secure employment and manage involvement with mothers and children in low-income communities
- Describe how they manage transitory involvement with multiple children across separate families and with families separated by national borders through immigration
- Discuss how they enter into a stepfamily situation; develop identities as stepfathers; and negotiate their relations with the mother, stepchildren, and biological father

- Explain how they have been engaged in volunteer and work-related activities with kids in the community (teachers, coaches, youth ministers, Big Brothers) and, for some, interact with their own children
- Reflect on their experiences with fathering while residing in correctional facilities, with an emphasis on strategies to build family relationships at a distance and to craft new identities as men who put “the difficult past” behind them

Those interested in a more elaborate discussion of our separate samples and methodologies can review our appendix or consult our selective publications that report that information.<sup>46</sup>

## Framing Our Analysis

As mentioned, we rely on four broad frames—fatherhood as a social arrangement, fathering paths, trust building, and the role of place in shaping fathers’ experiences—to set men’s stories in perspective and advance our social-change agenda for creating a more engaged, nurturing style of fathering. We use these frames to dissect the opportunities men have or might have to be nurturing fathers while taking into account the varied constraints they face. In doing so, we show how understanding fathers’ life circumstances enhances efforts to design more effective social initiatives to promote nurturance.

As men, fathers’ experiences are tied to both their male bodies and the gendered social landscape that help define their actions at home and in public settings—most notably, work. Initiatives are appealing that assume that fathers and mothers have comparable potentials to nurture their children and that fathers can improve their nurturing capacities if given the chance irrespective of their social location—their social class, race and ethnicity, or sexual orientation. However, the gendered realities of everyday life and the institutions and ideologies that structure the expectations, rhythms, and resources associated with family life continue to create an uneven parenting landscape that privileges female, motherly nurturance.

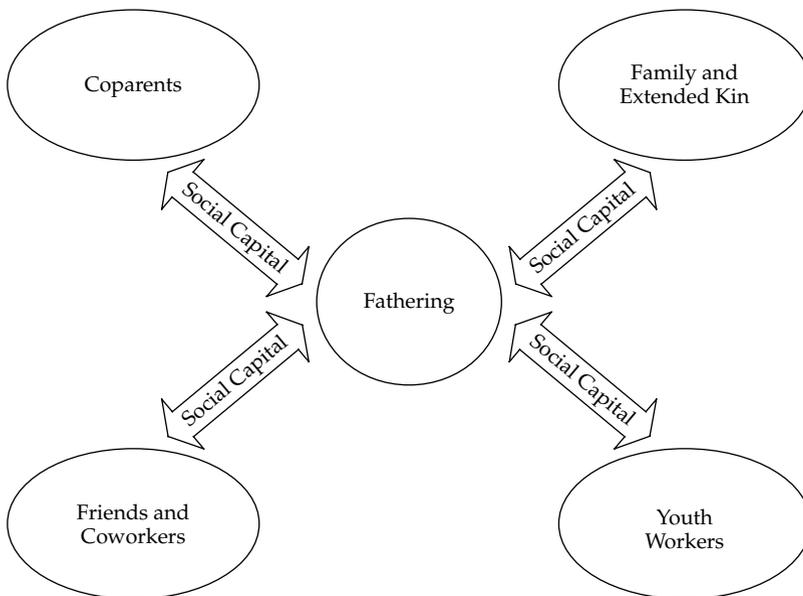
Despite women’s advances in the labor market, prevailing cultural norms continue to single out fathers—because they are men—as having more primary breadwinning responsibilities than mothers. In the public eye, and in the minds of many men, family breadwinning represents a “manhood act” that gives working fathers the chance to express their masculine self and claim membership in the dominant gender category.<sup>47</sup> Generally speaking, breadwinning in the United States enables fathers to claim privilege, elicit deference, and exert control over their own lives in ways that nurturance does not.

Consequently, initiatives to promote fathers' nurturance are more likely to succeed when they are informed by an awareness of how the interpersonal and structural threads of gender and masculinity influence fathering and are woven into the four broad themes we emphasize.<sup>48</sup> Noteworthy are men's gendered approaches to the body (their own and others'), health (their own and others'), caregiving, coparenting, kin work, friendship, community networks and social support, paid work, and father-child bonding. Efforts to facilitate fathers' nurturance also need to take into account the relationship between the ways men in more privileged positions construct their images of fatherhood and masculinity as compared to those in less privileged positions.

### *Fathering as a Social Arrangement*

Fathering is inherently a social arrangement that begins with fathers themselves but that usually requires an array of critical partnerships between fathers and other concerned adults (see figure 1.2). These partnerships comprise a network of coparents, family and extended kin,

**Figure 1.2** Fathering as a Social Arrangement



Source: Authors' figure.

friends, and youth workers who supervise children in public settings. How others treat fathers and their children can influence men's fathering, including their level and style of nurturance. Similarly, men's actions as fathers can affect how others think, feel, and act.

The diverse set of relations fathers have with family, kin, friends, and community youth workers provides them opportunities to build social capital that can benefit their children's cognitive and social development. Fathers can "expose their children to healthy dyadic interaction processes, bring about closure in their children's social networks, and act as a liaison to valuable community resources for their children. Social capital can be viewed broadly, then, as a product of families, communities, and the connection between the two."<sup>49</sup>

Any attempt to make policy more responsive to individuals' needs must account for the larger social matrix in which activities promoting social change are embedded. Helping men to realize their full potential as fathers often draws attention to the intimate interactions between parents and children in their everyday family lives, but these activities are also shaped by conditions related to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation; the political economy; economic restructuring; and national policy regimes.<sup>50</sup> Such regimes include policies such as welfare reform, child support and maintenance laws, social grants to limit poverty, and efforts to eradicate histories of discrimination and racism.<sup>51</sup> State intervention has directly shaped the rights and duties of fathers, although at times social policies have run counter to gender equity and have discriminated against African American and poor men.<sup>52</sup>

But policy stakeholders need to reach out to those involved in father- and family-based organizations, activists and social movements, and media enterprises to develop alliances that enrich and reinforce the cultural narrative celebrating high-quality fathering. Social policies lacking the cultural and social mechanisms that reinforce the message of engaged, positive fathering are likely to have little impact.

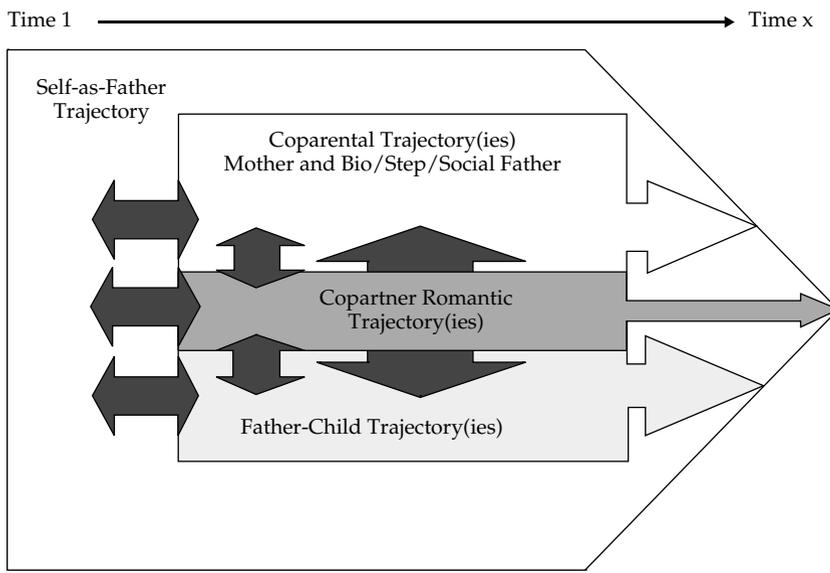
### *Paths of Fathering over Time*

With an eye toward transitional, developmental, and negotiation processes, we highlight critical circumstances that define men's everyday fathering realities across the life course, from adolescence to adulthood. All sorts of conditions shape both the meanings men assign to their potential fatherhood as well as their actual experiences as fathers. One such condition is time. Men grow older and gain insight into how to be better fathers as they move through significant transitions in their lives. In effect, they are constantly becoming different fathers with new needs and skills.<sup>53</sup>

Fathers' experiences are also related to the experiences of previous generations, including their own fathers' and mothers', as well as their peers' experiences—men of similar age who struggle with many of the same issues as fathers.<sup>54</sup> Relationships with older generations and with peers indicate how important historical time can be, as expectations for fathers shift over decades because of changes in the economy, social norms and values, or even life expectancy and health. “No man is an island” applies especially to fathers who define their lives by how they are linked to their children’s lives. Father development in large part demands that men notice how their decisions about marriage, work, and health ripple directly into their children’s daily routines. In this way engaged fatherhood encourages men to support and nurture coming generations of children—their own biological children as well as other youth.

To understand the social psychological dimensions of men’s lives as fathers over time, we turn specifically to a model that captures how men construct their father identities, express themselves in a fatherly way, and manage their most immediate familial relations.<sup>55</sup> Figure 1.3

**Figure 1.3 Model of Fathering Trajectories Over the Life Course: Social Psychological Domains**



Source: Authors' adaption of Marsiglio (2009b).

highlights the complexity and negotiated elements of fathers' subjective experiences by focusing on four overlapping paths or domains of activity that mutually influence one another over time. That fathers are parents whose male bodies evoke gendered responses from children, coparents, and others adds another dimension to understanding fathers' experiences. Perceptions of men's size, strength, physical capacities, sexuality, and so forth can shape a wide range of fathers' social interactions.<sup>56</sup>

A man's desire and intention to have a child, his readiness to become a father, his visions of being a father, and his fathering philosophy are the principle features of the self-as-father path (discussed in detail in chapter 2).<sup>57</sup> These expressions do not imply any particular child or coparental and romantic relationship. A man with or without biological or social children can experience this domain so long as he imagines himself relating to a child in a fatherly way. As a man ages he is likely to consider how fathering could enable him to experience different possible selves; for example, the doting, roughhousing dad; or the successful breadwinner well positioned to provide his child with intriguing travel opportunities and expensive gifts; or the man of faith committed to raising his child in a Christian way. With more years and maturity he is also likely to shift his sense of readiness to be a father. Once a man becomes a father, his everyday experiences with his child, as well as with the child's mother or another parent figure or romantic partner, are likely to influence to varying degree his broader sentiments about what it means to be a father. Being a parent can enhance a man's personal development as he copes with new responsibilities that are tied to managing intimate relationships.

Any discussion of men's fathering philosophy and nurturance of children should also include the process of generativity. Conceptualized as a form of adult caring focused on helping future generations thrive, generativity is typically associated with a stage of middle adulthood, but aspects of it can be expressed at earlier ages.<sup>58</sup> The generative spirit is captured in efforts "to pass on valued traditions, to teach key skills and viewpoints, to communicate wisdom, and to help younger generations reach their full potential."<sup>59</sup> Generativity is also associated with a "widening concern for what has been generated by love, necessity, or accident."<sup>60</sup>

When we focus on father-child bonds, we recognize that many adult men's first and most central generative experience is linked to caring for their first-born children.<sup>61</sup> Fatherhood researchers note that as men come to know and understand their children their capacity to be generative includes "nurturing the growth of another person."<sup>62</sup>

Generativity is expressed in multiple forms: biological, parental, technical, and social-cultural generativity.<sup>63</sup> Fathering offers men opportu-

nities to partake in each of these ways of “giving back” through procreation, positive parenting, and engagement in the larger community that includes children and their peers as well.<sup>64</sup> Although generativity emerges from a personal commitment, it is also shaped by cultural demand. The social need for fathers’ nurturance is evident in the range of initiatives and men’s stories we highlight in this book. Generativity, however, is also a matter of cultural permission that points to fathering as a social arrangement. Fathers without access to basic resources and skills are hard-pressed to “give back” to their children.<sup>65</sup> In chapter 7, we focus on how public and private initiatives can target human-capital resources during critical transitions in men’s lives in order to promote their nurturance. These initiatives are especially relevant for fathers challenged by constrained choices resulting from their disadvantaged social location.<sup>66</sup>

Generative expressions are also associated with the second path in the figure, “father-child,” which identifies a man’s connection to a particular child that evolves over time. We focus on this path primarily in chapter 3, where we discuss father-child bonds. Viewed broadly, the interpersonal bond may begin at varying points during the respective overlapping life courses of a man and child owing to the timing of paternity confirmation, stepfathering, and adoption.<sup>67</sup> For the man who develops a father identity for multiple children, the father-child relationship will be complicated by his ability to compare and contrast how his real-life fathering experiences are affected by processes involving genetic ties, family structure, gender, age, personality, health, and so forth. Each relationship may be complicated further because of multiple-partner fertility and fathering. A key aspect of this path involves a father’s identity, his perceived level of commitment to his child, and his ability to realize his particular fathering philosophy. Thus, although it is impractical for social initiatives to accommodate all the idiosyncratic features represented in the countless father-child paths, developing initiatives that can account for varied circumstances is ideal.

A third fathering path, “coparental” (discussed in chapter 4), is represented by a man’s efforts to navigate the shared or contested parenting rights and responsibilities that go along with having another parent figure involved in raising a child. The other parent can be the child’s mother or the child’s biological father, stepfather, or social father. The coparental path can be viewed as having four main interrelated components: “support versus undermining in the coparental role; differences on childrearing issues and values; division of parental labor; and management of family interactions, including exposure of children to interparental conflict.”<sup>68</sup> The conventional view of coparenting is that it corresponds to dyadic processes among heterosexual pairs raising

biological or nonbiological children, or both.<sup>69</sup> However, recent efforts have also highlighted the need to explore the experiences of stepfathers who serve as allies to the biological father in stepfamilies<sup>70</sup> and gay men's shared parenting with other men and birth mothers.<sup>71</sup> Parental gate-opening and gate-keeping experiences affect a man's opportunities and constraints for navigating father-child trajectories.<sup>72</sup>

Because the worlds of being a coparent and romantic partner are intertwined we also examine in chapter 4 a fourth path: men's co-partnering experiences. The history of men's relationships with the mothers of their children often precedes any negotiations they have about coparenting. How individuals relate to each other as romantic partners can set the tone for how well they work together as coparents. In addition, unmarried couples who become parents prior to a commitment to a long-term relationship often face more significant challenges with communication and developing trust.<sup>73</sup>

In sum, we see men's lives as unfolding along the four paths without passing through specific stages or heading toward a definitive endpoint. The paths are intertwined, can affect one another, and sometimes occur simultaneously. Stakeholders interested in prompting a more engaged style of fathering can fine-tune their efforts by learning how these paths come into play and helping fathers define their identities, maximize opportunities, and respond to constraints that impinge on their ability to be engaged, nurturing fathers.

### *Trust Building*

By viewing fathering as a social arrangement in which men navigate four interrelated paths throughout their life course as fathers, we underscore the need to understand and enhance trust building in diverse settings. Situated in families, fathers of every ilk must manage relationships with their children and usually relationships with coparents, extended kin, youth workers, and others as well. Specifics about trust and respect vary because of a child's age, gender, the father's status as a biological father or stepfather, and the father's coresiding or not coresiding with the child. Yet concerns about these matters are crucial to the father-child bond. They are especially relevant to expressions of nurturance and intimacy. Furthermore, because coparenting is often influenced by how individuals experience their romantic partnership, the full and powerful assortment of emotions that define romantic involvements will color how coparents construct, deny, and redefine trust.

In the four decades since the early 1970s, increasing rates of child-bearing outside of marriage and parents' uncoupling from serious romantic relationships have generated a burgeoning array of complex

households that provide the contexts within which individuals try to negotiate trust. For many men, the greatest challenge involves the fears and obstacles associated with nonresident fathering. Large numbers of poor, middle-income, and rich fathers alike find themselves wrestling with the prospects and realities of fathering without co-residing.<sup>74</sup> The other face to this situation is often represented by the stepfather who attempts to establish himself in a preexisting family dance of a mother and her children. Whatever the circumstances, managing trust across households and in nontraditional settings is likely to pose a challenge for all involved. Nonresident fathers who provide stable financial contributions may engender more trust because others recognize them as competent breadwinners. Of course, parents in conventional two-parent families also have to negotiate trust in the face of complications arising from the intersection of work and family life, family tragedies, geographical moves, and more.

Trust issues permeate many activities and decisions in the public arena as well. Fathers' opportunities to be more nurturing sometimes hinge on good-faith efforts by policymakers, activists, program coordinators and youth workers, researchers, and parents. Policy and programmatic decisions relating to paternity establishment; paternal leave; child custody, support, and visitation; access to children's personal information; gay fatherhood; and other similar issues are often contentious, creating winners and losers. Consequently, some groups will have to compromise and work to trust one another if they are to collaborate effectively.

### *Place Matters*

Most fathers have coped with the challenges of parenting from a distance. Fathering often occurs when men are not in the home; they may be at the workplace (which may be many hundreds of miles from their households), traveling, deployed in the military, or serving time in a correctional facility. We emphasize the need to attend to issues of place and space when developing initiatives to help fathers become more positively engaged.<sup>75</sup> Far too often policymakers and others neglect to see how fathers' options and constraints are fundamentally influenced by aspects of the physical sites where men do their fathering. These sites include both public and private locations associated with commerce, criminal justice, education, faith, home, recreation, and work. The sites shape men's parenting, but men can also reshape the sites to better fit their expectations and desires for engaged fathering. Fathers advocate with their children's teachers, take on leadership roles in coaching or mentoring positions, and request paternal leave policies for the workplace.<sup>76</sup> In addition, sentiments about fathering from a distance and the

valuing of “being there” for one’s children reflect gendered and practical realities associated with place. Whether the father is a traveling business executive or long-haul trucker, deployed soldier or prisoner, the practical and symbolic dimensions to place are likely to affect fathering. Men working in predominantly male occupations may find far less support for being nurturing dads than men working in more female-oriented settings, such as primary schools.<sup>77</sup>

Although our analysis is firmly grounded in our data, we also move beyond empirical findings to suggest possibilities for how a wide array of public stakeholders might effectively disseminate images of and frame policies that relate to fathers, children, and families. We examine how different conventions of communication that shape messages about commitment, involvement, entitlement, obligations, and change are promoted to different target audiences. Nonresident fathers, imprisoned fathers, military fathers deployed to a war zone, long-haul truck drivers, and abusive fathers may all struggle with their limited access to their children, and strategies to assist these men must be sensitive to the special circumstances of their particular situations.<sup>78</sup> We consider how specific strategies can be best implemented to ensure they will be well received by men and fathers, women and mothers, children, representatives of various groups and organizations, and others.

## **Policymaking and Men’s Family Lives**

The mismatch of ordinary family life and policy initiatives is the starting point for our discussion. To be fair, fatherhood has been on the radar screen of politicians and advocacy groups. Since approximately 1990 it has been a prominent topic of discussion. In policy, practitioner, and advocacy circles rhetoric is often driven by some version of the controversial and muddled question: Are fathers “essential” to children’s healthy development? Some vehemently defend the use of the “essential” term to express the idea that fathers “make a contribution to child development that is essential [irreplaceable], unique, and uniquely masculine.”<sup>79</sup> Yet because available rigorous research fails to support this hypothesis some scholars advance a less gender-specific alternative perspective: “Good fathering makes an *important* contribution to development.”<sup>80</sup> We side with the latter view and add that good fathering should ideally include elements of nurturance.

So far, the policy focus has been on men’s personal motivation (or lack thereof) to be involved parents. President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore spoke of the need for “a change of heart” among fathers. Organizers of the Million Man March in 1995, and recently President Obama in one of his Father’s Day speeches, declared that men need to “step up and

take responsibility” for their involvement as parents. In 2011, Obama launched the Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative, a partnership between the White House, the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, and the Administration for Children and Families in an effort to link families across the country via website updates.<sup>81</sup> He encouraged individual fathers to visit a website where they could pledge to be a positive and supportive figure for their children to help them reach their full potential.

But in the daily challenges that families face, fathering depends on individual men as well as their family and friends. Our discussion of nurturance frames fathering as a social arrangement, not just an individual choice. It begins with men’s personal commitment, but it does not end there. We envision an agenda for social change that encourages fathers to care for their children in ways that challenge gender inequalities. Initiatives that promote nurturance are progressive because they challenge the narrow breadwinner stereotype and they can change father-child relationships in positive ways. Moreover, they can transform family relations, making them more trusting and productive.

As social scientists we can make valuable contributions to the formal policy process as well by documenting how social policies have not kept pace with the dramatic changes in families that have unfolded over the past several decades. Fathers and mothers marry later in life, divorce more frequently, cohabit in larger numbers, have more children outside marriage, and manage multiple families (through remarriage and repartnering) more frequently than ever before. These family shifts have emerged alongside a dramatic transformation of the political economy. Globalization has left its imprint on local communities and income inequality has increased the gap between the poor and the wealthy in the United States. Women’s increasing entry into the workforce has radically changed the workplace, and men’s wages (controlling for inflation) have remained stagnant for three decades. Cultural expectations for fathers have evolved in response to these family and social changes. That the trajectories of men’s family lives are now more complex adds to the challenge of forging a policy agenda—informed by social science insights—to promote more positive fathering.

Instead of viewing policymaking as the limited arena of traditional policymakers, we expand our perspective to see that there are many distinct stakeholders who try to affect fathering by working through diverse types of social entities, what we call platforms—federal agencies, work sites, local community-based groups, grassroots advocacy networks, non-profit organizations, the media, state clearinghouses, and courtrooms. Each platform offers an infrastructure and communication medium as well as stakeholders who are affiliated with the platform.

With this broader view, fatherhood policies are better defined as initiatives that involve specific efforts, ideologies, and activities to shape men's parenting. An initiative might include the efforts of a specific platform with one type of stakeholder, or it might involve collaborative efforts across platforms with multiple stakeholders. The scope of an initiative varies as well. An initiative to provide technical assistance and supports to stay-at-home fathers would be limited to a single issue or group. In contrast, an initiative to promote "responsible fatherhood" by a national media organization would be much more inclusive in scope, addressing religious values, child support payments, marriage, and advocacy for federal policies that define men's family roles.

In the United States, fathering initiatives that receive the most public attention and funding typically focus on a specific population of disadvantaged, nonresident fathers. Few initiatives offer much to other populations of fathers, such as men with more resources who could still benefit from federal support for paternity leave. Contemporary initiatives do not stem from a comprehensive fatherhood agenda to support fathers across class, race, and sexual orientation. In part, broad-based initiatives have not emerged in the United States because stakeholders have not coordinated their efforts across platforms. Federal agencies, court officers, and state child support officials have not benefited from systematic collaboration with individual fathers and communities who might be invested in their success. As a result, we are left with a limited set of policies that focus primarily on lack of residence, marriage, or financial contribution, rather than the promotion of fathers' nurturance and responsiveness.

Promotion of nurturance through collaboration happens in other contexts, however. In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Tony Blair's commitment in 2001 to eradicate child poverty by 2020 corresponded to an emerging focus on the role that fathers can play in child well-being. Groups like the Fatherhood Institute, a U.K. think tank, have drawn attention to breaking the cycle of deprivation for vulnerable fathers in what the government terms "high cost-high harm" families.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, social policy commitments to redress inequality in post-apartheid South Africa have been instrumental in creating the Fatherhood Project.<sup>83</sup> Funded by Save the Children Sweden, the Fatherhood Project works to provide information and enhance dialogue about fathers' experiences and to encourage public and private actors to tailor services to male parents in order to improve families' well-being. Canada has developed the Father Involvement Research Alliance (FIRA) of fathers and families, community-based programs, government agencies, and universities to develop knowledge about father involvement and to create research partnerships between communities and universities.<sup>84</sup> In these three

national contexts, policy actors are trying to better coordinate efforts at multiple levels of government to target father involvement and promote nurturing relationships between men, women, and children.

As advocates of these international programs have discovered, promotion of nurturance faces formidable political obstacles. In the United States, the call to promote more and better fathering is reasonable, but the real debates about what that should entail are fraught with points of friction. For example, spokespersons involved with either wing of the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement are often connected to policy-making streams of activity in the pro-marriage or the so-called "fragile families" camps.<sup>85</sup> Pro-marriage groups emphasize efforts to increase marriage opportunities as the cornerstone to a successful strategy to improve fathers' commitments to their children. Spokespersons for the fragile families network stress policies designed to remove the barriers to securing a quality education and good job. Such policies are designed to build the human capital low-income fathers need. Neither of these networks of policy actors has accorded a close father-child relationship a higher priority than marriage or employment.

Nevertheless, it is evident that those who participate in contemporary culture are ready to question and critically examine the consequences of promoting a breadwinner ideal for fathers and families. The image of Don Draper from the *Mad Men* series does not reassure parents; instead it conjures up the painful realization of the limits of men's devotion to the workplace that compromises their everyday involvement with their families. The series offers men and women a way to better understand the mandates of past eras and realize that we need to transform those scripts.

The shift to a relational approach to fathering requires that we recast the father-as-wallet model and take gender equity more seriously. Unfortunately, the goal of promoting nurturance can be quite threatening to policy actors, community activists, and even family members who are invested in conventional fatherhood models. For all of the productive outcomes of the child support system in recent decades, we still have not discovered how to structure payments in a way that fathers and children develop close and responsive relationships. Leaving it to an individual father to feel a "change of heart" is not enough. Broad-based initiatives must empower individual fathers while generating institutional and community-based innovations to accommodate individuals' needs in different settings.

Policymakers have invested in stereotypes of what successful fatherhood is and what fathers' everyday lives are really like. We rely on a unique set of men's firsthand accounts to show how they perceive their own lives as fathers. Our joint data provide us considerable leverage in

highlighting a wide range of policy and program initiatives that can affect men in diverse settings. In a number of instances we use concepts we developed in earlier research and show how they can inform policies and programs to bring about a more nurturing and productive form of fathering. Our studies primarily have focused on men who were motivated to be positively and productively engaged with their children. They do not provide the same depth of insight into the experiences of fathers who neglect their children or who are violent with their partners and children.

The set of narratives we have provides rich data for the men affected most directly by fatherhood policies and programs as they currently exist. Across the country, in all sorts of circumstances, men increasingly are striving or at least are open to providing more nurturance. Unfortunately, they are doing so in the absence of family-friendly policy and in the face of policies promoting only marriage or employment.

A broad and deep change in fathering will require concerted efforts on numerous platforms. In the book's final chapter we argue that stakeholders must account for men's daily experiences and promote nurturing relationships between fathers and children for all fathers. If the realities of men's daily lives are ignored, policies will be misguided and inadequate. They will too often conflict with families' interests and overlook assets fathers can bring to relationships with their children. Our theoretically informed framework challenges policymakers to think in more complex and creative ways when they imagine what they can do to inspire and enable fathers to deepen their commitments to their children while providing them with more nurturance. More specifically, we inject theoretical insights into our interpretation of "federal guidance."<sup>86</sup>

We support initiatives that ultimately enhance children's well-being. The viability and public support for fathering initiatives will be greatest when positive child outcomes can be documented. However, the initiatives that interest us will also foster men's personal development, their desires to nurture their children, and their capacities to be active members in care networks. In addition, mothers who struggle to provide the more significant portions of daily care for children should benefit from the initiatives we envisage.

Our thematic approach encourages stakeholders in the policy world to think in new ways and more systematically about the expansive terrain of fatherhood. Instead of organizing our discussion primarily around subgroups of fathers, services, or specific outcomes,<sup>87</sup> we explore how consequential threads of meaning and experience pervade different subgroups of fathers' lives (prospective, resident biological, step, divorced, single, gay, deployed military, in-prison, low-income, married and unmarried). We emphasize the complexity of men's lives over time and focus on

them as individuals capable of creating and caring for human life with its multiple, sometimes overlapping trajectories. We also highlight how our insights about men's experiences as fathers can be enriched by gaining an appreciation of the larger social mosaic that includes men's orientation toward and interactions with children in public settings via their volunteer and paid work.

We extend Dowd's approach by developing seven analytic themes to anchor our recommendations for a coordinated set of fatherhood policies that reflect and respond to the ways structural inequalities shape the lives of fathers and families in diverse contexts:<sup>88</sup>

- How men develop and express father identities
- Bonding processes associated with fathers and children
- Partnering and coparenting processes that shape fathering
- Alliances fathers can forge with extended family members through kin work
- Social capital fathers can build for their children with community-based child advocates
- Strategies to improve men's opportunities to develop human capital that can enhance their fathering options, especially during critical transition events and processes that challenge fathers
- Suggestions for constructing a broader cultural narrative supporting a more nurturing and collective form of fathering

Our approach is not fundamentally related to particular demographic segments of fathers. Because our objective is to promote a nurturing, engaged form of fathering in its fullest sense, we stress the seven analytic themes noted that cut across different fathering types and settings. Thus, we offer data-driven insights as to which strategies might bring about positive change for which fathers.<sup>89</sup>

Our starting point for discussing fresh, collaborative initiatives begins with males' procreative and father identities as well as their views of children. We explore the underlying social psychological processes that shape fathers' self-images and commitments to fathering. In the long run, developing strategies that touch both the hearts and minds of boys and men should increase the chances for encouraging fathers to be more engaged and nurturing.