GOOD DADS–BAD DADS: TWO FACES OF FATHERHOOD

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Bill Cosby's bestselling *Fatherhood* was no fluke. It is one of a growing list of volumes on the rewards of paternity with titles like *The Father's Book*, *The Nurturing Father*, and *The Wonderful Father Book*. Treatises on how to be a good dad are by no means unprecedented but the popularity and profusion of father self-help books in the 1980s are. There is no question about it: fatherhood is in vogue. Men enter fatherhood consciously and perform their fatherly duties self-consciously.

Television, magazines, and movies herald the coming of the modern father—the nurturant, caring, and emotionally attuned parent. Cosby is the prototype. No longer confined to their traditional task of being the good provider, men have broken the mold. The new father is androgynous; he is a full partner in parenthood. Today's father is at least as adept at changing diapers as changing tires.

There is another side to fatherhood, a darker side. More fathers than ever before are absent from the home. A growing proportion of men fathering children deny paternity or shirk their paternal obligations. This darker side of fatherhood has also entered our cultural consciousness through the mass media. We are bombarded with research data detailing the rising number of single mothers, inadequately supported by the men who fathered their children. A TV documentary on the breakdown in the black family, hosted by Bill Moyers, presents a young father boasting about the number of women he has impregnated. The nation is outraged. Deadbeat fathers—men who refuse to support their children—have become a political issue. The level of child support is so low that federal and state laws have been enacted to try to enforce paternal obligations.

Reconciling or at least making sense of these seemingly conflicting trends is the aim of this chapter. The simultaneous appearance of the good father and the bad father are two sides of the same cultural

complex. Both patterns can be traced to the declining division of labor in the family. To advance this argument, the first section of this chapter briefly recounts the historical change in the role of fathers. The second part examines varied sources of data that have mapped recent trends in the attitudes and behavior of fathers and points out some of the consequences of change. This examination is intended to uncover some indications of future trends in the paternal role. Is the pattern of polarization that has yielded two distinct paternal styles likely to continue? Answering this question involves considering how current public and private policies affect the distribution of paternal styles. The concluding section speculates about how some of these policies could shape the future of fatherhood.

Lest the reader expect more from this ambitious agenda than will be forthcoming, let me emphasize that this chapter primarily summarizes and interprets existing research. Evidence on fatherhood, though far more abundant now than a few years ago, is still sparse, especially when it comes to trend data (Lewis 1986; Parke and Tinsley 1984; Stein 1984). In any event, this chapter is not intended to be a review of existing research on fathers; several excellent reviews and compilations of reviews have already summarized the fragmentary literature (Lamb 1987; Lewis and Sussman 1986; Parke and Tinsley 1984). I draw on these reviews and certain seminal studies to present an impression of the changing character of fatherhood and to render a sociological reading of present trends and possible futures. On this latter matter, I am unabashedly, but I hope not recklessly, speculative.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FATHERHOOD IN AMERICA

John Demos (1986) begins his recent essay on the social history of fatherhood by commenting, "Fatherhood has a very long history, but virtually no historians." Apparently, family historians and feminist scholars have written much about patriarchy while largely ignoring the role of the patriarch (Bloom-Feshbach 1981). Relying heavily on the work of several of his students, Demos briefly outlines the changing role of fathers over the past several centuries.

The story that Demos tells sounds familiar to readers acquainted with other features of family history. The pattern of change has not been completely linear, and much of the action has occurred in the

twentieth century (Filene 1986; Parke and Tinsley 1984). After all, the changing role of fathers is part and parcel of a larger configuration of changes in the American family. (For a succinct summary of these changes, see Cherlin 1981; Thornton and Freedman 1983.)

Fathers played a dominant role in the lives of their children in the Colonial period. Fathers assumed a broad range of responsibilities, defining and supervising the children's development. Domestic control largely resided in the hands of men; wives were expected to defer to their husbands on matters of child rearing. According to E. Anthony Rotundo (1985, p. 9), a student of Demos, who has surveyed the history of fatherhood:

> Colonial fathers often showed a keen interest in the infants and toddlers of the household, but it was the mothers who fed the little ones, cared for them, and established intimate bonds with them. When children reached an age where they could understand what their parents told them (probably around age three) the lines of parent-child connection changed. Fathers began to tutor all their children in moral values at this point.

A father's moral role persisted throughout childhood, indeed into adult life; his influence was pervasive, usually exceeding the mother's responsibilities over the child. This was especially true for sons. Demos illustrates this point by noting that typically sons, when serving as apprentices, would write to their fathers, asking only to be remembered to their mothers. Both Demos and Rotundo argue that the dominant position of fathers can be traced to their economic role as landowners. (See also Greven 1970.)

At least one source of the erosion of paternal control over children was a shortage of land in New England and the shift away from an agrarian to an industrial mode of production in the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, European scholars argue that from the late eighteenth century, and perhaps earlier, an increase of affective ties within the family reshaped the nature of parenthood and parent-child relations (Shorter 1975; Stone 1979). A general decline of patriarchy, indeed, of parental authority, initiated the emergence of modern fatherhood. As men's economic roles increasingly drew them outside the home and into the marketplace, women extended their sphere of domestic influence (Filene 1986; Lasch 1977).

In a wonderfully provocative essay on the rise and fall of the "good provider" role, Jessie Bernard (1981) provides a similar account of the shift in the balance of power within the family. She observes that by the time that Tocqueville visited America in the 1830s, the nineteenth century pattern of a sharp family and parental

division of labor was plainly evident. Tocqueville (1840, p. 212) portrays, as did scores of other foreign travelers (Furstenberg 1966), the contours of the modern nuclear family when he wrote that the public responsibility of men "obliges a wife to confine herself to the house, in order to watch in person and very closely over the details of domestic economy."

The spatial separation of work and home, the hallmark of an urbanized and industrialized economy, was revising both marriage and parent roles. For fathers, it meant the beginning of an almost exclusive emphasis on economic responsibilities, which curtailed the men's day-to-day contact with their children. Demos (p.51) tells us that the consequences of the uncoupling of work and family life for men cannot be exaggerated. "Certain key elements of pre-modern fatherhood dwindled and disappeared (e.g., father as pedagogue, father as moral overseer, father as companion), while others were transformed (father as psychologist, father as example)."

Rotundo reports that men still continued to act as disciplinarians in the family, but their removal from the home meant that they "stood outside the strongest currents of feeling that flowed between generations in a family." The father as "instrumental leader," as he was later dubbed by sociologists, derived his status from the outside world, that is from his position in the marketplace. A man's occupational standing established his authority in the home and his worthiness as a husband and father. This movement from ascription to achievement, which occurred throughout the nineteenth century, signaled a profound erosion in the role of fathers. And this transformation is one source of the good father–bad father complex that becomes more evident in the twentieth century.

The strength of the evidence for this historical account is not great, however. True, as Demos and Rotundo observe, the nineteenth-century advice books reveal a growing tendency to speak to mothers exclusively about child-rearing matters, apparently acknowledging the shrinking role of fathers. A more convincing bit of evidence is provided by changing custody practices. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, custody following marital disruption was typically awarded to fathers, who, after all, were assumed to maintain control over marital property (of which the children were a part). By the end of the century, with the growth of family specialization, children increasingly remained with their mothers when marriages dissolved. Early in the twentieth century, the practice of granting custody to mothers was enshrined in the doctrine of "the tender years," which holds that the children's interests are best served

when they are raised by their mothers, who ordinarily possess superior parental skills.

Yet, it is easy to overdraw the picture of change. Most available evidence is derived from the middle class. Then, too, accounts of family life in the nineteenth century, not to mention earlier times, are so sketchy that it is difficult to tell how much confidence to place in the existing evidence. As Demos points out, fathers retained considerable authority throughout the nineteenth century, while some may even have increased their affective involvement in child rearing. We should, therefore, assume only that a change occurred in the modal family type, or perhaps in the degree of cultural support for a more detached and distant style of child rearing. But as is true today, some fathers were unwilling to cede so much of the supervision of their offspring to their wives and became involved in the day-to-day upbringing of their children. It seems likely, however, that the number of these actively involved fathers may well have declined in the nineteenth century (Filene 1986). Jessie Bernard, among others, has contended that the more restrictive role of fathers ("good providers") accompanies the development of the privatized nuclear family, the "haven in a heartless world" (cf. Lasch 1977).

The image of the father as good provider remained securely in place—except, perhaps, during the Depression years, when many men could not make good on their end of the bargain (Benson 1968)—until the middle of the twentieth century. The Great Depression literature contains abundant evidence that the strict division of labor was necessarily violated, as women frequently were forced or permitted to assume a more dominant economic role and men occasionally were compelled to pick up domestic tasks in the wake of these changes (Komarovsky 1940). Women's economic roles were also expanded during the war years, as they demonstrated a capacity to fill positions in the job market. Despite these changes, there is little reason to believe that the legitimacy of the existing domestic order was seriously challenged until the 1960s. Indeed, the early post-World War II era appeared to restore the so-called traditional family by strengthening the gender-based division of labor in the family. Perhaps, participation in war enhanced the relative position of males in society and undermined gender stratification within the family. In any event, the post-war period appears to have been the heyday of the nuclear family.

Yet it was becoming clear that discontents on the part of both sexes were producing fault lines in this family form. Feminist scholars have made a strong case that the domestic accord regulating

the division of labor within the family was problematic even before Betty Frieden's proclamation of grievances in 1963 issued in *The Feminine Mystique*. Barbara Ehrenreich (1983), in a fascinating cultural account of the changing male role, forcefully argues that concurrent with, if not prior to, the reawakening of feminist consciousness, men were experiencing their own resentments about the burdens of the good-provider role. She contends that in the 1950s men gradually began to retreat from the breadwinning role because they felt imprisoned both socially and emotionally by the sharply delineated masculine role. (See also Filene 1986.) So men had an independent interest in shucking the exclusive responsibilities of providing for their families. Ehrenreich (1983, p. 116) writes:

> The promise of feminism—that there might be a future in which no adult person was either a "dependent creature" or an overburdened breadwinner—came at a time when the ideological supports for male conformity were already crumbling.

What followed, Ehrenreich argues, was a male revolt that occurred in tandem with the feminist revolution of the 1970s. Both movements helped reorder domestic life, producing a family form singularly different from the traditional model that had emerged in the nineteenth century. The collapse of the breadwinner role and the simultaneous entrance of women into the labor force are twin products of twin discontents, according to Ehrenreich.

Ehrenreich gives far more weight to cultural discontents than do economists, who argue that it was the economic expansion of service jobs and the growth of wage rates for female employment that ultimately drew women into the labor force. Similarly, demographers and sociologists might provide other accounts for the disintegration of the strict, gender-based division of labor in the family. Declining fertility and high rates of divorce figured into changing opportunities or requirements for women to assume a larger economic role. And economists, demographers, and sociologists all might argue that rising educational levels of women made work outside the home more attractive than full-time mothering.

It is probably not useful to try to separate the cultural from the structural determinants of family change. They are really part and parcel of the events in the 1960s and 1970s that transformed the family. The decline of the good-provider role and of the father as instrumental leader came about when ideology and social structural change converged. The changes in the family that took place during the past two decades were, in effect, sociologically "overdetermined."

The cultural and structural accounts of change strike a common theme: the strict division of labor in the family that predominated for a century or more was precarious from the start. This family arrangement lasted for a time because gender roles were clear and men and women were mutually dependent, owing to their trained incapacity to share tasks. But its demise was predetermined because it set such rigid conditions for successful performance. Ultimately, neither men nor women were willing to uphold their end of the bargain. Women insisted on a larger role in the outside world, and men, it seems, demanded a larger role inside the family. Or, did they? On this point the evidence is much less clear-cut and consistent.

The next section of this chapter examines in greater detail the experiences of men over the past decade as they have presumably relinquished their responsibilites as sole providers and presumably taken up more of the slack in the home.

MEN IN THE HOME: CURRENT PATTERNS OF FATHERING

Our consideration of fathers in the home begins on a discordant note. There are two sides to male liberation. As men have escaped from the excessive burdens of the good provider role, they have been freed to participate more fully in the family. They have also been freed from family responsibilities altogether. This contradiction emerges directly from the history of fatherhood just reviewed.

The "flight from commitment," as Barbara Ehrenreich describes the process of male liberation, is the inevitable process of the breakdown of the gender bargain that prevailed until the middle of the twentieth century. Ehrenreich (1983, p. 181), citing statistics of the rising reluctance of males to enter and maintain marital arrangements, is deeply skeptical about men's willingness to support women:

> If we accept the male revolt as a historical fait accompli and begin to act on its economic consequences for women—which I have argued that we must do—are we not in some way giving up on men . . . ? Are we acquiescing to a future in which men will always be transients in the lives of women and never fully members of the human family?

Hedging just a bit on the answer to this unsettling question, Ehrenreich concludes that in all probability men will not change and that women must rely on the their own economic power with the support of an expanded welfare state.

Jessie Bernard, analyzing the changing role of the good-provider,

arrives at a similar conclusion, although she is less prepared to abandon the possibility that men may find a way back into the family. The good-provider role is on its way out, she tells us, but "its legitimate successor has not yet appeared on the scene." She compares the reconstruction of gender and family roles to the deprogramming of a cult member. It has been far easier to convince husbands to share economic responsibilities with their wives than to assume domestic and child care responsibilities.

Historians Demos and Rotundo, in their individual assessments of the future of fatherhood, express similar apprehensions. Rotundo, in particular, is alarmed about the growing trend toward fathers' absence from families and the apparent unwillingness, when living apart from their children, to assume economic responsibility for their support. Rotundo comments, "Although this failure (of divorced fathers to pay child support) represents a dramatic defiance of the ideas of Modern Fatherhood, it is, consistent with an extreme strain of male individualism that reacts to family responsibility as a quiet form of tyranny." He, too, questions whether androgynous fatherhood will emerge as the predominant pattern, even in the middle class where it has been championed, at least in some quarters. In sum, Rotundo expresses many of the same doubts that were voiced by feminists like Ehrenreich and Bernard about the willingness of males to remain involved in the family, now that the gender-based division of labor is no longer in place.

Let us have a closer look at the evidence they find so disturbing—the retreat from paternal obligations. Then we shall turn to the data on the other side: are fathers becoming more involved and, if so, what are the likely consequences for their spouses and their offspring?

In drawing any conclusions about trends in paternal involvement, we must be aware that the time we choose to begin our examination will to some extent affect the results. Most comparisons of demographic changes in the family begin in the 1950s and 1960s, in part because data from that period are abundant and the contrasts are almost invariably dramatic. Yet it is important to recognize, as Cherlin (1981) and others have pointed out, that comparisons between today and the baby boom era invariably exaggerate the amount of change. Even taking into account this tendency to magnify the patterns of change, it is hard to dispute that in some important respects, fathers do indeed seem to be receding from the family.

Eggebeen and Uhlenberg (1985), two demographers, have provided a descriptive overview of the declining involvement of men in

families during the period from 1960 to 1980. Using data from the decennial censuses in 1960 and 1970 and the 1980 Current Population Survey, they calculate the amount of time men spend in family environments living with children. Later marriage, a decline in fertility, and increasing rates of marital dissolution all have contributed to a sharp decline—43 percent between 1960 and 1980—in the average number of years that men between ages 20 to 49 spend in families where young children live (falling from 12.34 years on average in 1960 to just 7.0 in 1980).

The decline is most evident for more educated males and is much sharper for blacks than whites. Eggebeen and Uhlenberg interpret these results to mean that the opportunity costs for entering fatherhood may be growing as the social pressure for men to become parents declines. In short, fatherhood is becoming a more voluntary role that requires a greater degree of personal and economic sacrifice.

An interesting corollary of this observation is that as fewer men assume the role, those who do will be selected among the most committed and dedicated. If this is true, one might expect to find that fathers today are fulfilling their paternal obligations more, not less, conscientiously. Fathers may be becoming a more differentiated population, with only more highly committed males entering their ranks.

This reassuring observation is, however, not entirely consistent with much of the available evidence on the entrance to fatherhood. Trends on the resolution of premarital pregnancies show a growing proportion of couples electing not to marry (O'Connell and Rogers 1984). Of course, women may be less eager than formerly to enter marriage. Social pressure and pressure from sexual partners have both declined, freeing males from entering marriage in order to make "honest women" of their partners or to "give their child a name." This more elective response to unplanned parenthood has been accompanied by a widespread reluctance of unmarried males to assume economic responsibility for their offspring. Data are unavailable to document whether or not the proportion of unmarried men who contribute to the support of their children has decreased during the past several decades, but most experts would probably agree that it has.

First, many males today do not report their children in social surveys. Fertility histories from males are notoriously unreliable because many men simply "forget" children living outside the household. My own study of unmarried youth in Baltimore showed strikingly higher reports of offspring among females than males, and

recent reports indicate that many males are simply reluctant to acknowledge children they do not see or support.

Of course, it is possible to argue that such findings are not discrepant with a trend toward a more voluntaristic notion of parenthood. After all, men are increasingly selective in their willingness to assume the responsibilities of parenthood. But once they do, they may be counted on for support. Not so. A growing body of evidence suggests that adherence to child support is very undependable, even among men who are under a court agreement.

More than half of all men required to pay child support do not fully comply. Moreover, a substantial number of males leave marriage without a child support agreement. In all, only a third of all children living in fatherless homes receive paternal assistance. Among those receiving economic aid, the level is usually so low that it only rarely lifts children out of poverty. The average amount of child support paid to divorced women was $2,220 in 1981 (this figure excludes women due but not receiving support). The amount of child support measured in real dollars actually dropped from 1979 to 1981 (Weitzman 1985, ch.9). Several studies show that divorced men typically spend a much lower proportion of their postmarital income on child support than do their ex-wives. According to Weitzman (p. 295):

> Most fathers could comply with court orders and live quite well after doing so. Every study of men's ability to pay arrives at the same conclusion: the money is there. Indeed, there is normally enough to permit payment of significantly higher awards than are currently being made.

Many authorities believe that the main reason why men do not pay child support is limited enforcement. In 1984, Congress enacted legislation empowering and encouraging states to adopt stricter provisions for collecting child support. It is still too soon to tell whether the new procedures will significantly alter the level of compliance.

My own hunch is that the issue cannot be solved merely by stricter enforcement measures, although they are certainly a step in the right direction. The more intractable problem stems from the fact that many, if not most, noncustodial fathers are only weakly attached to their children. Data from the 1981 National Survey of Children revealed some alarming statistics on the amount of contact between noncustodial fathers and their offspring (who were between the ages of 11 and 16 at the time of the interview). Close to half of all children in mother-headed households had not seen their biological father

during the 12 months preceding the survey, and another sixth of the sample had seen him only once or twice in the past year. And, only a sixth of the children saw their fathers as often as once a week on the average (Furstenberg et al. 1983).

Contact between children and their noncustodial fathers drops off sharply with the length of time since separation. Only about a third of the children in marriages that broke up 10 years earlier have seen their fathers in the past year. The provision of child support is closely related to the amount of contact maintained, which, in turn, is strongly associated with men's socioeconomic position. Less educated and lower income males are less likely to remain connected to their children than those with more resources. Significantly, the figures for support by and contact with never-married fathers are almost as high as the figures for men who were wed to the mothers. It appears, then, that matrimony confers little advantage in maintaining bonds between noncustodial fathers and their offspring.

In general, these figures, along with the child support statistics, provide a dismal picture of the commitment of fathers to their children—at least to those not living in the home. Of course, we cannot completely dismiss the accounts of some noncustodial fathers who report that they are, in effect, "locked out" of a relationship with their offspring by their former wives, who resist their efforts to play a larger role in child rearing. Such men often say they are unwilling to provide child support when they are not permitted to see their offspring regularly.

Some of these responses, no doubt, are credible. More often, it seems, custodial mothers complain that they cannot interest their former husbands in seeing their children. In the National Survey of Children, 75 percent of the women stated that they thought that the children's fathers were too little involved in child care responsibilities, and most stated that they wished the fathers would play a larger role in the children's upbringing.

Having sifted through evidence from this survey and from a smaller and more qualitative study I carried out with Graham Spanier in Central Pennsylvania, the women's accounts are generally more accurate (Furstenberg and Spanier 1984). Fathers typically are unwilling or unable to remain involved with their children in the aftermath of divorce. Instead, men often assume child-rearing responsibilities in a new household after remarriage. This curious arrangement resembles a pattern of "child swapping," whereby many men relinquish the support of biological children from a first marriage in favor of biological or stepchildren in a successive union.

Interestingly, children in stepfamilies report roughly comparable

levels of interaction with parents as children in families with two biological parents. Although they are less content with their stepfather's attentions, most acknowledge that their stepfathers are indeed involved in their upbringing—almost as involved as biological fathers in never- divorced families (Furstenberg 1987). It seems, then, that fatherhood is a transient status for many men. Paternal obligations are dictated largely by residence. This is not to say that some men do not maintain enduring ties with biological children when they move apart, especially with sons (Morgan, Lye and Condran 1987), but a substantial number seem to give equal or greater allegiance to their stepchildren.

This picture of men migrating from one family to the next modifies to some extent the proposition that a growing number of men are retreating from fatherhood. Just as they return to marriage, many men who have abandoned their biological children ultimately assume paternal responsibilites for a new set of offspring. Over their life course, most men will spend time raising children, if not their own, then someone else's. Yet it is clear that, from the children's point of view, this more transient notion of fatherhood may be less secure and satisfying.

Current estimates reveal that more than half of all children growing up today will spend at least part of their childhood in a single-parent household, usually headed by a woman. For many of these children, contact with and support from their biological fathers will be sporadic, at best. Although most will, in time acquire stepfathers, these men will often be imperfect surrogates for missing biological fathers. They will be less constant in their attentions and, at least from the children's perspective, less often role models for adulthood. Researchers are divided over the issue of how much permanent emotional damage to children is created by marital disruption, but virtually all studies show that spells of paternal absence inevitably place children at a severe economic disadvantage in later life.

Unquestionably, then, the dark side of fatherhood, which I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, casts a large shadow over the sanguine reports of a rising interest in fatherhood. In the breakdown of the good-provider role, a large number of men, in Jessie Bernard's words, have become "role rejectors," men who retreat from family obligations. As she observes, the retreat from fatherhood is not new. Family desertion has always occurred and appeared to be common during the Depression. Then and now, a disproportionate share of the role rejectors are drawn from the ranks of the economically disadvantaged. What may be new is the number

of middle-class men who are reneging on their paternal obligations—men who presumably have the resources but not the commitment to perform their fatherly responsibilities. In the concluding section of this chapter, I return to a consideration of what can or should be done to bolster the involvement of these derelict dads.

Despite the ominous rise in the number of transient fathers, it is impossible not to acknowledge that the decline of the good-provider role has, as so many observers have claimed, also brought about a more felicitous trend—the expansion of fatherhood to permit greater emotional involvement in child care. When I asked my barber, a father of two young children, whether he thought that dads were different today, he said, "They've got to be. They are there right at the beginning, don't you think?" he replied with a question back to me, the expert. When I asked him to elaborate he said, "You are right there when the baby is born. That's got to make a difference, don't you think?" he repeated.

I have not collected any statistics on the presence of men in childbirth classes and the delivery room, but I suspect that my barber is correct. Making childbirth and early infant care an important event for fathers conveys a powerful symbolic message: men are no longer on the outside, looking in; they are now part of the birth process. Whether that early contact has enduring "bonding effects," as some have argued, is a much less interesting and important question than the general impact of permitting, indeed expecting, fathers to be involved (Parke and Tinsley 1984). Unquestionably, as a number of leading developmental psychologists have observed, the shifting emphasis on paternal participation in early child care has created opportunities for a new and expanded definition of fatherhood (Lamb 1987).

The burgeoning developmental literature on fatherhood has focused largely on the consequences of new role responsibilities, especially during infancy and early childhood, for children's relations to their fathers and for their cognitive and emotional gains. Because this research is not central to the theme of this chapter, I merely note in passing that the seemingly obvious proposition that fathers' involvement in child care consistently and substantially benefits the child has not been well established. Existing evidence suggests that the relationship between paternal involvement and children's well-being is mediated by a number of conditions—the mother's attitude toward paternal participation, her ability to collaborate with the father, the father's skill in establishing a warm relationship to his offspring, and the child's needs, among others.

The fact that increasing paternal involvement in child care does not automatically result in improved outcomes for children is not altogether surprising, especially to skeptics of simplistic proposals to enhance family functioning. Nonetheless this discovery has disappointed some of the proponents of the new fatherhood movement (Lamb 1982).

Fathers, it seems, neither matter so much emotionally as some wishful observers claim, nor so little as other skeptics contend. When fathers are strongly committed to playing a major role in their children's upbringing their impact can be large, especially when mothers are a less conspicuous presence in the family. Ordinarily, this is not what happens: mothers are the preeminent figures, and the added impact of paternal involvement in shaping the child's emotional development seems rather small.

But a growing body of research indicates that in certain circumstances fathers do play a central role in child rearing, a role that greatly benefits the cognitive and emotional development of young children. Despite some people's reservations (Rossi 1985), fathers, it seems, can be perfectly capable caretakers of young infants. The notion that mothers possess special or unique talents for child care has not been substantiated (Russell 1986). Fathers do characteristically perform child care duties differently, according to Michael Lamb and others who have investigated infant care by men. In particular, fathers tend to engage in more play and roughhousing. Yet Lamb (1987, p. 13) observes that the emotional tone of the paternal relationship is what matters: "As far as influence on children is concerned, there seems to be little about the gender of the parent that is distinctively important. The characteristics of the father as a parent rather than the characteristics of the father as a man appear to influence child development."

Moreover, it is likely that active paternal participation has broader consequences for family functioning. Lois Hoffman (1983), for example, has assembled evidence showing that greater involvement by fathers in household and child care duties reduces the role strain experienced by working mothers. On the basis of fragmentary data, Hoffman speculates that easing the burdens of employed wives enhances marital well-being, which, in turn, contributes to children's adjustment. If fathers assumed an equal parental role, children would be less likely to acquire gender conceptions that restrict the future family performance of males and occupational performance of females. More immediately, however, conjugal bonds might be strengthened when couples share parental tasks.

Hoffman's assessment of the possible benefits of greater paternal participation is not uniformly rosy, however. She notes that the expansion of fatherhood can and has encroached on the prerogatives of women in the home. A breakdown of the traditional division of labor can erode women's power, create greater conflict when parents do not share similar definitions of desirable parental behavior, and dilute the satisfactions of motherhood for women. Hoffman also observes that as men become more competent parents, they may be more willing to divorce, knowing that they have the skills to claim custodial rights. I arrived at a similar conclusion in a study of divorce and remarriage in Central Pennsylvania. When fathers assumed a more active parental role before divorce, the possibility of postmarital conflict over rights and responsibilities for the children tended to increase.

On balance neither I nor, probably, Hoffman would claim that the costs of greater paternal participation outweigh the potential benefits for children. Most women are only too happy to see their husbands play a greater role in child care and would gladly yield territory in the home to increase their power outside the household. The greater involvement of men in child care probably does more to contribute to marital contentment than it does to increase the risk of conflict and divorce.

What is more open to serious question is the extent to which fathers today actually involve themselves in child care. Here again I turned to my barber for an opinion. How much child care does he, as a liberated father, actually do? "Well, I give my wife some relief, but she naturally does most of it," he volunteered. "I really don't have that much time to help out." He is not unique. The preponderance of data from a variety of sources indicates that most fathers still do very little child care, especially when their children are very young.

The extent to which fathers' roles have changed in recent years cannot easily be measured, for researchers simply did not think to ask about paternal involvement in child care even a decade or so ago. This fact itself might be taken as an index of change. Yet it is possible that fathers in the recent past did more than they got credit for and today do less than we like to think. The consensus of most scholars who have studied the question of role change is that modest change has taken place in both the attitude and the behavior of fathers. The change that has occurred is linked to a general shift in less gender-specific family roles (Thornton and Freedman 1983; Stein 1984). Recent data from the Virginia Slims Survey of American

Women, times-series data on women's issues collected by Roper, reveal similar shifts on a range of gender-related attitudes, although limited information was collected specifically on paternal obligations. From 1974 to 1985, women significantly increased (from 46 to 57 percent) their preference for a marriage in which husband and wife shared responsibility for work, household duties, and child care more equitably. Similarly, the Virginia Slims Survey recorded a sharp rise in wives desire to be paid by their husbands for household work (1985 Virginia Slims American Women's Opinion Poll). Although men were not asked these specific questions, their opinions on other related matters indicated that they, too, had greatly increased their support for more egalitarian marriages.

Whether these attitudinal changes are matched by parallel shifts in behavior is doubtful, though clearly some realignment of marital and child care roles has taken place. Joseph Pleck (1985), who has done the most extensive research on the question, concludes that most of these changes have been relatively modest.

The most recent data on changing patterns of paternal involvement were assembled by Juster and Stafford (1985) of the Institute for Survey Research at the University of Michigan. Juster, in a brief analysis of time spent in family activities, traces changes from 1975 to 1981. Using time diaries, he is able to show that men decreased hours spent at work in favor of home activities while women followed the opposite course. This change was especially marked for younger people. Further evidence of domestic change could be seen in the amount of time men spent in "female" types of activities—household duties that have traditionally been performed by women. Between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s, a distinct realignment in roles occurred, with women relegating more domestic tasks to men. This is further evidence of a movement toward greater equality between the sexes, a movement that Juster believes is likely to accelerate in years to come.

Unfortunately, Juster does not break out the data on child care separately or analyze the changes by the presence or absence of children in the home. Pleck's analysis of time diaries reveals that fathers spend substantially more time in domestic and child care duties in households when mothers are employed, but the men still fall far short of assuming an equal load. Moreover, men in families with young children do less than those in households with no children or older offspring. Clearly, these analyses confound a number of related variables—age, cohort, the number and age of children, and the labor force status of mothers. Unless these separate

components of paternal participation in child care are disentangled, it is difficult to get a clear picture of the magnitude of the changes in patterns of child care by men and women.

Lamb and Pleck draw interesting distinctions in paternal child care that involves time spent interacting, time spent being available (being the parent on duty), and time spent being responsible, that is making child care arrangements. Apparently, much of the increase in paternal activity has been in the first realm—fathers as babysitters. The least change has occurred in the sphere as father as orchestrator of the child's activities. In this respect, it appears that fathers are still pinch hitters or part-time players rather than regulars.

Evidence from studies of father's role after divorce or separation shows much the same pattern. Fathers are even more marginal. Despite the considerable attention given to joint-custody arrangements in the mass media, in fact, such agreements are rare and often short-lived. Typically, fathers, even when they remain on the scene, play a recreational rather than instrumental role in their children's lives.

In conclusion, evidence of change is compelling, and some researchers believe that the pace of change may be picking up. But fathers, except in rare circumstances, have not yet become equal partners in parenthood. This is not to say that androgynous fatherhood could not happen, only that it has not happened and is not likely to happen in the near future.

Michael Lamb, Joseph Pleck, and their colleagues have analyzed some of the sources of resistance to change. They mention four in particular: motivation, skills and self-confidence, social support, and institutional practices. Motivation represents the willingness of men to change. (William Goode [1982] has written most cogently on the subtle barriers to changing male prerogatives.) Clearly, further change requires a growing number of men to accept an expanded family role. Unless they acquire the skills to assume a greater scope of parental responsibilities, they are likely to confine their attentions to traditional male tasks. The restructuring of the father role requires support and encouragement from wives. Presumably, some wives are reluctant to give up maternal prerogatives. Finally, a number of institutional practices contribute to the maintenance of the status quo by denying fathers the resources to assume a greater share of child care responsibilities. Entrenched social practices continue to convey the message that parenting is mainly women's work.

Lamb argues that unless there is movement on all four of these fronts, fathers are likely to continue to play a relatively marginal

role in the family. Clearly, however, these four components overlap and are interconnected. Although Lamb conceives of them as hierarchical, they are probably better thought of as isomorphic. Change in any one will have ramifications for the others. Shifts at the personal and interpersonal level are likely to create social and political demands for widening opportunities for fathers to become active caretakers, just as changes in women's attitudes and the views of men have created change in the marketplace. But political and economic change—sometimes loosely referred to as structural change—can, by the same token, drastically alter personal and interpersonal expectations. In the next and concluding section, which explores the link between public policy and change in paternal practices, I assume that change may be instituted in a variety of ways. I am primarily interested in the prospects for change, ways that change could come about, and some possible consequences for the future of the family.

PUBLIC POLICY AND PATERNAL PRACTICES

Up to now, I have largely avoided the political question of whether the breakdown of the good-provider role was desirable. But I cannot entirely ignore this issue if I am going to discuss the potential effects of future policy initiatives to further equalize parental responsibilities. After all, many people wish to restore the gender-based division of labor that served as the mainspring of the nuclear family until the middle part of this century.

I suppose that if I believed that the costs involved in this transformation of family form greatly exceeded the benefits derived, I would be obligated to try, at least, to imagine ways of returning to the status quo ante. Some costs may exist, especially for children, who have probably been somewhat ill-served by the rapidity of change. This is not to say that children, girls particularly, have not benefited from the collapse of the gender-based division of labor. But we have not managed to protect children as well as we might have if we regarded their welfare as a collective, rather than merely family-based, obligation.

Change has not been cost-free for women, either. Restrictions on divorce provided social and material protections for women, albeit of a paternalist type. Certainly, the declining economic circumstances of divorced women constitute a serious penalty in the quest for equality. Furthermore, as women have entered the marketplace, they

have become susceptible to greater occupational stress, leading in some instances to an increase of mental and physical maladies. Finally, some people have argued that the sexual liberation has placed women at greater, not lesser, risk of sexual exploitation by men. Rises in venereal diseases, pregnancy, abortion, and possibly sexual abuse and rape could be seen as adverse side effects of freer sexual relations.

Yet if one examines the sentiments of both men and women, admittedly imperfectly captured in public opinion surveys, most Americans, men and women alike, seem to endorse the changes that have occurred in recent decades. When asked whether they favored or opposed most of the efforts to strengthen and change women's status in society, only 40 percent of women and 44 percent of men were supportive in 1970. Today, 73 percent of women and 69 percent of men sanction continued efforts to improve the status of women. Both men and women anticipate further changes in women's roles, while only a tiny minority believe that traditional roles will be restored. Most important of all, the vast majority of women believe that they have gained respect in the process (1985 Virginia Slims). Possibly these sentiments should be counted as mere rationalizations, but I am inclined to interpret them as strong support for changes that have occurred. Even after experiencing the costs associated with family change, most Americans desire continued movement toward gender equality.

In any event, it is difficult to imagine a scenario that would restore the family form common a generation ago. The collapse of the good-provider role resulted from a combination of economic changes and ideological discontents. What is the possibility of reversing these changes? Engineering the withdrawal of women from the labor force and persuading men to pick up the economic slack would be somewhat like putting Humpty Dumpty together again.

Indeed, there is every reason to believe that we are in for more change of the type that we have seen. The proportion of working mothers with young children continues to climb, putting more pressure on fathers to shoulder more of the child care. Men's attitudes and behavior, whether willingly or grudgingly, may well fall into line, as they are increasingly pressured by their partners and society at large to help out more (Goode 1982). Open support for patriarchical privilege has receded in the middle class and may be on the wane in the working class as well. It is unacceptable to make sexist comments in public arenas and unfashionable to do so in private circles. Sexism, like racism, has been forced underground.

Proponents of change have called for a variety of policies that

might hasten the process of accommodation to the new family order: parent education to prepare men for future paternal roles, paternity leave to allow them to accept a fuller measure of care for infants, and flex time to enable them to invest more time in child-rearing and domestic duties.

The limited evidence for the efficacy of such programs does not persuade me that any of these measures is likely to substantially increase the level of paternal involvement. Parent education classes may enhance the motivation and skills of young men who want to assume a larger paternal role, but they are not likely to produce many converts to the cause. They are somewhat like watered-down job training programs, which have had little or no effect in increasing occupational prospects. In Sweden, where paternity leave has been available for a number of years, only a small fraction of fathers use the benefit. There is little evidence that Swedish men, who are also exposed to more parent education, have developed more egalitarian child care patterns than American fathers. Finally, experiments to implement more flexible work schedules seem to have had a negligible effect on the participation of fathers in child care.

I do not dismiss these programs out of hand; they may not have had a full and fair chance to show effects. There is some evidence that many parents manage to get by with no outside day care when husbands and wives are able to work separate shifts (Presser and Cain 1983). Possibly, as some have argued, flex-time programs do not go far enough. The same can be said for measures such as education in parenthood or paternity leave. Besides, it might be argued that these provisions convey an important symbolic message to men that they have the right and the obligation to become more involved. Thus, these programs may have important indirect effects on men by changing the normative climate in society at large rather than by directly affecting the men who participate in them.

General family support services such as day care or preschool programs, which relieve the burden of child care for both employed parents, may do as much to foster paternal involvement as do categorical programs directed at fathers alone. Specialized programs can serve only a limited number of fathers—probably, largely the men who are already ideologically receptive. Systems designed to assist parents, regardless of gender, draw from a larger base and attract more public support. Thus, the arena for change may be played out in Parent-Teacher Associations, church groups, professional organizations, and the like. The degree to which these groups welcome or resist gender change within the family is a sensitive barometer to the transformation of family roles.

Enticing fathers in two-parent families to assume a greater share of child care responsibilities may be much less difficult than gaining their involvement when childbearing occurs out-of-wedlock, or retaining their involvement after marriages break up. As we saw earlier, some feminists are prepared to give up on men and turn to a more benign and generous welfare system for support. Building an economic support system that further weakens paternal obligation is questionable policy on several grounds. First, it is not clear how generous we are prepared to be in providing for the children of single mothers. And even if we raise the economic situation of female heads of families, their children are not going to be on a par with children in two-parent families. Furthermore, policies that let men off the hook are bound to contribute further to the retreat of men from the family. That is bad for women, bad for children, and bad for men as well. It is difficult to argue that black women, children, or even men, for that matter, have benefited from the retreat of males from participation in family life. Everyone seems to have lost as the ability of black males to contribute economically has been eroded over the past two decades. Some might say that the same trends are beginning to occur among poorer whites, as males increasingly offer little economic support to women and children. The rising rates of nonmarital childbearing among young white women may be an ominous harbinger.

As mentioned, vigorous efforts have recently been made to increase the contribution of males to children they have fathered but are not living with. This hard-line policy is intended to make men feel responsible for their children, but whether a more aggressive approach to the collection of child support produces a greater sense of paternal obligation remains to be seen.

The "stick" approach is worth trying, but should we not also be conjuring up a few carrots—programs designed to create incentives to paternal participation? In a recent article in the Public Interest, Vinovskis and Chase-Lansdale (1987) question whether teenage marriages ought to be discouraged. Citing a mixed bag of evidence, they assert that at least some fathers are capable of supporting their children and young mothers might do better if they were to enter marriage—even if the likelihood of the marriage's survival is low. Without discussing the validity of their claim, it is discouraging to discover that the authors of this provocative thesis suggest no policies for encouraging men to enter marriage other than to say that social scientists have been overly pessimistic about the merits of matrimony. Can we not conceive of ways to make marriage more attractive and to discourage single parenthood?

Previously I have argued, along with Wilson (Wilson and Neckerman 1985) and many others, that marriage is increasingly inaccessible to many low-income youth because males simply do not have the economic prospects to provide females with an incentive for entering marriage. The income-maintenance experiments notwithstanding, I am also persuaded that for many low-income couples, unemployment and poor future earnings weaken conjugal bonds and contribute to the especially high rates of marital instability among poorer Americans. Despite the demise of the good-provider role, men are more likely to move out of a marriage to which they do not contribute and women are less likely to want them to remain even if men are so inclined.

This situation probably could not be immediately remedied even if the unemployment rates were to return to the 1960s levels. With the breakdown of the division of labor within marriage, the value of men's economic contributions probably counts for less today than it once did, and the emotional exchange probably counts for more. Yet material contributions still matter, and a healthier economy would probably reduce, or at least slow down, the retreat from marriage and make remarriage more attractive, especially among disadvantaged populations.

There are probably other ways of making marriage more economically appealing to couples. Eliminating the residual marriage penalty and creating tax incentives for marriage, especially for poor people with children, might have some modest effects by at least reducing the disincentives to marrying. It might also be feasible to devise a program of family assistance linked to Social Security payments. Couples who contribute to the support of children might receive added payments during retirement. Although such a plan might not directly hold couples together, it would certainly encourage fathers to contribute to child support. It might be possible to provide bonus payments to households with two earners or two parents, or both.

Such programs are costly, and, judging from efforts designed to promote pronatalist policies, we should not look for large effects on nuptial behavior from incentive schemes. In some instances, though, even modest results might be cost-effective, given the very real price tag to society associated with single parenthood and the absence of child support. Moreover, as I have contended throughout this chapter, programs tailored to promote paternal involvement bolster the norm that it is desirable for men to participate in the family and support their offspring. As such they may produce indirect effects consistent with the aim of increasing paternal participation in the family.

Finally, it is reasonable to suppose that marital stability may be enhanced, at least slightly, by the diffusion of cultural norms permitting and promoting more child care involvement among fathers. Scattered evidence from a variety of studies, as I mentioned earlier, reveals that marital stress is relieved when men assume a larger burden of child care. Also, greater emotional investment in children by men appears to increase marital stability, reducing the risk that fathers will withdraw from the family (cf. Morgan, Lye, and Condran 1987).

CONCLUSION

Ordinarily it is difficult to predict future family trends. Forecasting changes in the father role is extremely hazardous, as we are witnessing a confluence of conflicting trends. About one thing we can be fairly certain—further attenuation of the good-provider role is likely to take place as fewer women count on their husbands to provide economic support without women's aid and fewer men expect women to manage the household and children without men's assistance. Whether the gender-based division of labor that characterized families until the middle of the twentieth century will disappear altogether is highly questionable. But if I am correct that the breakdown of the good-provider role for men is ultimately responsible for the rise of the good dad–bad dad complex, the bifurcation of fatherhood could continue unabated, creating both more fathers that are closely involved with their children and more that are derelict. Even if two discrete male populations are formed, men, as noted earlier, may migrate from one category to the other during their lifetime.

Some of the conditions that might reduce the number of men who are retreating from fatherhood involve normative shifts that encourage greater participation of fathers in child rearing; these shifts are not easily susceptible to policy manipulation. I nonetheless remain rather sanguine about the prospects of further change if only because the cultural climate appears to be increasingly receptive to this trend.

One set of policies that has been mentioned here involves creating larger incentives to contribute to children and disincentives to withhold support. Experimental programs may provide indications of the results to be expected from the judicious use of the carrot and stick. We probably should not expect too much from policy

interventions, if only because we are not prepared to build either a very large carrot or stick. The crux of the problem is that men looking at marriage today may sense that it offers them a less good deal than it once did. This is the inevitable result of reducing male privileges, female deference to men, and a range of services that were customarily provided as part of the conjugal bargain. The loss of these privileges has persuaded some men to opt out of family life altogether.

Those who have not done so now expect more emotional gratification from marriage; more than ever before, intimacy has become the glue of family life. Recently, men have begun to realize a second source of benefits from family life—the gratifications of parenthood and the satisfactions of close ties with their children. These men have become the "new fathers" who are more emotionally invested in parenthood. It is too early to tell whether this new form of fatherhood will enhance stability in family life. Are these more involved fathers more committed to family life, more willing to endure marital discontents in order to remain with their children, and more prepared to sacrifice their own emotional needs in the interests of their offspring? I am not so certain, but time will tell. In the meantime, it may be necessary to devise all the means we can muster to produce more nurturant males, in the hope that they will help to strengthen our present imperfect and tenuous forms of marriage and parenthood.

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