

## Reviews

***Involved Fathering and Men's Adult Development: Provisional Balances.*** By Rob Palkovitz. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002, 308 pp.

In the early pages of his book, *Involved Fathering and Men's Adult Development*, Rob Palkovitz identifies a significant gap in the developmental literature: although we have theorized that parental involvement is a vital factor in adult development, most studies focus on its impact on child development. In this empirical study of the experiences of 40 fathers with diverse backgrounds, Palkovitz offers new evidence that links dynamic fathering experiences to perceived changes in men's maturity and sense of self. He draws upon rich traditions in social theory and suggests intriguing new directions for the study of men and families. The volume can potentially inform the work of developmental psychologists, family scholars, adult and human developmentalists, marital and family therapists, scholars of men's studies, and even policy-makers.

Simply put, Palkovitz finds that fatherhood is a "call to change." As he states, "When we invest in being a dad, the role exerts a pressure that is beyond the self, and makes us better people than we would have ever become apart from the role" (p. xiv). This thesis is a direct descendant of Erickson's (1964, 1968) life stage model, in which a sense of generativity emerges during adulthood. Generativity has been conceptually reshaped and reworked, and Palkovitz acknowledges the important research on generativity and fatherhood by Cowan (1988), Snarey (1993), McAdams and de St. Aubin (1998), and Hawkins and Dollahite (1997). He describes the process of development in a way that many researchers have not done in the past. He argues, particularly in the capstone final chapter, that fathering is a dynamic and daily reworking of different roles and resources. In effect, this constant reworking—or "provisional balances"—pulls men into "good" fathering, and, consequently, greater levels of integration and differentiation that are the hallmark of maturity (Allport, 1961). As he asserts in the preface, "[These] roles have a way of pulling you into consistency when you do not feel consistent" (p. xiv).

The mix of qualitative and quantitative methods utilized in the study offer innovative approaches to understanding fathers' individual development. Primarily, Palkovitz draws upon qualitative interviews with 40 men who vary by social class, race/ethnicity, and age. He uses various sensitizing concepts (such as generativity, balance, costs and benefits) to guide the interview questions. The interview protocol integrates open-

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ended questions with close-ended questions, which has interesting implications for moving beyond socially desirable responses (see discussion below). Some textual data were coded for thematic prevalence (such as various paternal roles), and other questions prompted participants to suggest quantitative schemas (such as "In terms of rough percentages, how much of who you are is due to fatherhood?").

The book begins with a "foundational" section, which includes a helpful distillation of the research on fatherhood's effect on adult development; a description of the study design; a short historical discussion of changing father roles; related findings from the 40 men in the study; and a short chapter on the life course of fathers, in which men retrospectively reflect on their personalized paths through parenthood.

Palkovitz then focuses on "self" as the first of three domains of development. Two of these chapters—on emotions and health—are shorter and more descriptive, but they offer rare windows into men's consideration of under-researched demands of parenting. Of particular interest are men's reflections on dealing with emotions related to parenting (fear in particular) and their cessation of poor eating habits or substance use when faced with concerns about longevity. The chapter on faith is a lengthier and more theoretically developed piece of the larger study (see related analyses in Palkovitz & Palm, 1998). Palkovitz finds considerable variation in fathers' religious experiences (with half of the men reporting no changes to religiosity due to fatherhood); he also develops a useful typology of fathering/faith types (discouraging, disinterested, provider, and generative).

Men speak of father development in the "social" domain, and Palkovitz includes separate chapters on intimate partnering relationships, relations with relatives (primarily their own fathers), and changing friendships. Fathers remark how children "complicate" men's intimate relationships, leading to less time with their partners, changes in sexual intimacy, potential for conflict, but yet new opportunities for enhanced commitment to marriage. Children also prompt men to reflect critically on experiences with their own fathers. Palkovitz finds that fathers' "new levels of understanding and appreciation for their parents" is the most common theme here, although it is counterbalanced with the fact that very few of these men (two of 40) spontaneously refer to modeling positive parenting behaviors after their own fathers. Finally, fathers paint a complex picture of their social involvements during parenthood: involvement with children could lead to social isolation from old friends, as well as new, mature relationships with other groups of parents.

Father involvement also overlaps with experiences in the domain of "work." This stand-alone chapter, like the chapter on faith, is more theoretically developed than other chapters (see related discussion in Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). Palkovitz marshals data on work to critically examine controversial findings from Hochschild (1997), regarding men's "buying out" of family involvement through increased commitment to the workplace and careers. The qualitative data illustrates that work/family choices are not simple equations for any of these fathers, and that we must consider each father's potential for role overload as well as "micropolicies" (i.e., family-related policies tailored to each distinct workplace).

The book concludes with a "cost-benefit analysis" and a summary of the concept of "provisional balances." Palkovitz finds that fathers articulate complex tradeoffs related to parenting. It is interesting to find that men base most of their assessments

on time-related themes. For example, the most prevalent benefit is the satisfaction that fathers gain from watching children grow up over time. The most prevalent cost, on the other hand, is "time" that is invested in parenting. Some fathers argue that fatherhood does not entail any "real" costs: "The cost of fatherhood isn't really something that I was too sorry about paying the price for.... I mean, if you're really sincere about what you're trying to do and accomplish, then you don't miss it."

In summary, this book stands alongside previously noted seminal studies as one of the few benchmark studies of men's adult development as related to fatherhood. We can learn a great deal about both adults and children by asking men—not just other family members—about men's involvement in families. This point may appear obvious, but Palkovitz uses an innovative *emic* approach to allow fathers to define their own parenting experiences, in their own words. He garners rich descriptions and deep insights from the men in the study. As men reflect and discuss, we see the complex process of fathering unfold, even in the most unexpected parts of the book, such as the cost-benefits discussion.

The broad focus of the book suggests that it may be an agenda-setting study. Like Palkovitz's prior reframing of father involvement (1997), the study points fatherhood researchers toward unexplored directions, such as fathers' emotional dynamics, health concerns, and relationships with peers. Palkovitz offers the concept of provisional balances to capture the full range of men's dynamic daily efforts to achieve mature participation in numerous social roles. While the analysis becomes too broad and descriptive on some topics at times, the final chapter on balances serves as a useful roadmap, and perhaps it should be read first. I hope that Palkovitz and other researchers continue to explore how these dynamic balances can help explain men's diverse experiences as fathers.

Intriguing dilemmas of the social desirability of good fatherhood sit at the heart of this study. Fatherhood seems to be a positive experience for each of the study participants: health risks, negative feelings, and foreclosure on work careers and education due to fatherhood were discounted. Are men reluctant to consider that fatherhood was *not* the best thing that ever happened to them? Although Palkovitz uses questions that measure status ("Do you view fatherhood to be a positive or negative shaper of your life?"), it is his important "how" questions that tap into change ("How did you learn to be a father?") that move the men beyond social desirability and into complex illustrations of human development in process (also see Jessor, Colby, & Schweder, 1996).

In Palkovitz's work, it is the quality of developmental opportunities in fatherhood—and not just common aging processes—that lead to individual well-being. He suggests that parenthood, like marriage, may serve a normalizing or even taming function in men's lives, prompting men to turn away from friendships or habits that are not conducive to positive involvement with their children. In the end, we are left wanting to follow these men's lives: How do contextually specific developmental opportunities shift over time for fathers? Does fatherhood become something very different as men age alongside their adult children? Who do fathers become as they age?

KEVIN ROY

Purdue University  
Kroy@cfs.purdue.edu