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REVIEW ESSAYS

Problematizing the Gendered Substructures of Capitalist Economy

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A new study published by William Marsiglio and Kevin Roy, *Nurturing Dads: Social Initiatives for Contemporary Fatherhood*, examines current fathering practices and provides a vision of what a more involved form of fatherhood could be. The first part of the book is based on in-depth interviews with over 300 men living in the United States. Among the men interviewed are biological and adoptive fathers, gay fathers, fathers who share child custody with ex-spouses, and fathers who were or are currently in prison. This extensive data set enables the authors to examine in great depth the many meanings that men associate with fatherhood, their parenting and co-parenting strategies, and personal fears about failing at parenthood. Marsiglio and Roy then draw upon their broad knowledge of family research and social policy to conceptualize a framework for enhancing men's involvement as fathers in their children's lives. Their proposed strategies would enlist stakeholders from local communities and school boards, legislators, parents, employers, and educators who, ideally, would work together to transform hegemonic practices of fathering. Marsiglio and Roy's policy and programmatic proposals do not advocate for a particular parenting arrangement for children. Rather, they identify overlapping areas of concern among presumed stakeholders regarding men's parenting practices and outline key components of potential programs for enhancing involved fathering practices. The authors' use of qualitative data to help the reader to understand which programs and policies are needed is incredibly convincing. The book will be of great interest to family scholars, policymakers, and local community leaders alike.

Nurturing Dads: Social Initiatives for Contemporary Fatherhood, by **William Marsiglio** and **Kevin Roy**. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2012. 290pp. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780871545664.

Although *Nurturing Dads* is one of countless books published on the topic of parenting, the volume is distinctive in that it links men's roles as fathers to the "stalled" feminist revolution and identifies the steps that would need to be taken by men to help "un-stall" it. Feminist scholars have argued for years that drastic changes in how men fulfill personal family responsibilities are required for equality between the sexes to become a reality. Feminist scholars contend that un-stalling the revolution requires transformation of work organizations and paid employment in ways that support workers' family obligations and involvements, and transformation of society in ways that place a premium on reproductive labor (childcare, domestic labor, etc.). But where exactly does this overhaul of gender practices, parent-child relations, and by implication, capitalism, begin? Are such transformations possible, especially in the current socioeconomic context of the United States?

Given that most U.S. citizens would surely resist mandates issued by lawmakers to require men to do more carework, work organizations to make jobs family-friendly, or for states to pay for childcare, coalition-building and long-term strategies are clearly required. Marsiglio and Roy acknowledge that support for their proposals would have to be widespread. They outline the

components of a fatherhood-transformation framework that would enhance the roles that fathers play in children's lives and in so doing, further the cause of gender equity in family and work life. The authors discuss also the programs, policies and bureaucratic structures that would need to be implemented in order for their fatherhood-transformation model to work, and the changes in men's personal practices, local community efforts, and work organizations that would also be required.

The early chapters of *Nurturing Dads* provide a glimpse of the lived experiences that influence how men of different backgrounds construct meanings of fatherhood. Marsiglio and Roy use interview data to demonstrate that many explicit and implicit assumptions about what a "good father" does are embedded in men's approaches to fathering. Assumptions about what ideal fatherhood means also stimulate popular media portrayals, influence laws, and drive educational programs. One problem, as Marsiglio and Roy point out, is that not everyone holds the same assumptions regarding ideal fathering. Most commonly, opinions expressed in the media and in government-supported programs reflect the assumption that a "good father" is essentially one who provides economically for his children. Also implicit in these notions is the assumption that emotional and bodily carework are *not* an essential aspect of good fathering. Thus, argue Marsiglio and Roy, transforming fatherhood in the United States must begin with an examination of our own assumptions about men's abilities to connect with and to be more emotionally involved with their children. The notion that a father's primary purpose is to generate money for the family supports many of the most problematic aspects of parenting in the United States today, as well as inequalities between women and men in family and work life.

Contrary to the notion of fathers as merely breadwinners, the men interviewed by Marsiglio and Roy sought and developed many different kinds of emotional bonds with their children. The interview data also revealed, however, that the threads that connect fathers emotionally to their children are often too thin and too fragile. The authors contend that efforts are needed to help

fathers to strengthen those bonds by removing some of the existing barriers to fathers' involvement with their children (e.g., aspects of child custody laws, and work schedules). Marsiglio and Roy then explore (in Chapters Three and Four) the many different conscious and subconscious strategies men employ when negotiating co-parenting arrangements with the other parent or parents of their children. Recognizing the broader family networks that are often involved in parenting relations, the authors also discuss (Chapter Five) the roles that men's extended families play in developing "networks of care."

Whereas these early chapters are largely descriptive, explaining the complexities of men's lives as fathers, the later chapters of the book are used to build the authors' major arguments regarding the components of social change. The three pillars of Marsiglio and Roy's fatherhood-transformation model are, (1) strengthening fathers' leadership roles and connections within local communities, (2) enhancing fathers' abilities to maintain strong bonds with their children despite transitions in life that threaten to undermine those bonds, and (3) establishing programs and enhancing opportunities for fathers to develop and embrace nurturing as foundational to their own happiness and success.

Their proposals in each of these three main areas assumes a "shift away from prioritizing only married couples" and away from emphasizing only "men's personal potential as providers" (p. 151). Marsiglio and Roy imply that because the recent U.S. economic crisis and decades of women's participation in paid labor have already rendered breadwinning an activity that is not primarily a male endeavor, the public may be ready to embrace programs and policies that encourage men to focus more on children and family without assuming fathers are primarily breadwinners.

Local organizations and governments, explain Marsiglio and Roy, need to develop initiatives that will facilitate men's greater involvement in their communities, which in turn should help to strengthen fathers' presence in children's lives. This implies as well that other leaders and members of community institutions need to come together to

figure out how best to make these key institutions more father-friendly. Policies and programs need to be designed in ways "that make it more desirable and convenient for fathers to connect with those in the community who are involved with their children" (p. 156).

Also needed are programs and social arrangements that shore up fathers' human capital in ways that enable them to be more consciously present in children's lives throughout men's various life-transitions. Just as women who lose a job or who provide relatively little financial support for children are still viewed as loving involved parents, so too should men be viewed as loving involved parents when they are unable or less able to provide financially. Government programs and idealized parenting practices, assert Marsiglio and Roy, ought to reflect this. The authors suggest that men's greater involvement in their children's lives and increased care for children's emotional needs should, in turn, give men a better perspective on balancing paid labor and family life, and more confidence in themselves as fathers even when they are not primary breadwinners.

Public and private initiatives, Marsiglio and Roy suggest, also are needed to address men's participation in their own health care and to effectively care for their children's health. This requires, in part, changing current ideals of manhood that encourage men to engage in practices that are often harmful to one's health and, at the same time, that discourage men from seeking and receiving preventative and curative personal health care.

What steps must be taken in order to operationalize and implement Marsiglio and Roy's proposed fatherhood-transformation model? The first step in this process is to figure out how to get fathers to view themselves as being in need of transformation. The authors mention that media and education campaigns could be used to disseminate information about involved fathering. They do not, however, discuss specifically the kind of media and education campaigns that would be required to construct fatherhood itself as a *social problem*. They leave unaddressed the issue of how to mainstream a social movements-type agenda on fathering, and how to enlist the leadership of

willing women and men *who have the desire, time and resources* to negotiate across class, ethnic, race, religion, and marital and parental-status lines to identify common actionable concerns regarding fatherhood practices.

Marsiglio and Roy suggest that instead of an organized movement to construct fatherhood as a social problem, community youth workers could be encouraged to work with fathers to help them to better understand and connect with their children. But where does the incentive for developing such programs come from? Are men themselves compelled to change their lives in ways that would significantly alter fathering practices, or to lead a movement to achieve such goals? The authors' answer to these questions is not especially hopeful. They make mention of social survey data indicating that fathers cite work schedules as an impediment to greater family involvement. They then explain that few men actually utilize new family-friendly policies that would help to increase men's family time.

Perhaps the greatest success in generating desire among men for demanding that communities and workplaces be transformed in ways that make involved fathering more possible can be found in the efforts of faith-based movements. The authors mention some of these, but do not suggest that such organizations should lead a movement toward transforming fatherhood. Faith-based initiatives typically unite people of similar religious beliefs but also create divisions between people of different faiths. Thus, the question remains as to how to bring together people who hold different beliefs to act on issues that they may or may not "see" as problematic.

Second, Marsiglio and Roy argue that government programs' long-standing over-emphasis on fathers' economic responsibilities and under-emphasis on fathers' emotional connections to and care for children must change. They advocate, as a starting place, expanding the scope of parental leave in ways that encourage more men to spend more time with their children, and to supplement parental leave with education programs for building fathers' nurturing skills, the distribution of information regarding good fathering principles (e.g., via agencies such as the Department of Health and

Human Services), and local community forums and activities that bolster men's support for each other as fathers.

The authors imply that the infrastructure for initiating such proposals in the U.S. may already exist. They reference initiatives started in the 1990s under the Clinton presidential administration, as well as programs supported under the Bush and Obama administrations of the 2000s and 2010s, most of which have been tied to welfare reforms targeting families in poverty. Marsiglio and Roy explain that because these programs do not focus attention on fathers' nurturing roles, but rather promote the ideal of breadwinning as a primary element of fatherhood and heterosexual marriage as a remedy for poverty, the existing programs themselves are not the answer to the fatherhood problem. The fact that these programs are implemented via a bureaucracy and organizational structure that offers mechanisms for distributing information to (some) parents and for collecting information from (some) parents, nonetheless, means that if new policies with new goals were developed, they could be executed, at least in part, via these existing structures. Indeed, this would seem to be the most politically feasible way of initiating changes, even if such efforts would reach only a limited segment of the overall population.

Third, the authors suggest that at the local level, women as mothers may need to consider how their own assumptions and actions marginalize fathers in their efforts to play more significant roles in community organizations. Regarding this issue, Marsiglio and Roy are not suggesting that mothers consciously or conspiratorially exclude fathers from matters involving children but rather that unconscious gender biases regarding these issues exist and that these biases need to be more critically examined. While this point is well taken, their corresponding suggestion that if highly involved moms and biased community leaders were not standing in the way, more fathers would be more involved in their children's activities may be wishful thinking. Men expressing dissatisfaction with work/life balance on social surveys is a far cry from fathers mobilizing together to advocate for greater involvement in children's lives and to lead

the family, community, and workplace changes that would be needed in order to make this a reality.

Fourth, if fathers are to be more involved in caring for children's emotional and physical well-being, a fairly radical transformation in the overall structure of relations between women and men in society is also needed. Marsiglio and Roy's fatherhood-transformation proposals suggest, as noted, that changes in the gendered substructures of the capitalist economy are needed (See Acker 1990, 2006). They explain that forging "equitable relations at home and at work" between women and men is necessary in order for men and women to embrace themselves and each other as equals in family and labor markets. Unfortunately, the authors do not share their vision for how the gendered substructures of capitalism might be altered to bring about gender equality or to place a premium on family carework.

Finally, Marsiglio and Roy acknowledge that for all of the various components of their fatherhood-transformation model to be implemented, or even a subset of them, considerable public funding is required. As previously noted and consistent with some of the authors' own conclusions, lawmakers in the current political environment appear unlikely to entertain such proposals. The authors thus suggest that men's movement groups and feminist groups might collaborate in efforts to push the involved-fatherhood agenda, but in the same breath note that "significant compromises" would have to be struck between these two disparately positioned groups in order for them to collaborate effectively (p. 217).

As more and more children in the United States are growing up in households that fit no "standard" family structure, and as the "new normal" for parenting includes single parents, multiple parents who may or may not live together, co-parenting from different households, and various other parenting schemes, new visions for how men and women can fully realize their parenting potential only become more urgent. And in an age when achieving any sort of "balance" between employment and family life is difficult at best for both men and women, interest among parents and policymakers in organized, collective strategies for doing

fatherhood and motherhood differently will likely grow. Although the current U.S. economic and political environment may not be ready for the kinds of proposals that Marsiglio and Roy suggest, there is little doubt that these authors have identified the key components of an effective model for transforming fatherhood in ways that would not only enhance fathers' bonds with their children but also could help to bring about more equitable relationships between women and men in society. *Nurturing Dads* is a comprehensive vision of what involved fathering in a more gender equitable

environment could look like if the fundamentally gendered aspects of capitalism were transformed in ways that enabled greater equality between women and men as parents and as paid laborers.

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Why Good People Go Bad

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In his book *Normal Organizational Wrongdoing: A Critical Analysis of Theories of Misconduct in and by Organizations*, Donald Palmer asks the consequential question, "Why do good people join others already embarked on a wrongful course of action?" (p. 37). His approach to addressing this question focuses on collective wrongdoing that takes place within organizations. Given the many recent examples of organizational wrongdoing—from the Enron scandal to the use of banned substances in professional sports—Palmer's book is both important and timely.

The subject of organizational wrongdoing raises fundamental questions about human behavior: why do people do what they do, how much thought do they put into their decisions and actions, how intentional are they about their behavior, and how do their social contexts affect their choices? Palmer's exploration of these questions covers a wide range of disciplines—sociology, psychology, social psychology, criminology, political science, economics, and philosophy—giving his book an impressive breadth. He provides thorough and careful descriptions and illustrations of eight specific explanations of organizational wrongdoing which he categorizes by two overarching perspectives and two ideal-typical approaches.

Normal Organizational Wrongdoing: A Critical Analysis of Theories of Misconduct in and by Organizations, by **Donald Palmer**. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013. 313pp. \$30.00 paper. ISBN: 9780199677429.

The first overarching perspective he presents is the conventional view which "conceptualizes wrongdoing as an abnormal phenomenon" (p. 3). This view inspires the oft-used but simplistic analogy of "bad apples" (individual wrongdoers are bad people) and "bad barrels" (wrongdoing organizations have flawed structures and/or cultures). It is often paired with what Palmer calls the "dominant framework" of wrongdoing, which "assumes wrongdoing is produced by mindful and rational actors who deliberate in social isolation, make discrete decisions, and develop positive inclinations to engage in wrongdoing" (p. 3). He identifies and describes rational choice theories and cultural accounts as explanations that fit into the conventional category and dominant approach.

After presenting these conventional theories of wrongdoing, Palmer introduces