

Fatherhood, Esther Dermott proposes a new conceptual framework with which to view and organize the growing sociological literature on fatherhood: intimate fatherhood.

Dermott discusses the literature via several dimensions of fathering—breadwinning, time spent in fathering activities, emotion, fatherhood within the context of motherhood, policy definitions and accommodations of fatherhood, and fragile fatherhood (nonresident and gay fathers). Although she includes a great deal of research in her discussion, her support for her framework draws primarily from two studies: a secondary data analysis of two national samples from the United Kingdom that used quantitative methods (*The Effect of Fatherhood on Men's Patterns of Employment*, which analyzes the British Household Panel Study and the National Child Development Survey), and a study using in-depth interviews of 25 primarily White, middle-class, South London fathers (*Men, Work, and Family Life*). In the last chapter, she more fully develops the concept of “intimate fatherhood.” Drawing heavily on the work of Jamieson and Giddens, she proposes that the father-child relationship qualifies as an intimate relationship, and she discusses this relationship with regard to six themes gleaned from the intimacy literature: sexuality, reflexivity, equality, fragility, communication, and the meaning of time (p. 128). Although the proposed framework is worthy of discussion and perhaps empirical verification, there are weaknesses that make it difficult for fathering researchers to readily apply in its present state.

In Chapter 1, Dermott lays the foundation for a critical review of the fatherhood literature. She proposes three paradoxes found in contemporary views of fathering: “attention and absence, creation and construction, and culture and conduct” (p. 7), each of which she proposes to resolve via the framework of intimate fatherhood. The first paradox exposes the fact that attention to fathering is increasing at the same time as father absence from families also is increasing. The second references the balance between biological bases of fatherhood and the importance of social fatherhood. The third brings to light the dilemma that, although the culture of fatherhood is changing to reflect the “new” (presumably more involved) father, behavioral patterns among fathers have not changed dramatically, and parenting remains a largely gendered activity.

Intimate Fatherhood: A Sociological Analysis.

Esther Dermott. London: Routledge. 2008. 170 pp. ISBN 041542262-8. \$43.95 (paper).

Over the last two decades, research regarding fatherhood and fathering has expanded at a tremendous rate. Although some conceptual frameworks have been proposed to organize the literature (e.g., Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine's [1987] concept of father involvement; Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley, & Buehler's [1993] application of identity theory; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson's [1998] framework of responsible fatherhood), fathering research lacks a single, cohesive conceptual framework to guide and interpret its findings. In *Intimate*

In the next three chapters, Dermott discusses various components of fathering: breadwinning, engagement/involvement, and emotion work. Dermott argues that although breadwinning remains an important aspect of fathering, it no longer is the sole purview of fathers, with most mothers contributing at least somewhat (and perhaps more importantly, expecting to contribute) to financial provision for the family. Regarding father involvement in activities, Dermott surmises that fathers define time differently than mothers (e.g., she did not find evidence of “intensive fathering”) and view “being there” as the critical component of fathering, whether that be spending an entire day with their children or simply making sure they have 10–15 minutes available each day to catch up on the details of their children’s daily lives. Fathers did not feel that caregiving needed to be, or even necessarily should be, divided equally between mothers and fathers, but rather, emphasized the importance of being available to their children, rather than emphasizing participating in particular activities or performing particular childrearing tasks. Dermott also suggests that a way in which fathering has changed dramatically in recent generations is through the increased expression of affection and emotion that takes place in current father-child relationships. She explains that fathers always have loved their children and have experienced an emotional connection with them; what is new and unique to fathers of today is the more open and frequent expression of that love and affection.

Dermott next tackles the context of fathering, discussing the importance of linking motherhood and fatherhood (as neither occurs in a vacuum). Fathers tend to cede the primary parenting role to mothers but do not view themselves as competing with mothers; rather, they seek to develop independent, positive relationships with their children. Mothers figured largely in men’s accounts of fathering, whether by way of contrast or context, and fathering clearly was negotiated within the context of mothering and the mothers themselves. Fathers were somewhat divided regarding whether mothers and fathers performed unique roles or whether parenting was a “gender neutral” activity, with some drawing on biology to explain their views, whereas others cited personal choice as the basis for their decisions.

In Chapter 6, Dermott discusses the implications of national policies for defining and accommodating (or failing to accommodate) fatherhood. Citing examples such as parental leave and child support policies, she emphasizes the limelight that fathers have occupied recently in political arenas, with much attention having been paid to how, when, and how much to involve fathers in the lives of their children. She concludes that policies that tried to separate financial provision from a more active fathering role (e.g., visitation) inevitably have met with backlash, whereas policies encouraging paternal leave have met with mixed support (unsurprisingly, unpaid leave tends to meet with low take-up rates, although interestingly, father income did not predict which fathers would take paternal leave following the birth of a child). Fathers also appreciated workplace flexibility (e.g., the ability to take time off to attend a parent-teacher conference or to care for a sick child), but did not express a need for widespread, systemic shifts to accommodate greater time spent in fathering (e.g., greater availability of part-time work for fathers).

Chapter 7 highlights the difficulties that some fathers face when attempting to be involved with their children. Using the examples of nonresident and gay fathers, Dermott provides examples of structural and societal barriers to fathering within “atypical” fathering populations. The ability to “be there,” so valued by fathers, is compromised when fathers do not reside with their children, and societal biases (as well as policies that act to effectively exclude gay men from becoming fathers) frequently make it difficult for gay men wishing to become fathers to accomplish this goal.

In Chapter 8, Dermott at last presents her framework of intimate fatherhood. Although I appreciate the desire to present first the background upon which the framework is to build, it is difficult to read the entire book without fully understanding what the central tenet of the book is about. References are made throughout to intimacy in fathering, but no clear definition is presented until the last chapter, which makes it seem somewhat belated in its presentation. Dermott ultimately presents Giddens’ (1992) idea of a “pure relationship,” which is “entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another, and which continues in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough

satisfactions for each individual to stay within it" (p. 58, as cited in Dermott, p. 128).

She then suggests that the father-child relationship is an example of such a pure intimate relationship. Although most fathering scholars agree that fathering is more contextually influenced and variable than mothering, it is a much farther reach to say that the father-child relationship is entirely voluntary and, as such, comparable to a friendship or romantic relationship. Dermott uses the themes of sexuality, reflexivity, equality, fragility and communication, and the meaning of time to defend her proposition that fatherhood is an intimate relationship. Throughout even her own presentation, however, she notes several flaws in her own argument. For example, when discussing self-reflexivity, she notes that "the movement from non-father to father does not itself entail self-reflexivity" (p. 131). She notes instead that probably only *some* fathers, likely those who fit into her "fragile" category (such as gay or nonresident fathers), actually critically reflect on the process of fathering and the nature of the father-child relationship. Too, she agrees that parent-child relationships by nature are never equal or entirely democratic and that, compared with adult-adult relationships, parent-child relationships are the one form of relationship that cannot be abandoned without serious societal sanctions (thus, not meeting the criteria of fragility). As such, even in her own proposition and defense of the concept of intimate fatherhood, its tenets seem rather weak, and there appears to be only tenuous support for the father-child relationship being a truly intimate relationship, at least in the sense that intimacy has been talked about to date in the personal relationships literature and as it is presented in this book.

Overall, the book presents an interesting and cohesive view of much of the sociological literature on fathering. It presents thoughtful questions, raises important contradictions and weaknesses in our knowledge and attitudes towards fathering, and presents a good mix of both quantitative and qualitative empirical research as support. In that regard, it is a useful resource and a valuable addition to the fathering literature. With regard to being "the" new organizing framework for thinking about fathering, however, although I believe it provides some interesting fodder for discussion, it leaves much work to be done before it can

be a truly usable and testable framework for fathering scholars.

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