



Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City

By Kathryn Edin, Timothy J. Nelson

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Across the political spectrum, unwed fatherhood is denounced as one of the leading social problems of today. *Doing the Best I Can* is a strikingly rich, paradigm-shifting look at fatherhood among inner-city men often dismissed as “deadbeat dads.” Kathryn Edin and Timothy J. Nelson examine how couples in challenging straits come together and get pregnant so quickly—without planning. The authors chronicle the high hopes for forging lasting family bonds that pregnancy inspires, and pinpoint the fatal flaws that often lead to the relationship’s demise. They offer keen insight into a radical redefinition of family life where the father-child bond is central and parental ties are peripheral.

Drawing on years of fieldwork, *Doing the Best I Can* shows how mammoth economic and cultural changes have transformed the meaning of fatherhood among the urban poor. Intimate interviews with more than 100 fathers make real the significant obstacles faced by low-income men at every step in the familial process: from the difficulties of romantic relationships, to decision-making dilemmas at conception, to the often celebratory moment of birth, and finally to the hardships that accompany the early years of the child's life, and beyond.

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Editorial Review

Review

"An essential book."

(Harold Pollack *The Washington Post/WonkBlog* 2013-07-01)

From the Inside Flap

"This warm and often moving book cuts through the rampant stereotypes and misconceptions to give us the most insightful treatment yet of fatherhood in the inner city. Nelson and Edin are to be congratulated."—Bob Herbert, Distinguished Senior Fellow at Demos and former op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*.

"With a clear-eyed honesty and frankness, Edin and Nelson probe the experiences of fathers among our urban poor, and what they discover is both surprising and hopeful. Edin and Nelson should be applauded for their bold on-the-ground research which pushes us to consider that men whose lives are often marked by disorder having children can often be a stabilizing force. *Doing the Best I Can* turns many of our assumptions about fatherhood on their head." —Alex Kotlowitz, author of *There Are No Children Here*

"*Doing the Best I Can* will change the way we think about unwed fatherhood in the inner city. The book, based on in-depth interviews with low-income black and white fathers in Camden NJ and Philadelphia, is a real page-turner. Nelson and Edin's well-written narratives on the lives of low-income fathers, their role as fathers, and relationships with their children are replete with fresh insights. This compelling book is a must-read."—William Julius Wilson, Lewis P. and Linda L. Geyser University Professor, Harvard University

"I am confident that this book will instantly become the leading source of information on the nature of unwed fatherhood today. It shows a new path of intimate life for unwed young men, suggesting that marriage is no longer central in low-income young adults' intimate partnerships. It will be an eye-opener, a detailed portrait we have not seen before."—Andrew Cherlin, Johns Hopkins University

"This book smashes the stereotype of poor dads as the 'hit and run' or 'deadbeat' men who care only about casual sex and have no interest in the resulting kids. It is also unflinchingly honest about the sometimes egregious behavior of the men. Its poignant narratives and astute analysis make it the book to read on poor fathers."—Paula England, New York University

About the Author

Kathryn Edin is Distinguished Bloomberg Professor in the Department of Sociology and also teaches in the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences and Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University. She is the coauthor of *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City*, *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood before Marriage*, and *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work*.

Timothy Nelson is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of *Every Time I Feel the Spirit: Religious Experience and Ritual in an African American Church*.

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