



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Social Science Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ssresearch

Social mobility in the context of fathering: The intergenerational link in parenting among co-resident fathers



Christina J. Diaz

Department of Sociology, The Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 4412 William Sewell Social Sciences, 1180 Observatory Drive, Madison, WI 53706, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 4 March 2013

Revised 15 January 2014

Accepted 18 March 2014

Available online 26 March 2014

Keywords:

Intergenerational transmission

Father-child relationship

Early Childhood Longitudinal Study

ABSTRACT

Intergenerational transmissions extend across a number of family-related behaviors, including marriage timing, fertility, and divorce. Surprisingly, few studies investigate the link between the fathering men experience and the fathering they ultimately engage in. I use data on the grandfathers and fathers of the 2001 U.S. birth cohort – measured in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study ($N = 4050$) – to test whether men's perception of the parenting they received influences their subsequent paternal self-assessments and behaviors. I find a nonlinear association between experiencing warm fathering and men's self-assessed parenting quality and stress. Men with particularly warm fathers are more likely to report being good fathers themselves. Those who report having the harshest fathers also exhibit better paternal self-perceptions and lower stress. Perceptions of paternal warmth show similar associations with men's fathering engagement. This research sheds light on the significance of family dynamics and how a legacy of fathering may contribute to inequality.

© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The transfer of skills and socioeconomic resources from parents to children is a significant contributor to intergenerational inequality in the United States (Tomes, 1981). While parenting practices are a key mechanism by which these assets are transmitted across generations, the transmission of parenting itself is an important aspect of intergenerational stratification (Kerr et al., 2009; Simons et al., 1991). For instance, parent-child similarities in harsh parenting expose offspring to a greater risk for developing externalizing behavior problems and lower levels of well-being (McKee et al., 2007). Such patterns indicate that some families reap benefits from multiple generations of effective childrearing patterns, while others remain in a cycle of disadvantage due, in part, to the transmission of harsh parenting practices.

Over the past 30 years, cultural beliefs of childrearing have shifted such that men are expected to be involved in their children's lives (Carlson, 2006). Given that fathers play a central role in child development (Marsiglio et al., 2000), it is essential to ask if men obtain their parenting skills from their fathers. An emerging body of work examines the transmission of parenting between fathers and their adult sons (e.g. Gaunt and Bassi, 2012; Hofferth et al., 2012). However, many of these studies overlook systematic differences in the strength of the transmission process by assuming the relationship between fathering received and fathering given is linear. I argue that we must move beyond this basic characterization to also

E-mail address: cdiaz@ssc.wisc.edu

consider the possibility of *reworking*, which can be viewed as a form of upward mobility in parenting. In this context, reworking indicates that men practice warmer, more involved fathering in spite of receiving harsh or distant parenting, such as severe physical punishment. I link a long line of stratification research that emphasizes social mobility (Breen and Jonsson, 2005; Solon, 1992) to parenting theories (e.g. Masciadrelli et al., 2006) to shed light on the ways men nurture the next generation.

To fully capture the fatherhood experience, I ask if men's perception of the fathering they received as children is associated with their existing paternal self-assessments and behaviors. A descriptive analysis of this kind is valuable for a number of reasons. Although research indicates short-term benefits of a strong father–child relationship, such as academic success and fewer problem behaviors (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2006; Carlson, 2006), the long-term effects—including the parenting styles children adopt when they adults—are less understood. If men do not acquire the skills or behaviors that promote healthy family dynamics, disparities in human capital acquisition and socioemotional well-being may span across generations.

I draw on nationally-representative survey data containing two generations of men, grandfathers and resident fathers of the 2001 birth cohort, to test the following: First, is there a link between men's perceptions of the fathering they received and their self-assessed parenting ability? If so, does this relationship suggest a simple transmission process or is there systematic mobility across generations? I also consider whether men who do not identify ever having a father figure have more or less favorable paternal self-assessments than men who had a father figure while growing up. The inclusion of these men facilitates a more complete understanding of how one's parenting is formed in the absence of a father figure. Due to concerns that the link between perceptions of fathering practices and men's self-assessments may reflect other forms of intergenerational capital transmission, such as socioeconomic status or health, I control for these indicators in my analysis. Finally, I consider whether these correlations translate to men's *engagement* with their children, measured by verbal stimulation, physical play, and caregiving.

2. Conceptual framework and empirical research

2.1. Intergenerational links and the production of inequality

2.1.1. Parenting across generations

A well-developed line of social science research documents how capital, beliefs, and behaviors are transferred from one generation to the next. Parents and their adult children exhibit marked similarities in divorce, marital aggression, and fertility behaviors (e.g. Amato, 1996; Barber, 2001). Abuse and harsh parenting are also transmitted across generations, where parents who repeatedly experienced harsh parenting as a child are likely to use a similar form of parenting on their offspring (Simons et al., 1991; Steinmetz, 1987). This finding is robust to the inclusion of parental education and family income. Additional work elaborates the patterns and consequences of fathering itself being transmitted across two or more generations (e.g. Smith and Farrington, 2004). Results from selective samples demonstrate that constructive parenting in one generation – which includes high levels of involvement, supervision, and a positive parent–child relationship – has multigenerational effects, influencing the parenting of the second generation as well as the socioemotional development of the third generation (Kerr et al., 2009).

2.1.2. Two hypotheses: modeling and reworking

Two dominant hypotheses have emerged to explain how men's early childhood experiences influence their own paternal strategy: modeling and reworking. The *modeling* hypothesis suggests adult children base fathering behaviors and perceptions on their own father's behavior, which can occur for positive as well as negative fathering practices. The tendency of offspring to imitate or model their parents' behavior is a psychological process that explains a good deal of parent–child similarity in behaviors (Duncan et al., 2005). The second hypothesis, *reworking* or *compensatory*, posits that sons with distant and uninvolved fathers attempt to improve fathering for their own children.

Modeling is anticipated to occur when sons identify closely with their fathers, which is especially likely when a positive father–son dynamic exists (Duncan et al., 2005; Guzzo, 2011). Furthermore, the modeling hypothesis implies that the similarity in parenting across generations is not mediated by characteristics such as socioeconomic status. Several studies find men with highly involved fathers are more likely to become involved in their child's life, which supports the modeling hypothesis (Cowan and Cowan, 1987; Gaunt and Bassi, 2012). For instance, Hofferth and colleagues (2012) argue that men who were involved in child care and decision-making processes were more likely to have sons who engaged in warm fathering toward their own children. As a whole, men tend to learn responsibility and stability through modeling their own fathers' actions (Roy, 2006).

There is mixed evidence, however, on whether men model their fathers' negative parenting behaviors. Some studies suggest that men with uninvolved fathers are more likely to be uninvolved fathers themselves. For instance, respondents with less involved, non-resident fathers tend to report less favorable perceptions toward providing financial support and direct care to their offspring than men with very involved co-residential fathers (Guzzo, 2011). Others suggest that modeling negative parenting is less likely: Belsky (1984) argued that those with noninvolved or harsh fathers are less inclined to emulate their behaviors, mainly due to a lack of role model identification. This response likely generates a compensatory process, allowing sons to parent in a very different way. Thus, it may be that men model specific types of behaviors and not others.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7339260>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7339260>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)