Parenting and Gender

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Abstract

This chapter explores the sociological literature on the many ways in which parenting is both gendered and gendering. That exploration attends to the intersections of gender with other dimensions of inequality and the interconnections among gendered and gendering patterns at the individual, interactional, and institutional levels. Specific topics include definitions of parenthood, paths into parenthood, parenting labor, links between parenting and paid employment, social policy, and parenting as it shapes and is shaped by children's gender. Along with a review of key themes and patterns in the literature related to these specific topics, the chapter offers a discussion and suggestions for future directions. The literature has become more attentive, over time, to intersectionality, queer and trans issues, men and masculinities, and challenges to the gender binary. Future work should continue to deepen these more recent directions, and continue to emphasize power as a central organizing element of intersecting structures of inequality. Ongoing consideration of neoliberalism as a context in which family and household patterns are constructed is also suggested, as is a commitment to feminist public engagement and social change.

1 Introduction

Parenting, in its many forms, is deeply gendered as a set of culturally-informed practices and deeply gendering in its impact on parents, children and societies. Gendered and gendering patterns are evident at all three interconnected levels of the gender structure identified by Risman (2004), from individual gendered selves to interactional processes to institutional domains. The literature documents a wide range of such patterns, with explicit recognition of their intersections with other structures of inequality. In this chapter, I review and synthesize both foundational arguments and more recent literature, summarizing the state of theory and research on parenting and gender in the United States. I highlight what sociologists of gender have concluded about the topic and sketch directions for future work. Many concepts and patterns that figure centrally in the literature on parenting and gender are addressed more fully in other chapters of this handbook. Of particular note is research on carework, gender in the paid labor force, the division of household labor, gender and the welfare state, domestic violence, family

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formation patterns, gender socialization of children in families, and interactions between non-normatively gendered youth and their parents. I address these topics briefly given their relevance to parenting and gender, with more detailed considerations available elsewhere in this handbook.

As many scholars have noted, and Coontz (1992) conveyed to a broad audience in her now-classic book The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap, family structures are institutionally shaped and inextricably connected with other social structures, and families have always taken a wide variety of shapes and textures across times and places. Gender is critical as a structure shaping the social institution of family, as influential sociological studies like Berk's (1985) The Gender Factory, Hochschild's (1989) The Second Shift, and Stacey's (1990) Brave New Families established decades ago. More recent work continues to document how inequalities of gender, race, class, sexuality, and disability are reciprocally connected to family structures and family patterns, and throughout this chapter I consider those connections in terms of parenting in particular. Along with attention to mothers and mothering within a heterosexual nuclear household context, the sociological literature on gender and parenting recognizes a much broader array of experiences. Hill Collins (2000) traces a multitude of community-based mothering practices in Black Feminist Thought, while Hansen's (2004) Not-So-Nuclear Families documents the class-differentiated extended care networks rendered invisible by excessive focus on the household level. The gendered and gendering separation of fatherhood from motherhood has been explored extensively in books ranging from Coltrane's (1996) Family Man and Risman's (1998) Gender Vertigo in the 1990s to Edin and Nelson's (2013) Doing the Best I Can, with its focus on fathers in low-income communities, and Kaufman's (2013) Superdads, with its analysis of how fathers from a range of social locations navigate the tensions of work and parenting. The intersectionally gendered and gendering experiences of queer families are the focus of books like Sullivan's (2004) The Family of Woman and Moore's (2011) Invisible Families, while the importance of transnational parenthood is revealed in works like Parreñas' (2002) Servants of Globalization and Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2001) Domestica.

With attention to all three levels of gender structure and an explicitly intersectional analysis, the sociological literature has established that parenting is shaped by, and simultaneously constructs and refines, gender, race, class, sexuality and nation-based inequalities. From the works noted above, to many other specific contexts, sociologists of gender have documented a range of key patterns. Enos (2001) details the way motherhood is constructed and constrained for incarcerated women, while Natalier and Hewitt (2014) reveal how heterosexual parents construct gender during child support negotiations. Pfeffer's (2012) work explores resistance to dominant constructions of family among transgender parents, and Brush (2011) provides detailed evidence of the role of domestic violence and public policy in constraining low-income mothers. Reich (2014) develops the concept of neoliberal mothering and the way it allows upper-middle class women to reproduce class privilege, while Messner (2009) provides a nuanced account of gendered parenting practices within youth sports programs that reinforce a range of intersecting inequalities. Randles (2013) highlights the very particular social construction of fatherhood imposed by neoliberal public assistance policy for families living in poverty, and Ryan and Berkowitz (2009) document the complex interactions through which gay and lesbian parents seek social recognition. Blum (2015) addresses how neoliberalism shapes the intersectionally gendered constraints faced by mothers parenting children with what she calls "invisible disabilities" like ADHD and autism-spectrum disorders. All of these specific examples in the literature, and many more, have generated fruitful concepts, conclusions and debates, a synthesis of which is the main focus of this chapter. At the end of the chapter, I also offer

some analysis of the state of the field, and consider some of the most promising directions for continued work.

2 Key Topics, Patterns and Concepts in the Literature

2.1 Defining Parenthood and Paths into Parenthood

Hays (1996, 4) offers a nuanced account of the cultural celebration of what she conceptualizes as intensive mothering, an ideology that claims "correct child-rearing requires not only large amounts of money but also professional-level skills and copious amounts of physical, moral, mental, and emotional energy on the part of the individual mother." This model reveals the deeply gendered, classed and household-level construction of "good" parenting. It defines such parenting as the responsibility of individual women using household-level resources, a privatized endeavor in which individual mothers pass on class privilege to their children while limiting their own capacity to participate fully in the paid labor force. The hegemony of this model obscures many other ideologies and practices of parenting. Collins (2000) differentiates bloodmothers, othermothers and community othermothers as taking on the collective responsibility of raising children in African-American communities. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) casts light on the parenting work of transnational mothers, employed in the United States and sending financial support back to children in Latin America. Hoang and Yeoh (2011) explore similar processes for Vietnamese transnational parents, with particular focus on the impact of transnational motherhood on "left behind" fathers. Shows and Gerstel (2009) document the class-differentiated parenting practices of fathers who are physicians versus emergency medical technicians, arguing that the former group leverages its class privilege to reproduce gendered patterns that limit involvement with their children while the latter group reshapes traditionally gendered parenting practices. Haney (2010) explores the struggles of incarcerated mothers in community-based prisons that house them together with their children, as the carceral state controls their parenting in complex and highly problematic ways. And Edin and Nelson (2013) establish the daily commitments of time, energy and resources that non-residential fathers in low-income communities often devote to their children, in stark contrast to rhetoric about "deadbeat dads."

While the realities of parenting play out in a wide variety of ways, shaped by and further shaping social inequalities, the hegemony of the intensive mothering model becomes the standard against which other approaches are judged, reinforcing the legitimacy of inequitable outcomes for children and families. As Elliott, Powell and Brenton (2015, 367) report in their analysis of interviews with low-income women of color raising children, many judge themselves against the standards of intensive mothering, even as they struggle to navigate structural conditions that make it impossible to execute that kind of parenting.

> The ideology of intensive mothering reflects a version of privatized mothering that is not conducive with the constraints placed on low-income, Black single mothers, and instead increases their burdens, stresses, and hardships even while providing a convenient explanation for these very difficulties: mothers are to blame. This convenient fiction in turn supports and justifies the huge disparities in life opportunities among American families today as social safety nets continue to erode.

Related and overlapping patterns are evident in Frederick's (2017) analysis of interviews and focus groups with mothers with disabilities, especially in relation to how those women are labelled by others. "Nonnormative mothers, including women of color, poor mothers, queer mothers, and women with disabilities come under particular scrutiny, as they are systematically defined as "risky" mothers who are inadequate for the task of ideal mothering" (Frederick, 2017, 75).

Paths into parenthood are socially complex as well, and sociologists of gender have outlined a variety of constraints shaping those paths.

Though the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States extends one pathway to second-parent recognition for queer partners, queer and transgender individuals continue to face many obstacles in establishing parenthood (Bernstein, 2015), especially if they prefer not to participate in the institution of marriage (Pfeffer, 2012). Structural changes in the economy and family formation have also complicated paths into parenthood. In a large-scale survey and interview study, Gerson (2010, 12) argues that young adults in the United States have new hopes and expectations for parenting, but, as she puts it, "changing lives are colliding with resistant institutions":

> While institutional shifts such as the erosion of single-earner paychecks, the fragility of modern marriage, and the expanding options and pressures for women to work have made gender flexibility both desirable and necessary, demanding workplaces and privatized child rearing make work-family integration and egalitarian commitment difficult to achieve.

Bass (2015, 362) finds that among heterosexually-coupled young adults, women are "disproportionately likely to think and worry about future parenthood in their imagined work paths." Even before becoming parents, these women are more likely than their male partners to shape their work aspirations around the anticipated constraints Gerson (2010) points out, in a manner that directs them toward less financially secure occupations and greater dependence on a man's income.

For those whose transition into parenthood takes place in the context of a heterosexually-partnered household, the literature has long indicated that the transition tends to reinforce gender inequalities within the household and beyond (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997; Moen & Roehling, 2005; Singley & Hynes, 2005; Fox, 2009; Yavorsky, Kamp Dush, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2015). At the same time, parenting in the United States is increasingly likely to be taken on by single mothers, with or without a non-residential co-parent involved (McLanahan & Percheski, 2008). The increasing share of parenting that takes place in single-parent households headed by mothers is evident across racial and class categories, but the paths into this gendered trend vary especially by class. Hertz (2008) reports on the intentional decisions of single middle and upper-middle class professional mothers, forging new approaches to motherhood that draw on their class resources to parent on their own. In a comprehensive study of low-income women's experiences with parenting and partnership, the pattern Edin and Kefalas (2011) uncover often involves an unexpected pregnancy, followed by a thoughtful decision to embrace motherhood but postpone partnership until they believe economic conditions give them a reasonable chance for a lasting and stable marriage.[1]

2.2 Parenting Labor

After the transition into parenthood, there are clear divisions by gender in the ongoing labor of parenting. The contours of these divisions are one of the most frequent topics in the sociological literature on gender and parenting. Now a classic, Hochschild's (1989) The Second Shift offered an engaging look at the significant additional parenting and other domestic labor women took on in dual-earner heterosexual households with children. Hochschild popularized recognition of what she called a leisure gap, in the form of the extra month a year of 24-h days these mothers put into employment and household work relative to their male partners. Ten years later, in another influential work, Risman (1998) set out to profile heterosexual couples who more equitably shared that labor. But as she notes early on in Gender Vertigo, such couples were harder to find than she expected. Even among couples who considered themselves relatively egalitarian, she rarely found equal division of parenting labor. She explores that pattern to develop a

[1]Another relevant pattern in the intersectional inequalities that define paths to parenthood is evident in the literature on infertility, which Bell (2009) argues has long ignored low-income women's limited access to infertility treatment and the inequitable burden such women face from environmental and occupational hazards that compromise fertility.

theory of the way gendered structures of inequality are reproduced not so much at the level of gender-socialized individual preferences, but through significant interconnected pressures at the interactional and institutional levels. Though she considers the division of labor across a range of families, her particular foci in the book include single fathers and the heterosexual couples who come closest to equity. She uses their experiences to document that gendered inequalities in the family can be reshaped if institutional and interactional circumstances support or compel it.

More recent work documents the reduction of leisure gaps between dual-earner heterosexual parents, but overall those gaps continue to favor fathers (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2007; Coontz, 2015). As Craig and Mullan (2013, 1359) note in a comparative analysis of five nations, "parenthood was associated with more total work and a deeper gender division of labor in all of the countries studied," and especially so in the United States and Australia due to "gender neutral opportunity in the public sphere but little public institutional support to balance work and family." Parenting labor is gender-differentiated not only in minutes and hours, but in type and accompanying stress levels. For example, Offer and Schneider (2011) document that men in middle-class dual-earner heterosexual households with children spend less time multitasking than their female partners, and that multitasking creates more stress for mothers than fathers in these households. Given both the tasks and everyday accountability demands mothers often face from intensive mothering ideologies (Hays, 1996; MacDonald, 2010; Walzer, 1998), they may feel "particularly stressed when multitasking at home and in public because, being highly visible in their proximate surroundings, their ability to fulfill their roles as good mothers can be easily judged and criticized" (Offer & Schneider, 2011, 829).

Race, class, sexuality, disability, and partnership status are all critical to consider in painting a fuller picture of gender and parenting labor. Some have argued, for example, that intensive mothering labor is often a gendered approach to reproducing class privilege. Reich (2014) documents the way class-privileged mothers articulate vaccine refusal in a manner that advantages their children while reducing the safety and security of children with fewer economic resources. Sayer (2015) summarizes her extensive time-diary research by noting that "Child care remains a highly gendered activity" but also that child care norms among middle and upper-middle class parents are "influential mechanisms of class reproduction." Scott (2010) documents the extensive additional burden mothers face in relation to the carework associated with raising children with disabilities, highlighting some of the same neoliberal constraints that Blum (2015) considers in her work on mothers of children with "invisible" disabilities.

And white, upper-middle class mothers can often exploit racial, class and nation-based inequalities to buy their way out of some of this gendered parenting labor gap, by hiring women of color and immigrant women to take on that work at low wages. In Global Woman, Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002) describe the ways "The lifestyles of the First World are made possible by the global transfer of the services associated with a wife's traditional role—childcare, homemaking, and sex—from poor countries to rich ones" (4). Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001, 25) reveals the complex costs of these arrangements in her interview study with Latina immigrant domestic workers engaged in transnational motherhood: "women raised in another nation are using their own adult capacities to fulfill the reproductive work of more privileged American women, subsidizing the careers and social opportunities of their employers … (while) denied sufficient resources to live with and raise their own children." In another study that included both immigrant and non-immigrant in-home childcare workers, MacDonald (2010, 203) emphasizes the conflicts that arise as class-privileged mothers in heterosexual partnerships expect lower-income women to execute the kind of intensive mothering to which they feel accountable: "How the highly gendered work of mothering is enacted in class-based ways generates most of the conflict in these relationships."

Same-sex partners also navigate complex divisions of parenting labor that carry gendered dimensions. In an interview study of primarily white, middle and upper-middle class lesbian co-parents in the San Francisco Bay area who had conceived through donor insemination, Sullivan (2004) finds that most of her participants divide parenting labor at least somewhat equally. But she also includes attention to the gendered implications for the small number of couples who followed what she calls a "Rozzie and Harriett" pattern of one partner as breadwinner and the other as full-time parent. She also offers a nuanced exploration of the everyday emotion work that the non-biological comothers must take on as they seek to establish themselves as socially-recognized mothers. Moore's (2011, 178) study of a socioeconomically varied group of Black lesbian coparents in New York City fleshes out the compelling argument that "even in same-sex unions, gender profoundly influences the construction of family life," because intersectionally-specific gendered social expectations and gendered structures shape participation in everyday interactions as well as institutional settings. From the interactional responses they face in relation to their varying individual gender presentation to gendered institutional constraints shaped by labor market structures, expectations from institutions like their children's schools, and the feminization of poverty, these lesbian co-parents' lives are best understood through an intersectional framework that acknowledges gender as a "profound influence." The same argument is supported by analyses of single mothers, whose experiences are structured by gendered wage gaps, gender segregated carework expectations, the privatization of families, and a host of other gendered constraints (see, for example, McLanahan & Percheski, 2008; Edin & Kefalas, 2011). These scholars and others remind us that gendered structures shape parenting across a wide range of contexts, not only when a comparison of men and women within a household is the focus of the analysis.

2.3 Parenting Labor as Linked to Paid Employment

Closely linked to these gendered variations in parenting labor are gendered and gendering patterns in paid labor. Though addressed more fully in other chapters, a few key patterns are important. The integration of parenting and paid employment is contingent on a set of gendered inequalities that especially burden women also disadvantaged by intersecting inequalities of race, class and citizenship status. These include the wage gap that disadvantages women workers (Hegewisch & DuMonthier, 2016) and the interconnected wage gap that disadvantages those involved in paid carework occupations (England, Budig, & Folbre, 2002). Also relevant are the difficulties mothers face in combining the social expectations of motherhood with the supposedly "gender neutral" demands of the labor force (Hochschild, 1989; Hays, 1996; Moen & Roehling, 2005), as well as the punitive way U.S. social policy treats low-income mothers (Hays, 2004; Collins & Mayer, 2010), undocumented immigrant mothers (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001), and mothers of children with disabilities (Baker & Drapela, 2010; Scott, 2010).

One concept some scholars have used to capture the economic element of these burdens is the "motherhood penalty." Budig and England (2001, 204) document a significant "wage penalty for motherhood," concluding that "While the benefits of mothering diffuse widely—to the employers, neighbors, friends, spouses, and children of the adults who received the mothering—the costs of child rearing are borne disproportionately by mothers." Focusing on the earnings of white mothers across the income spectrum, Budig and Hodges (2010) find that this penalty is greatest for lower-income women. Glauber (2007) analyzes data for mothers across racial groups, documenting greater motherhood penalties for white women. And Correll, Benard and Paik (2007) use experimental data to document that the motherhood penalty others have studied in relation to earnings is also evident in

hiring decisions, with parenthood either insignificant or positively associated with the likelihood of hiring any given male applicant but negatively associated for female applicants. Along with these variations on a motherhood penalty in income and hiring, parents and especially mothers in the labor force face great difficulty meeting the expectations of increasingly inflexible employers who offer shifting and unstable hours, limited sick leave and family leave that is rarely paid, and who expect some employees to stay connected well beyond the normal workday through technology (Moen & Roehling, 2005). Some class-privileged professional mothers are pushed out of the labor force by these demands, as documented by Stone (2008) in her critique of the flawed assumption these women are "opting out." Others, as previously noted, attempt to resolve those competing demands by outsourcing the gendered labor of mothering to low-income women. In For the Family: How Class and Gender Shape Women's Work, Damaske (2011) argues that middle and upper-middle class women are more often able to use class resources to maintain steady employment in spite of the demands of family life, while working class women are more often forced to pull back or interrupt their employment as they juggle gendered carework expectations in their families. Scholars have convincingly documented the lifetime earnings cost mothers face for taking on this work (Budig & England, 2001), a gendered cost of parenting that is important to acknowledge. But it is also important to acknowledge the many structures that shape the meaning of women's parenting labor. As Hill Collins (2000, 46) notes, for example, in some cases "Black women see the unpaid work they do for their families more as a form of resistance to (racial) oppression than as a form of exploitation by men."

2.4 Gender, Parenting, and Social Policy

Social policy is referenced in many of the patterns within the literature that I have already noted. But given its crucial role as an institutional-level force shaping gender and parenting, some brief separate consideration of the topic is warranted. Comparative scholars have noted limitations to paid parental leave and publicly-subsidized child care as factors producing gendered inequalities in both employment and parenting labor across nations, and the absence of such paid leave in the United States is particularly striking in comparative perspective (see, for example, Orloff, 2009; Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2010). Along with these examples of the institutional-level construction of gendered constraints on parenting, at the interactional and individual-level scholars have also addressed how gendered expectations and gendered selves impact "uptake" of available policies in ways that can reproduce gender inequalities in parenting (e.g., Rudman & Mescher, 2013). Though women's greater likelihood of taking parental leaves disadvantages them in the labor force and reinforces their responsibility for the second shift of parental labor, the potential of policy to loosen these gendered constraints is also evident in scholarship documenting that fathers who take parental leaves "come to think about and enact parenting in ways that are more similar to mothers" (Rehel, 2014, 110).

Parental leaves and subsidized child care are common topics of consideration for feminist scholars of social policy, as are a variety of other policy arenas. From broad policy trends that have increasingly privatized families at the household level, considered by Cooper (2014) in her recent book Cut Adrift, to more specific policy domains like child welfare policy (Reich, 2005), criminal justice policy for incarcerated mothers (Enos, 2001), policy around queer families (Bernstein, 2015), child support policy (Natalier & Hewitt, 2014), and health and social services policy (Blum, 2015), feminist critics have documented the many ways family policy can disrupt but often reinforces gendered divisions and intersecting inequalities at the institutional level and also at the interactional level and in the shaping of gendered selves. Randles (2013, 864), for example, reveals the way U.S. welfare policy "promotes a highly gendered conception of

paternal caregiving" for low-income fathers participating in federally-funded fatherhood programs, while Pfeffer (2012) analyzes the complex patterns of "normative resistance" and "inventive pragmatism" transgender families employ as they interact with legal and policy constraints.

Public assistance for low-income families has been a particularly frequent target for feminist sociologists critical of the way neoliberal policy reinscribes gendered expectations for parenting in a manner especially harsh for mothers living in poverty. Through punitive work requirements and marriage promotion programs, Hays (2004, 30–31) argues, policymakers "treat the work of raising children, the issues of wages and working conditions, and the problems of gender and race inequality as 'private' concerns, appropriately negotiated by individuals in isolation. Our nation's leaders… simultaneously condemn the 'dependence' of poor women and children on the state and celebrate their dependence on miserly employers and men." Collins and Mayer (2010) refer to the work requirements central to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) as "tying both hands" for low-income mothers, forcing them into an exploitative labor market without protections as workers and without adequate social provision for the carework they would otherwise provide at home. Brush's (2011, 16) analysis of the intersection of neoliberal welfare policy and domestic violence policy also highlights privatization, and the way it can make low-income mothers especially vulnerable: "Privatization shifted the burden of arrangements for child care, transportation, housing, and job training to the market or family members instead of the welfare state. As a consequence, some women find themselves relying on men who have abused them or their children in the past for practical help in meeting those requirements."

2.5 Children's Gender and Gendering Children

Two related parenting topics that sociologists of gender have considered in detail are how parents are influenced by their children's gender and the role parents play in gendering children. Other chapters cover these topics more fully, but their direct relevance to parenting and gender makes them worth addressing here briefly. As I note in a summary of existing scholarship, "A body of literature that includes primarily large quantitative studies but also some qualitative studies documents a general tendency toward preferring sons, especially for fathers and especially in less developed areas of the world" (Kane, 2014). Once children enter a family, a comprehensive review of the literature by Raley and Bianchi (2006) concludes that children's gender shapes some aspects of parenting in the United States, with parents of sons somewhat more likely to marry and stay married, and fathers somewhat more likely to engage actively with sons than with daughters. Where such variations arise, they are an important reminder that parenting is gendered not only in the expectations surrounding mothers versus fathers, but also in the way those expectations may play out differently as gendered parents interact with sons and daughters. Though definitive statistics are difficult to calculate due to complexities of definition, reporting and interpretation, parental abuse of children also seems to vary by gender of child and parent in the United States: sons are more likely to experience physical abuse and daughters more likely to experience sexual abuse, and fathers are more likely to perpetrate physical and sexual abuse while mothers are more likely to perpetrate emotional abuse and neglect (Coltrane & Adams, 2008, 275–277).

The role parents play is constructing children's gender has also received considerable attention from sociologists of gender. In my book The Gender Trap (Kane, 2012), I draw on gender structure theory and interviews with parents of preschool-aged children from a broad range of backgrounds, to explore the way institutional, interactional and individual level processes constrain parents. I find that those constraints often lead parents to reproduce the gender binary, heteronormativity, traditionally gendered childhoods, and gender and other intersecting inequalities, even when they are trying to open a

broader range of possibilities for their children. But I also consider a smaller group of parents who are explicitly and intentionally working to resist gendered childhoods, who in my study were often parents located within at least one subordinated position within the intersecting matrices of gender, race, class and sexuality-based inequalities. Given that other chapters of this handbook address gender socialization within the family and how parents respond to gender non-conforming children in detail, I will not offer additional coverage of the extensive literature on these topics here.

3 Discussion and Future Directions

As the literature presented in this chapter indicates, sociologists of gender have documented that parenting is both deeply gendered and deeply gendering. And they have documented this while attentive to intersecting inequalities and to all three levels of the gender structure identified by Risman (2004). From our definitions of parenthood and parenting to the way the labor of parental carework is executed and its connections to paid employment in the labor market to social policy and children's gender, parenting is shaped by gendered selves, gendered interactions and gendered institutions. At the same time, parenting acts as a gendering force that reinforces, shapes and potentially disrupts the gender structure in ways that can only be understood accurately through an intersectional lens.

The literature reviewed here has been influenced by trends in the broader fields of the sociology of gender and interdisciplinary gender studies: increasingly consistent recognition of intersectionality, queer and transgender issues, transnational approaches, men and masculinity, and critical interrogation of the gender binary. From a literature once more often anchored in topics like the division of childcare among heterosexual couples and the impact of single motherhood, a much wider range of experiences, theoretical perspectives and approaches have joined these topics in constituting the overall body of sociological research on gender and parenting. Moving beyond a household-based definition of parenting, moving beyond a focus on women and then further beyond a binary approach to gender, and theorizing intersectionally and without heteronormative assumptions, are all movements that expand the literature. These are important expansions that advance our understanding of gender and parenting not only by studying a greater diversity of experiences and structures, but also more accurately understanding the common topics that once dominated the literature. Future scholarship on parenting within the sociology of gender should continue to consider, and continue to deepen its consideration of, this broader range of approaches and experiences. And it should do so with consistent recognition of power as a central organizing element of intersecting structures of inequality. Scholars of gender and parenting should also respond to developments in the mainstream visibility of trans and non-binary genders, with newly supportive laws and policies but also problematic backlash raising new and critical questions.

Like the sociology of gender in general, the literature on gender and parenting has addressed all three levels of the gender structure, with increasingly prominent attention to their interconnections. As Risman (2004, 435) notes, "Change is fluid and reverberates throughout the structure dynamically." Changes at any of the levels she differentiates—individual, interactional and institutional—have implications for and impacts on the other levels, and a holistic approach that considers those levels and their dynamic links is critical for further deepening our understanding of gendered and gendering patterns related to parenthood. One particularly noteworthy example of institutional level patterns is the relative hegemony of neoliberal frameworks in the contemporary West. As various scholars cited in this chapter have pointed out, neoliberal social policy has reshaped families and communities with consequences that vary tremendously by class, race, gender, sexuality, gender identity, and nation. Sociologists focused on gender and parenting should continue to pay close attention to neoliberalism as a context within which family and household patterns are constructed. Examples include the punitive

impact of the prison-industrial complex and welfare reform, diminished funding for health care and social services, public infrastructure and public education, and the ongoing lack of adequate funding for child care and parental leave. These are all aspects of an increasingly privatized family and the increasing privatization of care-work and social reproduction that are critical to recognize. An adequate analysis of any question related to gender and parenting requires that recognition. Even instances which might at first appear isolated from these harsh social forces are often instances in which class resources have allowed some parents and children to buy their way out of the additional burdens neoliberalism places on most people. Like the more general claim that an intersectional analysis is critical to any investigation of gender and parenting, the particular impact of neoliberalism at the institutional level and its reverberations at the individual and interactional levels is critical to consider throughout the literature as it continues forward.

But as Risman (2004) highlights, the change that can reverberate across levels can also disrupt inequalities and structural constraints. A variety of the studies considered in this chapter address that possibility, and explore the way institutions can be pushed in new directions, interactional spaces can be opened up to new configurations of practice, and individual selves can be crafted with fewer limits and constraints. This potential for change is often addressed in the literature, and it is important not to isolate that potential inside self-referential academic discourses. Public engagement should remain a key goal of sociological scholarship on gender and parenting. Many, probably even most, of the authors cited here have committed themselves to addressing gender inequalities and other intersecting inequalities with the explicit intention to contribute to progressive social change. From accessibly written books to blogs that summarize more technical articles for a broader audience, from legal briefs to policy analysis to white papers, from raising awareness in classrooms to direct feminist organizing, sociologists focused on gender and parenting have engaged local, regional, national and international communities. The scholarship reviewed in this chapter includes examples of systematic documentation of structural constraints, partnerships with a variety of organizations and entities to craft research questions and share analyses, debunking myths and revealing the regressive impact of policies and practices. Dedication to feminist public engagement has been a distinguishing feature of much of the literature within the sociology of gender, including literature focused on parenting and parenthood. Given the many crises, tensions, and injustices evident in our communities, nations and world, continued dedication to that kind of engagement is essential.

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