

Almost 20 years ago, family researchers examined provider role expectations for poor and minority fathers in the midst of economic recessions in the 1980s (McLoyd, 1989). The experiences of "underclass" families were framed in poverty literature, although some scholars argued for the explicit incorporation of working poor and low-income families into the vision of work/family research (Kelly, 1988; Wilson, 1987). In the 1990s, the national economy recovered, although the economic situations of poor men and their families persisted and even deteriorated. Young men experienced stagnation and decline in wages between 1980 and 1995, and young men of color in particular confronted two to three times the rate of unemployment of European American men (White & Rogers, 2000).

In this paper, I define providing as men's experiences in offering financial and material support to their children and families. Providing is an essential and often taken-for-granted aspect of successful fatherhood. What remains to be explored is how the emergence of new expectations for contemporary fathers--such as heightened concern for paternal caregiving--complicates assumptions about providing. The importance that families assign to men's providing may play out differently in diverse social contexts. Examining providing experiences gives us insight into the cultural work of defining "successful" fatherhood in these families (Townsend, 2000).

I compare and contrast the providing experiences of fathers from two distinct contexts: African American fathers in service sector jobs in urban Chicago and European American fathers in industrial jobs in metropolitan Northern Indiana. The groups are related by proximity to a shared economic restructuring process in the Midwest, where poverty rates have recently grown for minority families (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2003). Fathers in each context share similar educational backgrounds and exposure to incarceration. Although differences between the groups are subtle, they suggest that provider role expectations should be framed in context and in the process of integration with other aspects of new fatherhood, such as caregiving and "being there."

LITERATURE REVIEW

CHANGING EXPECTATIONS FOR PROVIDING

Exploring how men package roles in work and family domains, Townsend (2002) recognized that "locating men in specific historical circumstances illuminates the role of economic structures in magnifying the effects of cultural patterns" (p. 137). During early periods of industrialization and urbanization, men's role as fathers was increasingly identified as sole breadwinners in the public domain, in direct contrast to women's role as good mothers in the private domain of the family household (Griswold, 1993). The role of the "good provider" became a specialized male role in the transition from subsistence to market-oriented economies between 1830 to 1980 (Bernard, 1981). As "good fathers," men provided resources to their families through full-time wage contract labor. In most families, the ability to locate, obtain, maintain, and identify with employment in the public workforce was gendered. It defined masculinity and, in turn, fatherhood. In years when the economy contracted, men's parenting statuses also suffered (Elder, 1999).

Commitment to men's employment retains a "long term, consistent, full-time, and almost universal" place in family life, with 95% of all married men between the ages of 25 and 45 having worked in every year since 1960 (Townsend, 2000). Contemporary fathers fulfill only a fraction of mothers' time spent in household labor (Pleck, 1997). However, recent changes in work and family arrangements over the past two decades have diluted the prerogatives of the good provider role (Bernard, 1981). The dramatic growth in the number of mothers in the workforce has increased both household and emotional demands for caregiving made on male providers (Waite & Nielsen, 2001). Moreover, in the postindustrial shift to service-based industries, families increasingly have organized their work and family activities by allocating providing and caregiving responsibilities between both working fathers and working mothers (Casper & Connell, 1998).

Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) note that "contemporary discussions of [paternal] involvement usually connote something beyond provision" (p. 85). Men's roles as sole providers have been subject to negative stereotyping by both women and "new" fathers, who explore new cultural models for nurturant fathering (Daly, 1995; LaRossa, 1997). Reflective of these emerging expectations for care, work/family research often assumes that men may choose, or at least negotiate, between providing and caregiving activities (Voydanoff, 2002). "Good" fathers choose and succeed in providing for their children-- and "bad," deadbeat, or absent fathers do not choose or are unable to fulfill these expectations (Furstenberg, 1988).

Although the lines between providing and caregiving are clear in some studies, many contemporary men are unclear about the priority of providing. Drawing on 134 life history interviews with men in a range of socioeconomic contexts, Gerson (1993) described how men increasingly blend various providing and caregiving activities. Townsend (2000) delineated a package deal in which "work is not a separation from family, but a manifestation of family commitment" (p. 136). Employment remains materially and symbolically central to fatherhood, with implied security and parental consistency as the most salient dimensions of contemporary provider roles. Providing has become an interface phenomenon that sits between family and economic subsystems, absorbing elements of roles as worker, parent, and partner (Cazenave, 1979). This interface echoes research that links work and family roles through expansionist theory or role balance (Barnett, 1999; Marks & MacDermid, 1996).

PLACING PROVIDING IN CONTEXT

Without a set of common norms for fatherhood, provider role expectations have diversified across different contexts. Cazenave (1984) indicated that provider roles are socially constructed through negotiation of various contexts. He argued, "Only by placing masculine role perceptions within the appropriate social context will it be possible to fully comprehend why men act the way they do and under what conditions they might be expected to change" (p. 655). In effect, the decontextualization of providing masks qualitatively different opportunities for men to be providers for their families.

Changing family structures, such as the emergence of blended families, have further obscured set expectations for male providers (Amato, 1998; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Consideration of poor and working fathers' transitions in and out of family households and relationships offers new insights into how provider roles may emerge (Johnson & Doolittle, 1996; Johnson, 2000). Researchers have only recently focused on nonresidential fathers, who are underrepresented in most studies of poor families (Garfinkel, McLanahan, & Hanson, 1998).

Transitions in and out of jobs also directly shape expectations for providing. Edin and Nelson (2001) found that postindustrial jobs have gone "underground" for many low-income fathers and that there remain important racial differences in the participation of men in formal and informal economies. Despite the central importance of work to men's self and moral worth (Furstenberg, 1995; Wilson 1996), "there were differences in how [Black and White] men see their world and the appropriate strategies for operating within it" (Cazenave, 1984, p. 650).

Due to lack of job networks, information about changing technologies, and educational opportunities, many fathers struggle for years to find a pathway to legitimate full-time wage labor (MacLeod, 1995; Newman, 1999). Low-income fathers and fathers of color exhibit both disengaged and nuanced paternal involvement shaped by poor job opportunities, crime, and limited educational opportunities (Hamer, 2001; Sullivan, 1992, 1993) and by efforts to attain respectability by being "responsible" for children (Bourgois, 1996; Duneier, 1992). Historically, these men have searched for alternatives to the good provider role, maintaining contact and spending time with children, offering in-kind materials such as diapers or food, and connecting children to paternal kin who can act as resources (Roy, 2004; Stier & Tienda, 1993). Providing therefore touches on men's ability to provide not just financial capital but also to create human and social capital (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001).

Provider roles matter--but how, and in which contexts? In this analysis, I explore the process of construction of provider role expectations. I compare and contrast providing experiences of 40 low-income African American fathers in a Chicago parenting program, and 37 primarily European-American fathers in a work release correctional facility in Indiana. I examine how specific contexts may lead to different expectations for economic providing. In this way, provider role expectations can both discourage and encourage father involvement.

METHODS

PURPOSIVE SAMPLES

As a researcher and case manager in a community-based fatherhood program in Chicago, I recruited 40 fathers to participate in interviews about paternal involvement. In three years, more than 400 African American noncustodial fathers enrolled to receive employment training and placement, parenting classes, educational, housing and drug treatment referrals, and co-parental counseling. Fathers were referred to the program by

friends and family or through the child support enforcement agency. They lived primarily in South Side Chicago communities in public housing projects that were in the process of being torn down or reconfigured for mixed-income residency. Fathers faced severely constrained opportunities for employment due to the departure of industrial sector jobs (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999; Wilson, 1996; Young, 2000).

Just south of Chicago, I spent 18 months as a facilitator of a life-skills class for incarcerated men in a work-release facility in Northern Indiana. Along with a research team, I recruited 40 men for similar life-history interviews about paternal involvement. The men served sentences of up to two years for charges of driving while intoxicated, possession of illegal substances, nonpayment of child support, and fighting or domestic violence. Despite the loss of jobs and decreasing real wages in recent decades in Indiana (Perrucci, Perrucci, Targ, & Targ, 1988), the area boasted a base for manufacturing jobs. Men in this facility were mandated to work at one or more jobs in the local community but were formally restricted to the facility during nonwork hours.

In both sites, men's engagement in program services and their continuing reflection on their place in their children's lives allowed a strong rapport to develop between researchers and participants. For convenience, I initially approached active participants to provide information-rich cases for study. Fathers were selected according to their age to diversify the sample by birth cohort. Most participants in both programs were engaged in finding work due to program mandate or personal interest, and the study design did not allow for explanation of program outcomes. Although purposive sampling limited generalizability of the study's findings, my goal was to focus on cases that would provide insight into contexts and variation in providing experiences for low-income and working-class men.

I selected a total of 77 men for analysis on the basis of their providing experiences (see Table 1). Three men from Indiana were excluded since, from their perspectives, they had not "provided" for their unborn children or their nonbiological children. This sample of men included 49 African American fathers (64% of total sample) and 26 European American fathers (34%) of a wide range of ages. Almost three-quarters of the men had been incarcerated at some point in their lives, and another three-quarters completed high school or earned a GED. The large majority of fathers contributed to their former partners and did not reside with their children at the time of interview. In terms of contact, 60% ($n = 27$) of fathers who were not incarcerated saw their children daily or weekly. Incarcerated fathers were restricted by facility policy to short off-site visits with their children every six to eight weeks.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSES

I utilized multiple methods of data collection for this study. Participant observation allowed me first-hand accounts of specific ecological conditions that affected fathers and families. By spending multiple hours each week at the fatherhood program or the correctional center, I developed field notes that detailed men's accounts of how work and family roles changed over time. In Chicago, I also observed men's interactions with their

children during program activities. Finally, I conducted life history interviews with each father.

I drew upon basic elements of grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) as well as sensitizing concepts, such as provider role and "being there," which served as starting points to orient my thinking about data (van der Hoonaard, 1997). I was particularly interested in how men constructed their fatherhood by identifying and giving meaning to important life transitions (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). During two-hour sessions at program sites or in men's homes, I used protocols to retrospectively record the timing and sequencing of life events (using techniques found in Freedman, Thornton, Camburn, Alwin, & Young-Demarco, 1988). Using another semi-structured protocol, I explored the meanings systems that undergird the paternal role and how providing is shaped by opportunities and constraints. I also used a range of methods to enhance the trustworthiness of data (Lincoln & Guba 1985), including in-person discussions with fathers some weeks after their interviews to validate some of my initial understanding of family interaction and providing experiences.

Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, and both interviews and field notes were coded for fatherhood themes with the QSR NUDIST qualitative data analysis program. I re-read interview texts and coded texts using a simple scheme with sensitizing thematic concepts (Patton, 2002). Profiles were developed for each father to help identify divergent or common patterns of negotiating provider role expectations. I paid particular attention to a full range of prescribed, subjective, and enacted roles (Deutsch & Krauss, 1965, cited in Cazenave, 1979), which gave me a comprehensive view of provider roles based on reported expectations from fathers (and their reports of their partners), fathers' opinions about providing, and fathers' behavior as providers. Finally, a conceptual framework for selective coding was developed that linked unrelated codes to the core category of providing. For example, I was able to relate men's discussion of "being there" for their children to the emphasis on providing, as well as explore the variety of strategies that men used as alternatives to the provider role.

RESULTS

Fathers in this sample were similar with regard to their demographic backgrounds. All 77 of these men grew up in primarily blue-collar families in the Rust Belt of the Midwest, and most were socialized to the work their fathers did--factory jobs through local unions, manual labor, and highly skilled operators of machinery (Roy, in press-a). Across racial/ethnic groups and locations, fathers attained comparable educational status (finishing high school or dropping out just prior to graduation) and aspired to "good" jobs in manufacturing and construction trades.

Fathers were proud of their status as full-time workers, met obligations to their children, and often were uninterested in searching for better employment options. I coded fathers as "successful" working-class providers if they met their own expectations and made consistent financial and material contributions to their children. About 33 fathers (43% of overall sample) met their provider role expectations. Of these men, 82% (n = 27) were

incarcerated fathers from the work release program in Indiana, where employment was required by the facility as an aspect of the program. Another 57% of fathers (n = 44) were "unsuccessful" low-income providers who did not contribute to families on a consistent basis. Men from the Chicago parenting program constituted 77% (n = 34) of all men who were not successful providers, reflective of fathers' interest in job training sessions through the program. Racial differences were evident, although they were confounded with participation in either program. Fathers of color accounted for 93% (n = 41) of men who were not consistent providers for their children; three additional nonproviders (7%) were European American. Of successful providers, 67% (n = 22) were European American, and 33% (n = 11) were African American.

In the following sections, I examine the experiences of successful and unsuccessful providers. I explore the social contexts for their provider opportunities, including the nature of their jobs and status of family relationships. I also describe perspectives and negotiations over paternal providing between mothers and fathers, including critiques of the provider role myth that could dominate men's attempts to attain the package deal of fatherhood.

LIMITS OF SUCCESSFUL PROVIDING IN WORKING CLASS FAMILIES

Plentiful jobs and high commitments. Men in Indiana resided in a region that was hit hard by economic recessions in the early 1980s and early 1990s. However, the region recovered, and, although many jobs were lost, manufacturing industries remained in the area. As one father asserted, "This is a good place to work. I was told that there's lots of money to be made here." Even incarcerated fathers in Indiana had multiple job options in manufacturing and construction. Chicago fathers, in contrast, were employed in service jobs (shipping, food services, and janitorial positions). Success depended on their abilities to weave together two or more jobs at the same time.

Being a successful provider demanded stable work engagements over many years. Many older fathers in Indiana had long-term work engagements (20 years as an auto tech; 24 years in cryogenic metal casting; 23 years doing drywall work), whereas younger men in Indiana had opportunities to enter job training in the trades and union apprenticeships. The widespread availability of jobs led Lionel, an African American father of three sons, to reflect that, "I go anywhere, anytime, any state, town, any place there's a building going up, and I can get a job." Employers in the region seemed to "always be there to catch you," and they did not ask questions about lifestyle that might have been problematic. Jimmy, a long-term alcoholic and 45-year-old father of three teenagers, was laid off 25 times in 17 years of work. He proudly stated, "I'm always hired back somewhere. They'd call me back on Monday, and my wife would say, 'Well, he's at work.' My boss would say, 'No, we laid him off.' She'd insist, 'No, Jimmy's at [another job].'"

Stress in working class families. Successful providers in Chicago took advantage of the boom of service jobs. Although not "good careers," minimal commitments to part-time, low-wage jobs could allow fathers to spend time with their children and partners. Most of

the jobs in Indiana demanded higher commitments of 50 to 70 hours each week, which left fathers little if any time at home with children and partners. Roland, a 40-year-old African American father of three children, had earned his shot at provider status, like his father before him, with a job in a steel factory. The demands of the job, however, led to the dissolution of his family.

When I took my job and went to orientation, they tell you that you're going to get a divorce.... And when my wife called to see where I was, the manager couldn't pick up the phone. She got bored and found someone else. I lost something very special to me as far as being a father, bringing home the paycheck every Thursday, taking care of my kids. I used to come home, and they'd jump to the door for me. I used to love that--it was my life.

Similarly, Joe, a 41-year-old father of four children, sacrificed for minimum wage as a young worker and "started out in a hole that put extra pressure on me to be gone all the time. We weren't financially secure, and my wife wanted me home all the time." Joe turned his investment into a 20-year career as a union journeyman, although he lost his first marriage in the process.

Most of the fathers in the work-release program were doing time due to a history of substance abuse. The nature of manufacturing jobs often exacerbated previous drug use or introduced stress into men's lives, which led in turn to drug use. Some of the men's partners gave up on their relationship when drugs and arrests destabilized family environments. Mothers decided that, as in the case of Rusty, a 30-year-old European American father of six children, another arrest meant that "we got to go out and find a new dad." However, the safety net of manufacturing jobs could cushion the effects of stress and drugs in ways that families could not. Bob, a young father of a two-year-old, found a union construction job soon after high school graduation. His drinking led his wife to leave him, but "the union laid me off instead of firing me, and you get a union voucher so you can draw unemployment until the hall calls you back. I was off for a long time, getting drink-free."

Transitioning in and out of intimate relationships, fathers found consistent involvement with children could be problematic. Successful providers in Chicago adjusted their work schedules to allow for involvement. Gil and Damian, both fathers of preschool-age children who needed flexible care, quit their part-time jobs because they were required to work rotating hours with overtime. Prior to incarceration, many Indiana fathers faced similar circumstances, although typically they retained their full-time jobs. Fathers believed that successful providing would lead directly to a relationship with their children. Deacon broke up with his girlfriend and had never met his two year-old son. Although he "never had the feeling of how to be a father," he had begun to make "major money" building metal containers. He spent weeks planning how to become involved by paying child support and gaining visitation rights on the weekends once he was released.

Belief in good provider roles. In contexts that allowed for successful providing, fathers and mothers fell back on the promises of the good-provider role. Children's mothers sought fathers who could secure a conventional family life through full-time jobs with

benefits. Fathers reported that their children's mothers could "count on me financially, physically to be there." Jimmy stated, "I'm a provider, that's what I've done all my life; it's all I know. If they ain't fed they ain't healthy, if they're not healthy they're miserable; if they're miserable they're normally dead." For Ben, a successful contractor who had survived a divorce with two teenagers and ended a drug habit, men's responsibilities to providing and stable family life were "unquestioned" pillars that structured men's lives. Most fathers continued to be socialized early into the notion that successful providing led to respect and self-worth. Will, an 18-year-old father whose baby was born the day after he was released from the correctional facility, "just couldn't smile if I can't provide."

Men also espoused a work ethic rooted in self-sufficiency, which attributed their success to their own efforts. "I'm proud of staying married through all this crap [caught driving while drunk and sentenced to work release]," Don, an older African American father, asserted. "I pay the house payments and pay my wife and always keep \$1,000 in my pocket. I'm a workaholic, and she ain't going nowhere." A number of fathers were disturbed by the notion of dependence through welfare. Jack, a 24-year-old father of three who worked as a tree cutter and a grocery clerk, knew that "I couldn't be living off someone else, like the government, or my parents, or [my girlfriend's] parents."

The large majority of fathers in Indiana paid some child support as a measure of successful providing. Chad's greatest fear was to be mistaken as a "deadbeat dad." In his mid-30s with two children from his first marriage, he had worked in masonry and electrician apprenticeships to cover bills from his ex-wife and children as well as extra pay on his weekly child support bills. Fathers preferred informal arrangements that privately recognized payments to children to public accountability of payments through the courts. Rock, a 54-year-old father of two adult daughters, ignored formal child support mandates from judges, who had little understanding of his commitment as a provider.

I was ordered to do this, do that, never did any of it because I figured that was between her and me and God, and a judge doesn't got anything to do with it--I'm not a thief; I'm not a liar. I'm an honest person. I'm a hard-working person. I'm gonna be treated like a criminal and I never missed a month of payments.

Men also took pride in placing their children's needs before their own, providing "before I go out and spend money," as Lionel said. Men felt that children with nonresidential fathers needed role models who would prioritize children first. Cutlass, an African American father of two teenagers, insisted "the kids must see Pops take care of this. Pops has to take care of his kids, to pull them up." Providing became a non-negotiable imperative for fathers who had tasted successful fatherhood and wanted to do anything that they could to promote their children's well-being. Tony, a 24-year-old father of an infant and two nonbiological children, flipped burgers and welded and laid pipe to make ends meet. When he was laid off and lost his role as a successful provider, he turned to illegal sources.

I got to do what I got to do, gotta provide; that's what led up to [dealing drugs] right there ... laid off, no unemployment, no check

coming, so hey, gotta do what I gotta do, gotta provide. Dealing paid real nice, but it wasn't my cup of tea.

Confusion over new fatherhood. However, mothers and fathers both aspired to the ideals of the "new" father, who was a caregiver and a provider. Although some men spent 70 hours or more each week at work, mothers did not lower their expectations for father involvement. They pushed men to spend more time with young children, which fathers could not easily do. Daryl, a 44-year-old African American father, supported his fiancée and her daughter for five years. He found that demands on him as a father and provider were relentless.

Providing ain't never enough. Got lots of money but no time, honey.... I'm busy, I'm a hard-working guy. I've been working since six this morning. In any relationship, give this and that, it still ain't enough. Somebody is going to nail you, and you aren't going to be doing enough.

Fathers often did not know how to "do both" employment and time with children. Andy, a 32-year-old shipping manager and father of three preschoolers, did the expected thing--to work more hours with a child on the way. Work hours and inability to help with childcare added stress to the family, and his prior dependence on alcohol grew. His wife eventually took the children and left the house.

That's just what I thought it was like to raise a kid. My wife and I never did talk much about the hours, 'cause my hours pretty much never changed from the time that I started the relationship until now. I've always had overtime there.

Even with overtime pay in a good job, men and women could not deny changing economic realities and shifting gender roles for parents. Lombardo recognized that "in today's society, both people have to work to be financially stable.... I've got a loving wife who should have nothing to do with me for the way that I've treated her. I just wish she didn't have to work." Women faced new expectations as working mothers, and they encountered many of the same difficulties as the fathers of their children. The stresses of managing family life with few resources and barriers to work, education, adequate care, and stability were shared--even if fathers did not reside with their children.

The contradiction at the heart of fatherhood for successful providers was that providing was no longer equated with success as a parent or partner. Too much commitment to providing could limit and even harm paternal involvement. This realization was unacceptable to some successful providers. If economic success led to dissolution of their family relationships, some fathers "let the past go" and refused to salvage relationships that seemed irreconcilable. Firmly rooted in his success as a businessman, Ben yearned to return to economic self-sufficiency. He paid child support after his divorce, but he had not seen either of his two teenage children. He refused to speak of that part of his life, although he acknowledged that "something is wrong ... nothing's normal now." He, like other successful providers, could afford to start over if he could identify second (or third) chances to "move on" to secure family life.

Alternatives to the good provider role. Many other successful providers began to shift the focus off the provider role. This shift in perspective allowed a small group of fathers to fulfill expectations as providers and caregivers. Lionel reflected on his commitment to work and family from the work-release facility. He realized that "time was just as important [as providing], though ... I just wasn't there enough. Working is good, but, I mean, I've got a family. Why was it so hard to stay home for a while?" Gil, a young Chicago-based father of two children by two different mothers, took pride in his role at the head of food services for a local hospital. After quitting a job that demanded too much of his time with his children, he advocated linking time with money as the true definition of providing.

That's the first thing that comes out for most men: I ain't got enough money. But if you spend time with your child, you see how the child's living, then you say you've got to find something better for my child. You'll want to find a better job, with insurance. That's my thought.

Men from both communities resolved to "work on themselves" as a strategy to become more involved. By pledging to "get straight," fathers reworked images of themselves that would somehow fit with contradictions in the providing role. For many fathers in Indiana, changes entailed dealing with substance abuse while turning to their well-paying and consistent manufacturing jobs to reinstall them as successful fathers. Men in both Indiana and Chicago felt that dedication to "being there" as an involved parent could be an alternative to dedication to providing. Rock, who took pride in his record as a provider, realized that "providing was my mistake."

Back then, to me, it was everything. Now I realize it's kinda near the bottom of the list of priorities, compared with simply being there instead of working, not doing anything, just hanging out and being there, not being at work or at home thinking about work. Children know when you're there and when you're not there. Don't get sucked in.

"Being there" could pose more of a risk than "moving on." Leaving town and disappearing from their children's lives in order to "let the past go" was always an option. Chad knew that he could easily disappear from the stresses of providing by keeping a distance from his children, who lived with his ex-wife and her abusive boyfriend. But he recognized that involvement meant more than money.

There was a time I just wanted to fly away. Just say heck with it, goodbye Indiana, I'm going to the beach. I've never seen the ocean, man. They'd never find me here in this country. But I want to stay right here, face up to what I've got to do to take care of my obligations, my little boys.

In summary, men became successful providers in diverse contexts. Chicago fathers pieced together part-time jobs in the service sector, and Indiana fathers continued to work in manufacturing even throughout their incarceration. They identified strongly with the

provider role and proved to be motivated to work. However, the nature of working-class employment, emergent expectations for nurturant fathers, and issues over substance abuse for the unique sample in Indiana placed these successful providers in a tenuous position. Their commitment to work could limit and even harm their further involvement as fathers. Usually, they struggled to bring together the delicate components of the package of new fatherhood. Marriage, security, and family relationships could unravel in the face of time demands and stress over work. Some men were satisfied with a slice of the package deal, and others invested more effort into direct nurturance of their children.

FATHERHOOD BEYOND PROVIDING IN LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Absence of good jobs. The majority of fathers in the study (57%; n = 44) did not fulfill their expectations as providers for their children and partners. Men were either unattached to the labor market, unemployed, or underemployed in part-time service sector jobs. Fathers from Chicago made up more than three-quarters of this group of unsuccessful providers. Their families suffered through the permanent departure of manufacturing industries and the loss of stable, unionized jobs from South Side neighborhoods throughout the 1980s. Jobs were plentiful yet short-term, with no commitments from employers to ensure stability or family-supportive wages (Roy, in press-b). Unsuccessful providers in both Chicago and Indiana were limited to employment opportunities in fast food, shipping or warehouse work, or piecemeal construction and auto repair jobs.

It was extremely difficult to remain engaged in work activities with sporadic jobs that lasted a few months at a time. Devon and Eric, two fathers in their early 20s from Indiana and Chicago, respectively, each strung together seven separate job spells over a three-year period. Of the 44 men, only three had worked in the same job for four years or longer, with most noting that "this was the longest I've ever worked at a job--six months." Paul, a 38-year-old African American father of four children with different mothers, was lucky to land temp jobs with leading car manufacturing and metal-casting plants in Indiana. However, he was confused that his jobs had not "come together" into a career. He said, "I always thought I'd be a little bit more secure, don't know, more independent on my own before I brought kids, started raising a family."

Whereas manufacturing jobs in Indiana offered a safety net, part-time, high-turnover service-sector jobs in both Chicago and Indiana presented barriers that disadvantaged many fathers. Workers needed to supply higher-education credentials as well as demonstrate an impressive range of soft skills, such as normative language, appearance, and, as one father described, "a certain frame of mind." Fathers with felony records or periods of substance abuse were often disqualified from even part-time work. Moreover, the nature of work did not match many fathers' aspirations for blue-collar careers. Fred, a 20-year-old European American father, served in the Army and worked in "freelance" construction, but after an arrest for possession of marijuana and writing bad checks, he was mandated to participate in work release and take a job at a nearby fast-food restaurant. He asserted, "It's boring, it's monotonous, I'm stuck at this 10-foot row of vegetables and meat and bread, and it's ridiculous."

It is important to note the influence of race and ethnicity on men's experiences in limited labor markets. African American fathers in Chicago encountered barriers to employment, but they were hesitant to attribute them to racism. Seven of the 10 unsuccessful providers in Indiana were men of color, and they more quickly pointed out episodes of discrimination. As an immigrant from Southeast Asia with a college degree, Marley spent many weeks looking for work before obtaining a minimum-wage job in fast food that lasted only a few months. He reflected, "No amount of experience or intelligence prepared me for [the racism that] I found here ... you can smell the hate in the air."

Tenuous family relations. Both incarcerated and otherwise nonresidential fathers were challenged to secure long-term relationships with their children. While long-term spells of employment usually led to stable household arrangements and partnerships, only 14% (n = 6) of the unsuccessful providers had even begun to establish a committed relationship and household residence with a partner. Relationships based on good intentions were fragile and tenuous. Wesley, a first-time Chicago father at 21, felt that he would lose his residence if he got into one more disagreement with his partner or his boss. Remy was a 27-year-old African American father, and his mother's close relationship with his three children kept him involved. After serving time for hustling drugs, he did not know "what it's like to be a father."

It's hard to say what it's like to have kids when you ain't got a stable home for no kids.... I was kind of down because I was about to have another child, and already I can't take care of the one I've got. Growing up in the family that I grew up in, I knew all about being responsible. I just wasn't responsible enough to have a job.

Fathers' motivation to be involved parents impressed the mothers of their children, and many partners aspired to co-residential relationships and even marriage. Many Chicago fathers saw their children at least weekly. Very few mothers, however, could rely on consistent and viable economic support for raising children. For example, Alfred, a 36-year-old African American father of two sons, lost his job as a hairdresser, and after many months of enduring unemployment his working wife moved with her sons to the home of her own parents on the East Coast. However, neither partner foreclosed on the possibility of this relationship. She and their children maintained regular contact with Alfred after two years and encouraged his efforts to find a stable job as a cook. For Alfred, the open door to his effort as a provider allowed him to remain involved despite never "closing the deal" as a good provider.

Low expectations for providing. In contrast to partners of successful providers, these mothers often lowered expectations for providing. They asked men to be involved by providing in-kind resources or even time. Kara held little hope that her husband Kelvin, a 30-year-old African American father of three young girls who had served time in prison, could become a good provider. However, she welcomed his small contributions during holiday times and encouraging him to tutor his children weekly after school. Kelvin was proud that "this past Easter, I got all my girls dresses, without no money or no job. I'm proud of that, even if my wife doesn't want to talk to me."

Flexible expectations as providers and caregivers were crafted informally, outside child-support systems. Fred appreciated his ex-partner's openness to trust him to offer what he could when he could. He promised her that "if you don't take me to court for child support, I'll give you money whenever you need it, like two or three times a week." Working mothers shared many of the challenges that unsuccessful providers faced, and they lowered expectations for providing through personal insight into the difficulty of locating stable employment. Some mothers served time in prison and searched for fathers and paternal kin to keep children in their homes for indefinite periods of time. Others managed involvement with multiple fathers in order to secure resources for their children.

Emphasis on nurturance and presence. Men who were unsuccessful as providers debated the value of providing. Most fathers begrudgingly recognized that providing was a non-negotiable need for children. Rodney, a 41-year-old divorced father in Chicago, was unemployed, but he insisted that "you can't eat love, unfortunately--you got to do both the loving and the providing." Even with eight children, Stoney, an unemployed college student, did not feel that he was a worthy parent without providing.

You could look at me now, and I'm not ready to be a father. I know what it takes to be a father. In today's society, it takes cash, moolah, and I don't got any. I can't turn the tables, so I go on dealing with the hand that I've got. I can't blink my eyes. I'm not a genie.

Men acknowledged the lure of achieving success as a "good" provider, but they also problematized providing as a myth that could hide men's lack of involvement as caregivers. Rich, a 34-year-old father, left a substance treatment program to return to his wife and children. He admitted, "I thought that I was a great father at the beginning.... I had won, just because I had a job [as a hospital technician]." Devon, a 26-year-old Native American father of two preschoolers, understood the limits of the provider role from his dad, "who had tunnel vision, always working. I understand, you gotta work to pay the bills. But it's not fair to cast your kids aside because I have to work."

If the good provider was a myth, then the true challenge was raising children, which demanded creativity, guidance, and perseverance. Damian, an unemployed 27-year-old father of two boys on the South Side, said, "Any idiot can send a check. A check don't make you a daddy. A father is supposed to raise his child." Raising a child could be difficult from a distance. Jalen left his son and a failed relationship in Las Vegas to return to Chicago, where he had hustled for a decade as a teenager. Although torn by being apart from his child, he advised, "If you are not with your son, giving him guidance, it doesn't make any difference what types of jobs you have. They just got a rich thug for a father." By emphasizing "presence, not product," men refused to measure success solely by material things. Isaiah, a 40-year-old father with a part-time janitorial job in Chicago, successfully gained custody of two preschool-age daughters in the foster care system. He presented himself to the courts as someone who could provide for basic needs as well as offer time and care.

Providing goes further than feeding them and everything. I went out and got life insurance for her and her sister. I have to buy

oatmeal and milk, braid hair, buy clothes--I never thought about this stuff. I stay up until they go to sleep when they are sick, get up in the middle of the night, buy cough medicine, bundle them in the winter. I have a boxload of responsibilities now.

Alternatives to the good-provider role. The contradiction at the heart of fatherhood for unsuccessful providers was that, with a great deal of family negotiation, involved fatherhood still seemed possible without stable employment. However, reaching this understanding was an achievement in itself. The challenge for men was not to focus on failure in the world of work. Focus on failure could lead to a blind determination to find work that would compensate for the guilt of not providing. Chris, a 21-year-old African American college dropout with two preschool-age children, worked at a fast-food restaurant. His failure to find work led to a selfishness that harmed his children.

It does something to a father's ego if he can't provide for his own sons. It's even worse when you can't provide for yourself. You can't do nothing for anybody else if you can't take care of yourself, and that's pretty much what I was going through. I was too young, feeling like if I can't support my child, then I didn't deserve contact with my son. Which I know was dumb--the least I could do was be in his life.

Fathers also struggled to maintain a sense of self-worth when they could not provide. A victim of a drive-by shooting, Jelani lost his job as a fork-lift operator. He was physically unable to pick up his newborn son, and he grew more isolated from his son over time. He admitted that he was depressed, but that "if I had a job, I could get back on track; I couldn't even get my daughter a bag of chips right now."

"Getting real" with children about past failures as providers offered fathers an alternative to sole dedication to providing. Many of them tried to build relationships through sobering and honest discussions of their problematic pasts and by urging their children to lead different lives. Linking their experiences to the potential of their children's achievements, unsuccessful providers became involved fathers through a process of generative engagement. Miles, a 30-year-old father of two boys, had returned to Chicago from four years in prison to become reinvolved with his sons.

My greatest hope is that neither one of my kids will grow up to be like me or experience what I have experienced. I don't want either of them to go through that. That's why I have to start with Little Miles fight now, because I see that he don't want to mind nobody. He wants to be his own person. I know what I got to do because I know myself. I know how to approach him.

In summary, with the difficulty of finding stable family-supportive employment, these fathers achieved a different version of the package deal of new fatherhood than successful providers. They tried to cut themselves loose from provider-role expectations as the sole measure of paternal involvement. Marginal attachment to work, in some ways, gave fathers the opportunity to become more involved with their children. They saw that the provider role was limited and inevitably looked beyond it--to real interaction with

their children--in order to construct a viable path to successful fatherhood. Mothers of their children also recognized the barriers to providing, and many welcomed good-enough efforts of trouble-free fathers to get to know and spend time with their children. These perspectives gave fathers like Devon the insight to challenge the persistent myth of the good provider.

There is no such thing as a good provider. A father can only do what he can. Some people do more than others. Some people do less than others. What I consider a good father is a man who is around all the time.

DISCUSSION

PROCESS AND CONTEXT OF MEN'S PROVIDING EXPERIENCES

The "good provider" role, as Jessie Bernard asserted, was a specialized male role that in itself defined masculinity and fatherhood. Social changes, including men's declining real wages, women's increasing labor force participation, and men's desire to spend more time with children, transformed social norms behind the good provider role. The purposive sample of fathers in Chicago and Indiana allowed me to compare and contrast provider expectations in two different contexts. Fathers who worked in stable working class jobs--primarily those in manufacturing and construction industries in Indiana--held high expectations to fulfill a normative provider role. However, successful providing could come with high costs to fathering: unmanageable amounts of required work hours and stress placed on family relationships at risk. Low-income fathers who were underemployed or unemployed--primarily those in part-time service sector jobs in Chicago--realized the importance of providing, but they tended to lower expectations for the role itself. Their challenge was to find ways to be involved with their children in spite of being unsuccessful providers. For all of these families, providing remained of obvious material and symbolic importance and could not be taken for granted.

Providing near the poverty line was extremely stressful. Parents under extreme economic and social stress often respond either through a singular drive for hard work or through disorganization and inconsistency (Pinderhughes, 2002). Most men and their families--across contexts--realized that the ability to provide by itself was no longer synonymous with success as a father. Even while insisting "you can't e, at love," most fathers sensed that parenting should also include nurturance, interaction with children, and related concepts linked to "new" fatherhood. In turn, many grew critical of equating fatherhood with providing and searched for alternative constructions of "success" as fathers.

In effect, providing mattered in different ways for families in different contexts. The cultural work of prioritizing providing was related to everyday constraints faced by men and their families. In Chicago, alternative constructions of fatherhood offered low-income men promise to become involved parents. In Indiana, new emphasis on interaction with children threatened stable family relationships of working class men who by all accounts were successful providers. Burton and Snyder (1998) encourage researchers to explore these junctures in which social changes, role transitions, and

personal choices about work and family that occur in one group are related and have implications for those of other groups. They assert that "interconnectedness and reciprocal continuity between men from similar educational backgrounds and socialization to working class jobs helps to shift men's work and family roles across historical time."

Can fathers be successful providers and successful caregivers? It may depend on the cultural work that men and their families do to relate providing in a meaningful way to growing expectations for caregiving and on the resources--such as jobs--that are available to translate culture into conduct. Recent research on the rise of the creative class (Florida, 2003) pinpoints another group of fathers under stressful providing expectations. These fathers are overworked, but their jobs offer them flexibility in scheduling and self-directed tasks that allow--even invite--father involvement. It may be that many low-income and working class fathers are less able to garner resources to fulfill the increasing expectations placed upon new fathers. In this study, men who combined providing and caregiving were successful due to their adaptive capacities (such as growing diversity and transitional nature of fathering experiences) and due to role flexibility (allowing mothers and even nonresidential fathers to engage in important negotiations about men's roles in their children's lives) (see Jarrett, Roy, & Burton, 2002).

The limits of this study are closely related to its strengths. Future studies should utilize mothers' reports of advocacy and recruitment of fathers into paternal involvement in its myriad forms in addition to men's reports (see Roy & Burton, under review). The nonrandom sample of fathers from two different contexts does not offer generalizable effects of race and class on providing status. However, the findings of this qualitative study may be transferable to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995), and it documents the subtle differences between fathers from related socioeconomic backgrounds. A qualitative approach was suited to show how provider expectations did not unfold in isolation but were tailored to situated opportunities in diverse families and local communities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

Three implications for research on fatherhood emerge from this study. First, examination of social context can refine conceptualization of the full range of fathering experiences. For example, we know from previous studies that African American fathers may more closely link providing and caregiving than European American fathers (Ahmeduzzaman & Roopnarine, 1992; Danziger & Radin, 1990). Models of family dynamics in African American communities may be a window onto changing prospects for families in other cultural contexts (Crosbie-Burnett & Lewis, 1999). As the postindustrial economy remakes opportunities in local communities, will more low-income and working-class European American families search for alternatives to the good-provider model?

Second, normative, middle-class assumptions about the worlds of work and family may offer limited understanding of providing experiences in poor families (Thome, 2001). Time-use frameworks, in which less work and more "quality time" with children are

individual choices, fail to address different demands of blue-collar or service-sector jobs. In this study, some working class men found that successful providing harmed potential paternal involvement. We should reconsider the nature of jobs in specific communities (such as full-time work with family-supportive wages or requirements for overtime). Provider-role expectations emerge in distinct ways among working-class and low-income families, particularly with regard to gendered "package deals" of providing and caregiving. Mothers' experiences as providers shape men's efforts to be involved with children (Garey, 1999). Paternal providing is influenced by maternal and paternal kin networks and social policies such as welfare reform (Roy & Burton, under review; Stack & Burton, 1993). How do provider expectations for mothers compare to those of fathers? What does fathers' failure to provide mean for mothers in families?

Third, social expectations of new fatherhood are not explicit in fatherhood research. "All or nothing" assumptions about providing may have been assumed into a model of new fatherhood that emerged in large part from work/family decisions of middle-class fathers. Ambiguous standards for successful fatherhood may appear to offer personal choice and flexibility, but they also mask risky propositions for men with few resources. Work remains central, but the costs associated with the provider role have climbed considerably. Instead of comparing the salience of providing to other elements of fatherhood, a role-balance approach could capture the complexity of the interface of providing with emerging expectations such as caregiving (Barnett, 1999; Marks & MacDermid, 1996).

The package deal of fatherhood ultimately rests on life chances as well as personal choices (Gerson, 1997). Many fathers are expected to be successful as providers and caregivers without adequate resources. Should social policies lower expectations for providing? Good provider expectations linger when contemporary social policies and even family members target low-income fathers as "Dollar Bills" (Roy, 1999). The question may be how other forms of capital can or cannot compensate for lack of financial capital (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). Programs that recognize and encourage provision beyond finances--such as in-kind contributions--are rare (Pirog Good, 1993). Father education programs may encourage alternative views of successful parenting (Curran & Abrams, 2000). However, lowering expectations for fathers may require shifting the responsibility for family support to other family members, communities, or public institutions. For example, efforts to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit in the U.S. and various forms of universal family allowance in other countries have proven to be effective means of supporting working families (Dowd, 2000).

Or should social policies enhance opportunities to fulfill provider expectations? In cities like Chicago, there remain few "good jobs" with the departure of manufacturing industries, and there have been few concerted attempts to create or promote employment opportunities to replace them. Programs to move men with prison records back into the labor force as well as to move high school students from graduation into stable jobs are necessary family policies. Alternatively, in areas like Indiana, men must depend on their sporadic benefits as employees of a particular corporation instead of guaranteed rights as workers (Orloff & Monson, 2002.). Fathers in this study who were successful as

providers and caregivers showed the potential of flexible jobs that allowed men to lower expectations as the sole provider and get engaged in raising their children. Such jobs are rare, however, in part due to the lack of a coordinated national policy for work/family restructuring in all kinds of workplaces. In effect, the potential for generative activity as parents is a social opportunity that is allocated differently across diverse social contexts. Social policies should be explicitly designed to promote, not discourage, generative involvement of poor and working-class fathers.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics (n = 77 Fathers)

Characteristics	n	%
Location		
Chicago	40	52%
Northern Indiana	37	48%
Ethnicity/Race		
African American	49	64%
Non Hispanic White	26	34%
Asian American/Native American	2	2%
Age of Primary Caregivers		
17-29	22	29%
30-39	28	36%
40+	27	35%
Education		
Less than High School	17	22%
Completed HS or GED	60	78%
Incarceration		
Record	58	75%
No time served	19	25%
Work Status (at time of interview)		
Working	45	58%
Successful provider	33	73%
Unsuccessful provider	12	27%
Not Working	32	42%
Number of children		
One child	21	27%
Two children	27	35%
Three children	12	16%
Four or more children	17	22%
Average (children/father)	2.3	
Residence (at time of interview)		
With partner and children	14	18%
Without partner and children	63	82%
Different residence	32	51%
Incarcerated	31	49%
Relationship with mother of children (at time of interview)		
Former partner	59	77%
Unmarried partner	8	10%
Married partner	10	13%

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