Conclusions and Reflections

The individual chapters, particularly those relating to the data analysis, are the core of this book and, we hope stand in their own right. In this final chapter, we do not attempt a grand synthesis, which we feel would be a false way to conclude, but rather make a number of summary comments and reflections which we hope will be of value particularly to those working in the fields of fatherhood and intergenerational research.

At the heart of the book has been the concept of generation and the dual meaning of generation – membership of different family generations and the location of each in historical time. Families in the broad sense of the term are socially, materially and emotionally connected in ways not only bounded in present time but in the context of overlapping sets of relationships that change over time (Morgan, 2011). Each of us as individuals moves through time and is part of a relational flow in which we connect with others through presents and pasts that are both shared and not shared.

The substantive focus of the book has been on fatherhood in the context of generation and how men parent and are parented in different times and places. For while we know a good deal about contemporary fathers, we know relatively little about the diverse ways in which men ‘do’ fatherhood across time. The intention has been to provide a defined focus on fathers in particular historical and social contexts (Britain, Ireland and Poland). The book therefore set out to understand how fatherhood was perceived and experienced in different generations, at different points in the life course and from the perspectives of sons as well as fathers. The approach was to focus on a relatively small number of male intergenerational family chains and to select these chains according to two intersecting dimensions: social class background and ethnicity. The book also sought to fill another gap in the literature.
Employing a comparative approach, it examined how fatherhood is shaped in the context of migration. Three ethnic groups were its focus – Irish origin, Polish and white British men. The two former represent experiences of men in two different migration waves – the Irish who came to Britain in the mid-twentieth century and the Polish in the 2000s. In this final chapter, we consider and reflect on some of these themes as well as on theoretical and methodological issues raised in the book.

**Transmission, fatherhood and masculinities**

Constructions of adult hegemonic masculinities have been narrowly focused on heterosexuality, breadwinning, physical contact team-based sports, aggressive behaviour, lack of emotional vulnerability and absence and fear of intimacy (O’Connor, 2008, 2014). Hegemonic male gender practices include, therefore, practices and the embodiment of toughness and the avoidance of expressed positive emotion as feminine. In Britain, class is also an element. The artist Grayson Perry sums this up pithily, ‘Being male and middle class and being from a generation that still valued the stiff upper lip means our Default Man is an ideal candidate for low social awareness. He sits in a gender/class/age nexus marked “Unexploded Emotional Time Bomb”’ (New Statesman, 10–16 October 2014: p. 29). However, recent research on fathers indicates that the current generation of fathers is contesting the notion of masculinity as an essentially unitary and fixed concept (Whitehead, 2002). Nevertheless gender ideologies continue to influence constructions of fatherhood and contribute to men’s identities as fathers and their parenting practices.

The application of an intergenerational focus in the book has provided a means of illuminating how fatherhood and associated male gender discourses and practices are changing. It has allowed the reader to consider and assess ongoing tensions between fatherhood and what is described as the emergent ‘new Man’ in post-modern society. While theorists have started to conceptualise masculinities as more variable and plural, the complexity and diversity of the phenomena suggest that it is not easy to study in practice. As Wetherell and Edley (1997) write in relation to masculinities, identifying what masculinity ‘is’ suggests a constant process of stabilised, stabilising and destabilised meanings. Analysis therefore involves patching together fragments in order to plot the ordering and patterning of meanings of the self in relation to others and to examine how men constitute their identities as men through their practices.