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Book Review: *Nurturing Dads: Social Initiatives for Contemporary Fatherhood*

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Nurturing Dads: Social Initiatives for Contemporary Fatherhood, by William Marsiglio and Kevin Roy. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2012, 312 pp., \$35.00 (paper).

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In a brief public service announcement currently airing around the United States, President Obama calls on fathers to “Take time to be a dad today!” While moving and directed toward change, calls like this are challenging to make sense of as new ideals of fatherhood emerge. *Nurturing Dads* is a rich summary of research on American fatherhood today, challenging policy makers to get the most out of men, rather than expecting men’s worst. *Nurturing Dads* critically considers ways of nurturing new fathers into taking on the parenting roles many of them desire, while also highlighting men’s capacity to nurture. Taking nurturance as a starting point, Marsiglio and Roy call for a shift in policies from myopically considering fathers solely as breadwinners and promoting marriage as a universal solution. By highlighting the diversity among fathers, *Nurturing Dads* argues that fatherhood means different things to different men at different stages of their lives. Policies that treat fathers as a homogenous group fail because they are ideologically driven, attempting to push fathers into recognizable “family” forms rather than recognizing families and fathers as they actually exist.

Nurturing Dads is based on seven separate qualitative data sets from previous projects of both authors, comprising more than 300 men. Although methodologically atypical, they present an appendix thoughtfully explaining and examining their approach. They address diverse “types” of fathers: biological fathers, step-fathers, incarcerated fathers, military dads, gay fathers, social fathers, fictive kin networks, and more. As they illustrate, each of these groups have different concerns. Social policies often statically address fatherhood as only “successful” in heterosexual, coresidential unions. Such policies neglect the diversity of ways in which men father, the variety of family forms conducive to good fathering, and the ways that the social contexts in which fathering emerges are intricately

tioned to the ways that men embrace an ethic of committed, attentive, and developmentally appropriate care. *Nurturing Dads* calls for the combined efforts of federal and state agencies, grassroots advocacy groups, the media, worksites, and more.

To structure their analysis, Marsiglio and Roy present four frames and situate the stories that diverse groups of men tell. First, they conceptualize fathering as a social arrangement. In contrast to policies that simply attempt to get men to do more, *Nurturing Dads* recognizes that although fathering begins with dads, it involves a number of critical partnerships with other institutions and networks of concerned and caring adults. Helping men to create their own and join other communities of care helps men gain confidence as parents while also helping them put their social capital to work for their children.

Second, they recognize that the meanings men attach to fatherhood vary throughout their lives. Here they address the ways that men form identities as dads and take interest in supporting and nurturing the next generation. They also address prenatal support for men, both during the pregnancy (for heterosexual fathers or gay fathers with surrogates) as well as at early ages, seeking to instill young men with a reproductive consciousness. This involves promoting models of masculinity that value care work well before men become parents.

Third, recognizing that many heterosexual pregnancies are unplanned and occur outside of marriages, Marsiglio and Roy focus on issues of trust. Fathering children post-separation or as nonresident fathers presents a unique set of challenges. They suggest ways of helping men navigate issues of trust so that their participation in care work does not hinge on a romantic relationship with the mother. One way of helping men toward this end, they suggest, is to create a system of accountability for child support for unmarried, nonresident fathers.

Fourth, they argue that policies must attend to issues of social and physical space. Fathering is an act that often occurs when men are *not* in the home. They might be at work, in prison, deployed in the military, traveling, or somewhere else. Sometimes, fathers struggle with the physical constraints of the spaces in which they *do* their fathering. The authors suggest more use of technology in places like correctional facilities and on military bases to help preserve and strengthen father-child bonds when they occupy different spaces. But divorced, nonresident, and separated fathers also struggle to find places to be dads.

Nurturing Dads is a compendium of the social scientific research on fathering by leading scholars in the field. Drawing insights from diverse

groups of men, this book critically highlights common struggles of fathers as well as the ways that dads are far from the homogenous group they are often treated as by policy makers. *Nurturing Dads* would make a wonderful contribution to courses in sociology, family studies, public policy, gender studies, and more. The progressive agenda Marsiglio and Roy promote argues that the way to help fathers is to recognize the barriers they face and to encourage and expect them to nurture their children.

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Unhitched: Love, Marriage, and Family Values from West Hollywood to Western China. By Judith Stacey. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2011, 304 pp., \$65.00 (cloth); \$21.00 (paper).

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In her latest book, Judith Stacey extends her legacy as one of sociology's chroniclers and defenders of family diversity. Drawing on several articles Stacey published over the last decade, *Unhitched* might at first be seen as an edited-volume retrospective. In fact, Stacey has revised, supplemented, and synthesized these primarily ethnographic pieces into a coherent and innovative monograph that reads like a twenty-first-century companion to her earlier touchstone, *Brave New Families* (1991). Where the earlier book explored two demographically mainstream, white, working-class kin networks to argue that the United States was transitioning through a period of recombinant and unresolved family structures, *Unhitched* turns to three demographically atypical groups—gay men in Los Angeles, polygynists in South Africa, and the marriage-less Mosuo ethnic minority of western China—to suggest, and hope, that contemporary family diversity might be less a transitional way station than a destination in its own right.

Opening with the most familiar of her cases, Stacey suggests that gay men are “among . . . the most creative petitioners for family recognition and rights around the globe today” (p. 9). This creativity encompasses not only the monogamous, two-parent families foregrounded by the marriage equality movement of recent years but also a protean assortment of other arrangements. Devoting her first chapter on this case to caring relationships among gay adult men themselves, Stacey introduces us to a self-described “sex pig” who, by agreement with his largely celibate