

## Fathers from an Attachment Perspective

We are pleased to introduce this Special Issue of *Attachment and Human Development* on “Fathers from an Attachment Perspective.” Recent conceptual advances and increasing empirical research have focused greater attention by developmental psychologists on the roles of fathers in children’s development (Cabrera, Volling, & Barr, 2018). However, attachment theory and research have been slow to more fully consider and investigate father-child attachment. Perhaps this relative neglect of fathers, especially during infancy, was once understandable given fathers’ lesser involvement in parenting of infants and toddlers relative to mothers. But, dramatic increases in fathers’ early involvement in parenting in many societies around the world demand greater attention to the meaning, development, and consequences of father-child attachment from infancy onward (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000).

In some ways, the study of father-child attachment can be characterized by “fits and starts” (Bretherton, 2010). Classic studies by Michael E. Lamb and Ross D. Parke (e.g. Lamb, 1977; Lamb & Stevenson, 1978; Parke, 1981) demonstrated that infants could become attached to fathers as well as to mothers and that fathers were capable of responding sensitively to their infants. These studies were followed by important work on father-child attachment begun in the late 1970s/early 1980s and published into the 1990s and early 2000s. However, at the time of the first meta-analysis of paternal sensitivity and attachment (van IJzendoorn & de Wolff, 1997), there were only eight studies of father-infant attachment available for analysis (Belsky, 1983; Caldera, Huston, & O’Brien, 1995; Cox, Owen, Henderson, & Margand, 1992; Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984; Goossens & van IJzendoorn, 1990; Grossmann & Grossmann, 1992; Schneider Rosen & Rothbaum, 1993; Volling & Belsky, 1992). This led Cowan (1997) to argue strenuously for more attention to fathers in the attachment literature. However, this state of affairs did not necessarily spark the expected proliferation of father-child attachment research. In fact, by the time of Lucassen et al.’s (2011) updated meta-analysis on paternal sensitivity and attachment, over 10 years later, only eight more relevant studies had become available (Braungart-Rieker, Garwood, Powers, & Wang, 2001; Eiden, Edwards, & Leonard, 2002; Hazen, McFarland, Jacobvitz, & Boyd-Soisson, 2010; Kochanska, Aksan, & Carlson, 2005; Lucassen et al., 2010; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2006; Volling, McElwain, Notaro, & Herrera, 2002; Wong, Mangelsdorf, Brown, Neff, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2009). Instead, as numerous studies of mother-child attachment accumulated, and children from existing longitudinal studies were followed into adulthood, attention continued to focus on the wealth of data available on mother-child attachment.

Thus, a central purpose of this Special Issue was to reinvigorate the study of father-child attachment and stimulate more sustained progress in this area. One component of our approach to achieving this goal was to encourage junior scholars, who represent the next generation of attachment researchers, to submit papers for this Special Issue on father-child attachment. A second component of our approach involved inviting senior scholars with relevant expertise to write commentaries for each paper, thereby contributing with their

experience to new approaches and methodologies in attachment research. As a result, this Special Issue consists of six papers written by young scholars with brief commentaries on each by outstanding senior researchers who contributed vital observations on attachment figures' sensitivity (Hedwig J. A. von Bakel & Ruby A. S. Hall from Tilburg University, The Netherlands), on their abilities to mentalize (Svenja Taubner from University of Heidelberg, Germany) and how they adjust parenting throughout the preschool years (Carlo Schuengel and Anne Tharner from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands, as well as Ross Thompson from the University of California, Davis, USA). Other senior researchers took a closer look at the attachment development of children beyond the preschool years in the context of school experiences (Karine Verschuere from Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium) and within non-traditional families (Brenda L. Volling from the University of Michigan, USA, as well as Ross D. Parke from the University of California, Riverside, USA).

In addition, an evolutionary perspective on fatherhood opens up this Special Issue and outlines how *Homo sapiens'* ancestral past might have paved the way for how today's fathers parent and form relationships with their offspring (Harald Euler from the University of Kassel, Germany). We will be also reminded about the early debate regarding safe have and secure base phenomena in conceptualizing parent-child attachments, which have led researchers to consider peculiarities in how fathers may form attachments to their children (Karin Grossmann and Klaus E. Grossmann from the University of Regensburg, Germany). Finally, family systems and ecological perspectives are emphasized (Natasha J. Cabrera from the University of Maryland, USA, as well as Jay Fagan from Temple University, USA) to wrap up the insights that the presented studies have fostered.

We hope you enjoy this wonderful and thought-provoking set of papers and commentaries, and that they inspire you to continue or begin essential work to enhance our field's understanding of father-child attachment.

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