**THE DEFINITIVE REFERENCE ON THE IMPORTANT ROLE FATHERS PLAY IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT TODAY**

Edited by Dr. Michael Lamb—the recognized authority on the role of fathers in child development. *The Role of the Father in Child Development, Fifth Edition* brings together contributions from international experts on each subject to provide a thorough and current summary of the state of fatherhood across cultures, classes, economic systems, and family formations. This classic guide offers a single-source reference for the most recent findings and beliefs related to fathers and fatherhood.

This thoroughly updated new edition provides the latest material on topics such as:

- The effects of divorce
- Fathers from low-income backgrounds
- Stepfathers’ lives: exploring social context and interpersonal complexity
- Social policy
- Gay fathers
- Fatherhood and masculinity

The definitive book on when, why, and how fathers matter to their children and families, *The Role of the Father in Child Development, Fifth Edition* is an essential reference for all mental health professionals who endeavor to understand and support fathers in becoming positive influences in their children’s development.

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The Role of the Father in Child Development

Fifth Edition

Edited by
Michael E. Lamb
University of Cambridge
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Preface

This fifth edition of *The Role of the Father in Child Development* appears nearly 35 years after the first edition was published in 1976. The intervening decades have been marked by extensive research, thoughtful scholarly reconceptualization of fatherhood and father-child relationships, and widespread public debate about the meaning and importance of fatherhood in drastically changing social landscapes. As a result, this edition bears little resemblance to the four earlier volumes with the same name. Instead, it contains a series of integrative summaries and reviews that represent the vibrant and productive scholarship that has done so much to illuminate our understanding of fatherhood and the many ways in which fathers can influence their children’s development.

One feature of the contemporary scholarly landscape, in comparison with that which existed in 1976, is close attention to the broader social context. Whereas contributors to the first edition focused narrowly on biological fathers and father-child dyads, the contributors to later editions have increasingly placed fathers in the context of family systems and subsystems, in which the relationships with and attitudes of mothers and siblings also play crucial roles. By the third edition, there was also widespread recognition of the variety of roles that fathers played in their families, with the relative salience of these roles varying across time and (sub)cultural context. Meanwhile, changing patterns of partnering and child-bearing have creating a new landscape of relationships and paternal roles, with scholars and researchers broadening their focus from biological fathers in ‘intact’ two-parent families to include step-fathers (married and unmarried), resident and non-resident bio-fathers, adoptive fathers, and gay fathers. Other features of this latest edition are concerns with cultural variability alongside recognition that the middle-class North American fathers who initially attracted the attention of social scientists and commentators are a small minority, and increased attention to social policy issues in a variety of countries. Strikingly, the authors hail from five continents, with only South America unrepresented. Also noteworthy are the disciplinary backgrounds of the contributors: Whereas the first volume was written entirely by psychologists, this edition includes contributions written by psychologists, sociologists, educationalists, social policy specialists, anthropologists, social workers, and legal scholars.
All of the chapters in this anthology were written especially for the volume, whose size and scope attest to the amount social scientists have learned about father-child relationships, especially in the last few decades. Each of the contributors has made seminal contributions to our collective understanding of the specific topic about which she or he has written, and together they have painted a rich and highly nuanced account of fatherhood and paternal influences, beginning with two chapters that provide a broad overview and examine the seldom-examined links between the concepts of masculinity and fatherhood. Several later chapters focus on the normative processes whereby paternal behavior and family dynamics shape children’s development, while others examine the effect of variations in paternal involvement in both intact and divorced families or focus on the special social and psychological circumstances that shape relationships, family climate, and child development. The unique challenges, opportunities, and circumstances faced by step-fathers, divorced and divorcing fathers, non-resident fathers, gay fathers, and fathers whose children have special psychological or psycho-educational needs are also examined. A further group of contributors examine cultural variations in perceptions of fatherhood and the ways in which fathers perform their roles, as well as the policies increasingly adopted by developed countries to foster and facilitate the constructive engagement of men in their children’s lives, when they live with them and when they do not. The resulting collection of chapters constitutes a truly comprehensive and up-to-date summary of contemporary scholarship concerning fathers, fatherhood, father-child relationships, and paternal influences around the world.

The collection will be of special interest to clinical, developmental, and social psychologists and their students, as well as policy makers, psychiatrists, social workers, family lawyers, and other mental health professionals. In the face of an exploding scholarly literature, this unprecedented collection provides a timely, unique, and definitive integration of recent scholarship and research. It will surely shape conceptions of and research on fatherhood for years to come.

Michael E. Lamb
Cambridge
January 2010
CHAPTER 1

How Do Fathers Influence Children’s Development? Let Me Count the Ways

MICHAEL E. LAMB

IT IS OFTEN claimed that psychology became a science in the second half of the 19th century, led in part by continental (mostly German) research on perception, psychophysics, and memory, Galton’s attempts to measure intelligence and establish the importance of heredity, and William James’s efforts to create a coherent theoretical edifice, which might guide the derivation of empirical answers to age-old philosophical questions. For those who study the development of personality and social behavior, however, the key figure was Freud, who pioneered the close study of pathology as a medium through which to elucidate psychological functioning and spawned a plethora of admirers and critics who constructed much of the popular and scientific psychology we encounter in books such as this. For example, we owe Freud credit for the proposition, now widely viewed as an article of faith, that childhood experiences shape subsequent personality and behavior, although Freud himself only shifted the focus from late childhood and early adolescence to infancy very late in his life. Similarly, it was Freud who placed special emphasis on the formative importance of parent–child relationships, although the specific mechanisms he considered have since been widely discredited. Furthermore, although Freud (and the cohort of psychoanalysts and psychodynamic theorists he inspired) published prodigiously from just before the turn of the nineteenth century to the time of the Second World War, the scientific study of social, personality, and developmental psychology really took off in the postwar period, initially dominated by social learning theorists who rejected Freud’s theoretical architecture even as they embraced many of the related beliefs and concepts, including those regarding the importance of parent–child relationships, although neo-analysts played a central role in the construction of attachment theory, which dominates parts of developmental psychology to this day.
Developmental psychology changed from a discipline dominated by theoretical analysis to one dominated by empirical research, much of it initially conducted in North America, in the years following World War II. This is often viewed as a politically conservative era, dominated by policies designed to put into the past the rigors and horrors of both the Depression and the two world wars by creating a new age of affluence and opportunity. In practice, this involved championing the “traditional” nuclear family, dominated by a breadwinning father and a home-making, child-rearing mother, often housed some distance from either parent’s biological or metaphorical roots. Not surprisingly, psychologists embraced these values of the society in which they were reared and lived, so their initial empirical forays into research on children’s early development were dominated by mothers—as informants, as the cofocus of observations, and as the “socializing” figures about whom they theorized. Where fathers did enter the picture, their roles were often represented through the eyes and voices of their partners, or they were judged against the models of family function developed by family theorists who shared similar societal assumptions. In such a context, it was easy (if exaggeratedly provocative) to entitle my first essay on the subject: “Fathers: Forgotten Contributions to Child Development” (Lamb, 1975).

Three and a half decades later, the scholarly landscape has changed dramatically. Thousands of professional articles have explored the ways in which fathers affect their children’s development, and the contributors to this anthology provide a thorough and readable summary of our contemporary understanding. My goal in this introductory chapter is to sketch some of the overarching themes that dominate the book.

FATHERS AND THEIR ROLES

WHAT DO FATHERS DO?

It seems logical to begin this anthology by examining definitions and descriptions of fathering. What roles do fathers play in family life today? What taxonomies might effectively characterize fathers’ activities with and commitments to their children? What do fathers do when they are available to their children, and why they do what they do? In this regard, a fuller conceptualization of fathers’ roles and the origins of their “prescribed” responsibilities is warranted. As several contributors illustrate in this volume, historical, cultural, and familial ideologies inform the roles fathers play and undoubtedly shape the absolute amounts of time fathers spend with their children, the activities they share with them, and perhaps even the quality of the relationships between fathers and children.

In earlier times, fathers were viewed as all-powerful patriarchs who wielded enormous power over their families (Knibehler, 1995) and vestiges of these notions continued until quite recently. According to Pleck and Pleck (1997), for example, Euro-American fathers were viewed primarily as moral teachers during the colonial phase of American history. By popular consensus, fathers were primarily responsible for ensuring that their children grew
up with an appropriate sense of values, acquired primarily from a study of
the Bible and other scriptural texts. Around the time of industrialization,
however, the primary focus shifted from moral leadership to breadwinning
and economic support of the family. Then, perhaps as a result of the Great
Depression, which revealed many hapless men as poor providers, social
scientists came to portray fathers as sex role models, with commentators
expressing concern about the failures of many men to model masculine
behavior for their sons. Throughout the 20th century, fathers were urged
to be involved (Griswold, 1993), and following feminist and scholarly cri-
tiques of masculinity and femininity, there emerged in the late 1970s a
concern with the “new nurturant father,” who played an active role in his
children’s lives. As Elizabeth Pleck (2004) explained, however, popular and
scholarly discussions of fatherhood have long dwelled on the importance of
involvement—often defined by successful breadwinning—and the fear of
inadequate fathering. In contrast to earlier conceptualizations of fathers’
roles, often focused quite narrowly on breadwinning, and later discussions
focused narrowly on “involvement,” researchers, theorists, and practitioners
no longer cling to the simplistic belief that fathers ideally fill a unidimensional
and universal role in their families and in their children’s eyes. Instead, they
recognize that fathers play a number of significant roles—companions, care
providers, spouses, protectors, models, moral guides, teachers, and bread-
winners—whose relative importance varies across historical epochs and
subcultural groups. Only by considering fathers’ performance of these vari-
ous roles, and by taking into account their relative importance in the socio-
ecological contexts concerned, can fathers’ impact on child development be
evaluated. Unfortunately, theorists and social commentators have tended in
the past to emphasize only one paternal role at a time, with different functions
attracting most attention during different historical epochs.

Focusing on fathers’ behavior when with their children, much of the
observational and survey data collected by developmental and social psy-
chologists in the 1970s and early 1980s (e.g., Lamb, 1977) suggested that
mothers and fathers engage in rather different types of interaction with their
children, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries like the United States (see
Chapter 4). These studies have consistently shown that fathers tend to
“specialize” in play, whereas mothers specialize in caretaking and nurtur-
ance, especially (but not only) in relation to infants.

Although such findings seem quite reliable, the results have often been
misrepresented, and have led to overly stereotypical and unidimensional
portrayals of fathers as play partners. Compared with mothers, fathers
indeed spend a greater proportion of their time with children engaged in
play, but they still spend most of their time with children engaged in other
activities. In absolute terms, most studies suggest that mothers play with their
children more than fathers do, but because play (particularly boisterous,
stimulating, emotionally arousing play) is more prominent in father–child
interaction, paternal playfulness and relative novelty may help make fathers
especially salient to their children (Lamb, Frodi, Hwang, & Frodi, 1983). This
enhanced salience may increase fathers’ influence more than would be
expected based on the amount of time they spend with their children.