

# **The Fatherhood Problem**

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## THE FATHERHOOD PROBLEM

Fatherhood is more problematic than motherhood. The world over, mothers just seem to go on about their business, bearing and nurturing the young and feeling relatively secure in their endeavor. But fathers are a different story. Father-child relations are often filled with conflict, tension, distance, and doubt. Across cultures, fathers may or may not be closely engaged with their children, remain with the mother, or see their father role as most important.

Today, the fatherhood problem is coming to a head. Not only are men in growing numbers living apart from and not supporting their biological children, but more and more people are asking, are fathers really necessary? Few have doubts about the intrinsic importance of biological mothers. But biological fathers? To the degree that fatherhood is still thought to be important, it is said by many to be merely a social role. And if merely a social role, then perhaps anyone is capable of playing it. The implication is one of arbitrary substitutability: Not just biological fathers, but any competent actor who has studied the part can step in. Or perhaps the script can even be rewritten and the role changed--or dropped.

Yet biological fathers have functioned on the world scene for a very long time. Until modern times, almost no society ever thought of fathers as potentially superfluous. Fatherhood has always been problematic, but fathers have also been considered essential--and not just for their sperm. If fathers are essential, however, why are they at the same time so problematic? That is the enigma addressed in this chapter.

Like all social behavior, fatherhood is a combination of biology and culture--the way men are, and the way they are taught. To understand both the problem and the "true nature" of fatherhood, we must enter the realm of cultural and social anthropology and look at the record of fatherhood in other societies that exist or have existed around the world. Universally, biological fathers are identified where possible and they play some role in their children's upbringing. But more than motherhood, we have emphasized, fatherhood is a cultural "invention." We should therefore expect to find great diversity among the world's societies in the roles fathers play, and that, in fact, is what exists.

The cultural diversity is not limitless, however. Because it involves human mating and reproductive behavior and therefore the very survival of the human species, fatherhood must also have an important biological component. This biological component can be unearthed by cross-species comparisons, especially comparisons between humans and our primate relatives. Such comparisons fall into the realm of ethology, the study of animal behavior, and sociobiology, the study of the biological basis of all social behavior. More generally, the biological component of fatherhood can be brought to light through an examination of how humans have evolved, the realm of evolutionary biology.

Social fathers are not common among mammals. But among humans the rise of civilization depended heavily, as we shall see, on the activities of fathers. Civilization was the result in large measure of a high "paternal investment"--the time, energy, and money that human fathers were willing to impart to their children. The evolutionary record suggests that the human male is

genetically endowed with the capacity to be a social father in some form--at minimum the protection and provision of resources to his childbearing mate. Thus fatherhood is an inherent part of the human repertoire, and fathering, or paternal behavior, is a part of men's nature. There is no evidence that men are not cut out to be fathers, and would prefer, for example, that the job be left solely to women.<sup>1</sup>

In the positing of a "human nature" we must, of course, be careful. We are all shaped by culture, and the use of the phrase "human nature" is not meant to imply that biology determines social behavior. Take the sex drive. It seems about as fundamental to our beings as anything can be, yet one can find subcultures that practice celibacy, others that practice promiscuity. Thus sex can be culturally patterned in precisely opposite ways.

Also, what is biologically inherent in human nature--or "natural"--is not necessarily "good." Men are aggressive, for example, but that does not make inappropriate male aggression morally right. The good and the right are cultural concepts, designed to guide human behavior in ways that benefit society as a whole. Every society carefully restricts aggression, notably the right to kill. Indeed, imbedded in the very concept of human civilization is that humankind has evolved to follow cultural and moral principles, not just those that govern animal behavior.

Those caveats aside, we have evolved as human beings with certain species-typical traits--biological and psychological predispositions that continually give shape to our lives and to the human condition, whether it is the need to eat and sleep, the feeling of jealousy or aggression, or the desire to love and be loved. Certain behavioral patterns make us feel comfortable and able to thrive, while others make us uncomfortable and compromise our ability to survive. Within the species, fathers differ from mothers. A growing body of evidence from biology and psychology suggests that males and females have inborn predispositions for how each sex thinks, acts, and feels.

The understanding of fatherhood that comes from knowledge of other cultures, and of our evolutionary past, is certainly different from the contemporary version of fatherhood. Fatherhood is problematic, all right, a continuing struggle between male biology and human culture. For this reason one of culture's age-old tasks has been to engage men in fathering, and it is a task in which modern societies appear to be failing. But fatherhood is also essential, so essential that it lies at the very heart of the evolutionary process.

## A PRIMER ON HUMAN EVOLUTION

To provide background for these propositions, let us briefly examine the nature and meaning of human evolution. We are all, in part, mere animal organisms. As Charles Darwin said

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, *Sex, Evolution, and Behavior* (2nd ed.) (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1983), p. 280.

in *The Descent of Man* in 1871:<sup>2</sup>

Man with all his noble qualities, with sympathy that feels for the most debased, with benevolence which extends not only to other men but to the humblest of living creature, with his god-like intellect which has penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system--with all these exalted powers--still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin.

By "bodily frame" Darwin meant behavior as well as physical structure. The Darwinian-based theory of evolution, the fundamental theory that organizes our knowledge of the structure and behavior of all organisms, is now accepted by virtually all scientific biologists not only as "theory" but as fact. The great biologist Theodosius Dozhansky once said that "Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution."<sup>3</sup>

The fundamental proposition of evolutionary biology is that all organisms, including humans, are shaped or designed by "natural selection"--those best adapted to an environment are more likely to survive, reproduce, and produce successful offspring. Natural selection operates mainly through differential reproduction--some organisms reproduce more than others, and it is the genetic traits of those organisms that tend disproportionately to survive into the next generation. It is not just which organisms produce the most offspring, but which produce the most offspring that themselves survive and reproduce. In higher animals, this involves the careful rearing of offspring after they are born so that they may have more success as adults.

Most educated people today have little difficulty accepting that human anatomy and physiology are products of evolution by natural selection. But they often have enormous difficulty when it comes to human behavior, taking the view that almost all human behavior is learned and can be explained entirely by culture. With respect to behavior, in their view, humans are entirely different from animals. This is despite the fact that we share 98% of our DNA with chimpanzees, our closest living relatives in the animal kingdom; genetically, we are as close to the chimpanzee as the dog is to the wolf, or the horse is to the zebra.<sup>4</sup>

No scientific basis exists for leaving human behavior out of the evolutionary equation. Complex human behavior is not determined in any rigid or obvious way by genes. And people are not usually conscious of trying to maximize their reproductive success, the fundamental force in evolution. But as biologist Katharine M Noonan has stated, "There is no reason to think that behavior is different from other kinds of traits in relation to genetic influence."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a similar conclusion, see: Wade C. Mackey, *Fathering Behaviors: The Dynamics of the Man-Child Bond* (NY: Plenum, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (NY: Appleton, 1871).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Daly and Wilson, *Op. cit.*, p. iii.

<sup>5</sup> R. J. Britten, "Rates of DNA Sequence Evolution Differ

Because successfully raising children to adulthood is so much a part of the human equation, not only mating and reproduction but also parenting--mothering and fathering--are the key phenomena of human evolution. One important implication of this is that human beings have evolved to be parental as well as sexual. Predispositions toward raising children are very likely as much a part of the human make-up as are predispositions toward sexuality. If this were not the case, we probably would not be here.

Mating, reproduction, and parenting, however, are not the only ways that individuals can insure their genetic futures--the passing on of their genes into the next generation. A second means is known as "kin selection," and is based on the fact the individuals share their genetic makeup with blood relatives. A child receives half its genes from its mother, half from its father, and shares half its genes with full siblings, one eighth with first cousins, and so forth. One's genetic posterity can also be achieved to some extent, therefore, through nurturing these genetic kin. Not a single animal species has been found in which organisms, if they are social at all, do not behave preferentially toward their close kin. This must surely be a reason why people the world over tend to favor their close relatives, and why modern societies have had to develop rules against "nepotism."

The term "inclusive fitness" refers to the sum of an individual's own reproductive fitness together with his or her influence on the fitness of relatives. It is inclusive fitness, according to evolutionary biologists, that the inherited anatomy, physiology, and behavioral dispositions within each of us have been designed to maximize.<sup>6</sup>

## The Human Line

The human line in the animal kingdom branched off from a common hominoid ancestor with the chimpanzees in Africa some seven and a half million years ago (which is barely one percent of the history of complex life on earth.) Due to a cooling climate, the first hominids, or human ancestors, were pushed out of shrinking forests into the surrounding savannah environment, consisting of woodland/grassland. The early hominids probably lived in small, family-based bands of from twelve to twenty five individuals, gathering food in the vicinity and scavenging for meat, cleaning up the carcasses of animals that had been killed by other animals.<sup>7</sup> They were essentially

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Between Taxonomic Groups," *Science* 23:1393-98. Discussed in Jared Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal* (NY: Harper Collins, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Katharine M. Noonan, "Evolution: A Primer for Psychologists," in Charles Crawford, Martin Smith, and Dennis Krebs (eds.), *Sociobiology and Psychology* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1987), p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> W. D. Hamilton, W.D., "The Genetic Evolution of Social Behavior," I, II, *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 7 (1964), pp. 7-52.

still "bipedal apes," and their social behavior was probably not much different from their forest-living relatives.<sup>8</sup>

After some five or six million years of hominid existence, and probably the result of a further cooling of the earth's climate, our genus *Homo* emerged about a million and a half to two million years ago. Concurrent with the development of an enlarged brain, a more complex language, and the ability to make tools, the size of these early human bands grew to some 50 to 100 individuals who came to rely increasingly on hunting big game in addition to gathering plant materials and scavenging, a combination to which we give the name hunter-gatherers.<sup>9</sup> These early human bands were made up of close relatives and were probably relatively cooperative and egalitarian; they had a strong sexual division of labor in which males did most of the hunting and females most of the gathering.<sup>10</sup> Meat, presumably a richer nutrition essential for the enlarged brains, became an important food source. Meat and other food materials were typically shared among the group members, a practice not commonly found among lower animals, and such cooperative sharing was a major source of group ritual and, eventually, other complex social behaviors.

Markedly different from the situation of the chimpanzee (a forest-dwelling, individual foraging, less cooperative, and mostly plant eating animal), these have been the living conditions for humans until quite recently, the last 12,000 years or so. Hunting, food sharing, and the division of labor between the sexes gave early humans a remarkable adaptive advantage over their animal relatives, and proportionately more human young were able to survive to adulthood. Because biological change through evolution takes so long, this hunting-gathering lifestyle in the savannah is probably the environment for which humans today are biologically best adapted. It is often called by evolutionary experts the "environment of evolutionary adaptedness." This is an important point to stress: The inherent and inherited dispositions toward such behaviors as sexuality and parenting

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<sup>8</sup> Robert J. Blumenshine and John A. Cavallo, "Scavenging and Human Evolution," *Scientific American* 267 (Oct. 1992), p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> This is the recent position of Richard Leakey. Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, *Origins Reconsidered: In Search of What Makes Us Human* (NY: Doubleday, 1992), Chs. 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> There is evidence that, still to this day, "we enjoy being in savannah vegetation, prefer to avoid both closed forests and open plains, will pay more for land giving us the impression of being a savannah, mold recreational environments to be more like savannahs, and develop varieties of ornamental plants that converge on the shapes typical of tropical savannahs." G. H. Orians, "Habitat Selection: General Theory and Applications to Human Behavior," in J. S. Lockard (ed.), *The Evolution of Human Social Behavior* (NY: Elsevier, 1980), p. 64; quoted in Donald Symons, "Darwinism and Contemporary Marriage," in Kingsley Davis (ed.), *Contemporary Marriage* (NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 1985), p. 137.

that we have today are likely based on natural selection not in our current social and ecological environments, but in the particular environment of evolutionary adaptedness in which most of human evolution took place.

Human culture is entirely dependent on our biologically evolved capacity for language, the most remarkable trait that separates us from the higher animals. Language enables what is learned by each generation to be passed on to future generations, thus enormously enlarging our ability to adapt. Language-based cultures also "evolve," but many cultural changes, even major changes, can take place in a single generation or less. Consider the recent sex and civil rights revolutions in America, which in the space of about thirty years have radically transformed the way we behave toward one another. Biological or genetic changes in a population, on the other hand, take dozens of generations, and major changes take millions of years.

Thus biological and cultural evolution not only operate somewhat independently of one another, but they proceed at vastly different rates of speed.<sup>11</sup> Although biological evolution is a continuing process, there has not really been enough time for humans to have become biologically re-adapted to the vastly different cultural and ecological conditions of modern times. One thinks of the enormous material wealth and individual freedom in advanced societies today, and such modern technologies as contraception, conditions that are so very different from our environment of evolutionary adaptedness.

Despite these vast cultural changes, most evolutionary biologists agree that our reflexes, drives, and social instincts in all probability remain largely as they were formed over the past two-million years in our environment of evolutionary adaptedness. For better or worse, and until it gradually changes, this is the biological endowment that shapes our lives.

## THE EVOLUTIONARY RISE OF FATHERS

Within the animal kingdom, the human species stands out as one in which males and females cooperate in raising a relatively few "high quality" young. Parenthood among humans has expanded to include a very long period of child care. Particularly important and unusual is the special role of males. Unlike many other species, in which vast numbers of offspring are produced and males and females abandon each other after insemination, human males appear to have an inborn tendency to "pair-bond" with females for the purpose of helping to raise their offspring. Thus monogamy--the exclusive mating of one female with one male--may be built into human nature.<sup>12</sup> This does not necessarily mean lifetime, "till death do us part," monogamy or absolute sexual fidelity, however, as discussed below.

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<sup>11</sup> For a general-interest discussion of early human bands, see the recent book by Leakey and Lewin, *Op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> John Paul Scott, *The Evolution of Social Systems* (NY: Gordon and Breach, 1989); C. R. Hallpike, *The Principles of Social Evolution* (NY: Oxford--Clarendon Press, 1986).

Put in sociobiological terms, human parenting distinctively involves, on the part of men, a relatively large "paternal investment" in their children. Paternal investment refers to the range of activities and behaviors that a father contributes to the survival and fitness of his offspring. In the words of anthropologists Jane and Chet Lancaster, "the evolution of the human husband-father role can be summarized as the channeling of male parental energy into the rearing of young."<sup>13</sup>

In this sense, the rise of fatherhood can be considered the key dimension in the evolution of the human family and, ultimately, of human civilization. Here are the Lancasters again on this topic:<sup>14</sup>

In the course of evolution, the keystone in the foundation of the human family was the capturing of male energy into the nurturance of young, most specifically for the collaborative feeding of weaned juveniles. The human family is a complex organizational structure for the garnering of energy to be transformed into the production of the next generation, and its most essential feature is the collaboration of the male and female parent in the division of labor.

Fathering is a part of the human make-up as it is not for most animals. In fact, both monogamous pair-bonding and significant male care of the young are relatively rare in the animal kingdom; in only about 3% of all mammal species do males form a long-term relationship with a single female.<sup>15</sup> In virtually all human societies, men play some version of the father role with their biological children. The most universal and therefore probably most fundamental elements of the father role are physical protection of the family unit, and the provision of resources necessary for the family's survival.

### The Human Pair-Bond

Why did such relatively high paternal investment and monogamous fathering patterns develop in the human species? One answer is our unique bipedalism. As they left the forest for the

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<sup>13</sup> C. Owen Lovejoy, "The Origin of Man," *Science* 211-4480 (1981), pp. 341-350. See also: William J. Hamilton III, "Significance of Paternal Investment by Primates to the Evolution of Adult Male-Female Associations," in David M. Taub (ed.), *Primate Paternalism* (NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> Jane B. Lancaster and Chet S. Lancaster, "The Watershed: Change in Parental-Investment and Family Formation Strategies in the Course of Human Evolution," in Jane B. Lancaster *et al.*, *Parenting Across the Life Span: Biosocial Dimensions* (NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1987), p. 189.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

savannah, our ancestors evolved to walk on two legs instead of four; this is the most distinctive anatomical difference between humans and apes. A leading explanation for bipedalism based on evolutionary adaptation is that it "was a response to the need to forage for food in open environments, where patches of food were widely spread apart."<sup>16</sup> The ability to stand upright presumably helped the early humans to see over the tall grasses, to travel longer distances, to fight enemies. Over time, having the hands free also enabled them to make and use tools.

Yet walking on two legs created a special problem for mothers. Among our forest-dwelling forebears, infants clung to their mothers' abdomens or rode on their backs. But the new upright mother had to carry her infant in her arms. This hampered her ability to protect herself from the dangers that lurked everywhere, and limited her ability to collect food. She had to depend more on others for protection and provision, or she would not survive.

Bipedalism is only one answer to the puzzle of high paternal investment and monogamy among humans. A more common explanation is that human young have a longer period of dependency on adults than any other animal. In all mammals, offspring grow internally within the female for a relatively long period of time, and after birth, due to the function of lactation, they require close attachment to the mother as their food source. But as many biologists have pointed out, humans are mammals whose infants are in a sense born prematurely or "too soon," and they therefore have a longer period of dependency outside of the womb. For almost a year after birth, for example, the human baby still lives almost like a dependent embryo. Human newborns can not grasp onto their mothers like the newborns of other primates can, and following weaning human infants must have all of their food brought to them by their parents, whereas weaned apes gather their own food.

An important reason for this premature birth is that the human brain and therefore head size became so large that human babies had to be born early so they could pass through the woman's birth canal. Anatomical constraints, imposed by the demands of bipedal locomotion, restrict the size of the birth canal. To produce an infant destined to have a very large brain, therefore, requires that the infant be born at a relatively immature stage; the human brain then continues to grow at a rapid rate outside the womb for the first year after birth. This year alone lengthens the period of childhood dependency among humans.

As humans evolved, the period of childhood dependency was further extended by the growth of an increasingly complex culture. Children had to be taught by adults how to make and use tools, how to hunt, to sew, and to cook, plus the use of language.

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<sup>16</sup> Monogamy is most common among birds; 90% of bird species are monogamous. High rates of avian monogamy are found because nestling birds are so helpless, and avian mothers (who don't lactate) are commonly no better suited to parenting tasks than fathers. Douglas W. Mock and Masahiro Fujioka. 1990. "Monogamy and Long-term Pair Bonding in Vertebrates," *Trends In Ecology and Evolution* 5-2 (1990), pp. 39-43.

Thus the childbearing woman in the environment of evolutionary adaptedness needed an inordinate amount of help from others, and the most likely helper was the nonchildbearing father, the person who genetically had the most at stake. According to evolutionary theory, those children who were most likely to survive came from women who managed to secure mates who would stay with them after fertilization and help them during their dependent years. Stated as an evolutionary proposition, monogamy occurs when the need of the mother to obtain her nutrition interferes with the care of the young.<sup>17</sup>

For such reasons the human pair-bond or nuclear family, the most primeval form of human social organization that is known, was generated. It is important to note that, from this evolutionary perspective, the human family is primarily an arrangement for raising children. In the words of biosociologist Pierre L. van den Berghe, "the human family is, very simply, the solution our hominid ancestor evolved over three to five million years to raise our brainy, slow-maturing... highly dependent, and, therefore, very costly (in terms of parental investment) babies."<sup>18</sup>

In a later cultural development, this primitive pair-bond became governed by the institution of marriage. As one indication of its biological basis, marriage is a universal social institution--the preferred way of mating in every known society--and the vast majority of humans marry sometime during their lives. Virtually all marriages the world over take place between just one man and one woman, although in many societies men may subsequently marry additional women while still married to the first woman (simultaneous polygyny), and in most societies both men and women may marry subsequently if the first marriage is broken by divorce (serial monogamy or "successive polygamy"). The simultaneous marriage of several men to one woman (polyandry) is quite rare in human societies, and group marriages--more than one man or woman marrying at a time--are virtually absent from the human scene.

It is not difficult to see why pair-bonding benefits childbearing women. Women need help in raising their children. But why should men be adapted to pair-bonding, to staying with women and helping them to raise their children? Like the males of many other species, why shouldn't they mate with as many women as possible, "love 'em and leave 'em," and go for quantity not quality in their offspring? As is well known, some men do act this way, so this impulse has by no means been eradicated in the human species. But, as evolutionists have suggested, two biological mechanisms evolved in human females to minimize such male behavior--to promote pair-bonds and hold men to them during their childbearing years.<sup>19</sup> The first mechanism is the human female's continuous sexual receptivity; they do not go into periodic "heat" or estrus as other mammals do. Women are, so to speak, continuously available for sex far beyond the necessity for reproduction, and one

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<sup>17</sup> Leakey and Lewin, *Op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>18</sup> See discussion in Helen E. Fisher, *Anatomy of Love* (NY: W. W. Norton, 1992), p. 334.

<sup>19</sup> Pierre L. van den Berghe, "The Family and the Biological Base of Human Sociality," in Erik E. Filsinger, *Biosocial Perspectives on the Family* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988), p. 43.

reason for this may be to keep men around. Second, and also unlike all other mammals, ovulation in women is "concealed;" men do not know when the woman's fertile period occurs. This provides another biological reason for the man to hang around with one woman.<sup>20</sup> He never can be sure which of his sexual acts will result in reproduction, and to insure fertilization (as well as to guard against his woman have another man's child instead) he must seek to copulate regularly with her.

An even more important evolved mechanism that helps to hold couples together is our predisposition for love--the "affective attachment" between men and women that causes us to be infatuated with each other, to feel a sense of well being when we are together with a loved one, and to feel jealous when others attempt to intrude into our relationship. Although we tend to think of love attachments as being highly social in character, they also have a strong biological component.<sup>21</sup>

## THE BIOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF FATHERHOOD

If the human family is a biologically evolved mechanism for insuring our survival, and if men contain some impulse to pair-bond, what is the problem of fatherhood. Why is fathering so often filled with tension? Why do so many fathers in modern times not get the biological message? There are many cultural forces pulling against fathering today, but some inherent fatherhood difficulties are rooted in the biological natures of males. In effect, fathers are pulled by their biological natures in several directions at once.

Monogamous pair-bonding, after all, is hardly the exclusive form of male-female interaction among humans. In the environment of evolutionary adaptedness, the practice of monogamy may have meant only that a man stayed with a woman until their child was out of infancy, possibly for a period of about four years.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, from a moral point of view, monogamous pair-bonding among humans does not necessarily mean sexual fidelity or a lifetime partnership.

Just as there are inherent biological mechanisms that promote pair-bonds, there are also

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, R. D. Alexander, *Darwinism and Human Affairs* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1979).

<sup>21</sup> See Paul W. Turke, "Concealed Ovulation, Menstrual Synchrony, and Paternal Investment," in Filsinger, *Op. cit.* For a critical view of this theory, see: R. D. Martin, "Female Cycles in Relation to Paternity in Primate Societies," in R. D. Martin, A. F. Dixson and E. J. Wickings (eds.), *Paternity in Primates: Genetic Tests and Theories* (Basel, Switzerland: Karger, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Robert A. Hinde, *Individuals, Relationships and Culture: Links Between Ethology and the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

mechanisms that operate to pull them apart. Such conflicting forces and tensions lie at the heart of what is said to be the longest running battle in human social life, the battle of the sexes. Does anyone out there really believe that, if lifetime monogamy with sexual fidelity were the goal, male sexuality would be biologically structured the way it is? As anthropologist Donald Symons has summarized, "human sexuality, especially male sexuality, is by its very nature ill-designed to promote marriage, and gender differences in sexuality do not seem to be complementary."<sup>23</sup>

In brief, men are universally the more sexually driven and "promiscuous," while women are universally the more relationship oriented. The pioneering sex researcher Alfred Kinsey once said, "Among all peoples, everywhere in the world, it is understood that the male is more likely than the female to desire sexual relations with a variety of partners."<sup>24</sup> Also, men universally are expected to initiate sex, while women are expected to set limits on the extent of sexual intimacy.

### Sexual Strategies

To understand the male difference, and why human pair bonds are in many ways so fragile, we must carefully consider the radically dissimilar sexual and reproductive strategies of males and females.<sup>25</sup> Biologically, the primary reproductive function for males is to inseminate, and for females is to harbor the growing fetus. Since male sperm are numerous and female eggs are relatively rare (both being the prime genetic carriers), a distinctive sexual or reproductive strategy is most adaptive for each sex.

Males, much more than females, have the capacity to achieve vast increases in reproductive success by acquiring multiple mates. One man with one hundred mates could have hundreds of children, but one woman with one hundred mates could not have many more children than she could have with just one mate. Males have more incentive to spread their numerous sperm more widely among many females, therefore, and females have a strong incentive to bind males to themselves for the long-term care of their more limited number of potential offspring.

The woman's best reproductive strategy is to insure that, for the one baby she is able to produce every few years, she maximizes the survivability of that baby through gaining the provision and protection of the father. The man's best strategy, however, may be two fold: he wants his baby to survive, yes, and for that reason he will provide help to his child's mother. But at the same time it is relatively costless to him (if he can get away with it) to inseminate other women, and thereby help to further insure that his genes are passed on.

In all of these respects, humans show their strong relationship to other animals. The

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<sup>23</sup> Fisher, *Op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> Symons *Op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Daly and Wilson, *Op. cit.*, p. 281.

radically different sexual mating and reproductive strategies of males and females throughout most of the animal kingdom have been summarized by the evolutionary psychologists Martin Daly and Margo Wilson as follows:<sup>26</sup>

In most animal species, the female's greater investment in each offspring means that her maximal reproductive potential is lower than the male's. Males therefore compete among themselves for fertilization opportunities. Investing little in each offspring, males are selected to sow their seed wherever opportunity arises. Investing considerably in each offspring, females are selected to exhibit greater selectivity in their choice of mates. One feature on which females may exercise selectivity is the male's willingness or ability to make an effective parental contribution. But wherever males do in fact invest parentally, they are under selective pressure to protect themselves against cuckoldry, and therefore males have a greater concern than females over the fidelity of their mates.

Human males, by nature more than females, could be said to be at least mildly polygynous. Many things point in that direction, such as the male's larger body size and degree of aggression, features not commonly found in fully monogamous species, and the fact that 84% of the 853 traditional cultures on record either permit or prefer polygyny (in modern societies, polygyny is banned by law).<sup>27</sup> Of course, most men in traditional cultures are not able to live polygynously; only 10% to 15% of men in avowedly polygynous societies have more than one wife at a time. The relatively equal sex ratio (same number of women as men) in most societies forbids more polygyny than that, to say nothing of the disgruntled men who are left out of the bargain.

### Paternal Certainty

From an evolutionary viewpoint, if a man is to stay with one woman rather than pursue many different women, the "paternal certainty" of his offspring is extremely important. A woman can be certain about her own offspring, but a man can not be. Because the biological goal is to pass on one's genes, it would be genetic folly for a man to spend his life with one woman unknowingly raising someone else's child in place of his own. For this reason, some evolutionists believe that monogamy arose first, and that high paternal investments evolved only after monogamy had produced a decrease in uncertainty concerning the paternity of offspring.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> R. L. Trivers, "Parental Investment and Sexual Selection," in B. Campbell (ed.), *Sexual Selection and the Descent of Man* (Chicago: Aldine, 1972).

<sup>27</sup> Hinde, *Op. cit.*, pp. 119-122; G. P. Murdock and D. R. White, "Standard Cross-Cultural Sample," *Ethnology* 8 (1969), pp. 329-369.

<sup>28</sup> Joel R. Peck and Marcus W. Feldman, "Kin Selection and the Evolution of Monogamy," *Science* 240 (1988), pp. 1672-1674.

The likely impact of the paternal-certainty problem can be seen throughout the world today. Studies have shown that mating systems in which paternity tends not to be as acknowledged or is downplayed relative to maternity, and systems in which paternal investments are minimal, are those in which confidence of paternity is low.<sup>29</sup> In other words, a male tends to invest in his mate's children only when his paternal confidence is high.<sup>30</sup> As anthropologists Steven Gaulin and Alice Schlegel have put it: "cultural patterns leading to heavy male investment in wife's children are common only where mating patterns make it likely that such investment benefits bearers of the male's genes."<sup>31</sup>

Paternal certainty may be an important, and is surely a relatively unexamined, evolutionary insight to keep in mind when analyzing social conditions in modern societies. The evidence strongly suggests that paternal certainty is diminishing in our time, with these same predicted consequences of unacknowledged paternity, decreasing paternal investment, and the downplaying of fatherhood, consequences which are discussed elsewhere in this book.

### Male Sexual Strategies

While the female sexual strategy has been pretty much the same the world over, male strategies have ranged from the faithful and monogamous Puritan fathers of American colonial history, who were devoted to their children, to men who spend their lives trying to sleep with as many women as possible and pay as little attention to their children as possible. Using the popular terms suggested by evolutionary scientists Patricia Draper and Henry Harpending, male reproductive strategy can range from the relatively promiscuous and low paternal-investment "cad" approach, in which sperm is widely distributed with the hope that more offspring will survive to reproduce, to the "dad" approach, in which a high paternal investment is made in a limited number of offspring.<sup>32</sup> It is because there is more plasticity or flexibility in the male than in the female reproductive strategy that the male strategy can be, and is, so heavily shaped by culture.

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<sup>29</sup> Mark V. Flinn, "Paternal Care in A Caribbean Village," in Barry S. Hewlett (ed.), *Father-Child Relations: Cultural and Biosocial Contexts* (NY: Aldine De Gruyter), p. 80.

<sup>30</sup> Steven J. C. Gaulin and Alice Schlegel, "Paternal Confidence and Paternal Investment: A Cross Cultural Test of a Sociobiological Hypothesis," *Ethnology and Sociobiology* 1 (1980), pp. 301-309.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>32</sup> Patricia Draper and Henry Harpending, "Father Absence and Reproductive Strategy: An Evolutionary Perspective," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 38-3 (1982), pp. 255-273.

Why aren't all men promiscuous cads? In addition to the human pair-bonding predispositions discussed above, to say nothing of the strong moral proscriptions against male promiscuity that are found in many cultures, a good answer is, other men. Men try to hold such activity in check; they don't want other men breaking into their relationships with the possibility of generating paternal uncertainty. All things considered, the "dad" approach with monogamous pair-bonding provides men with a trade-off that most men find acceptable. At the cost of having to make a relatively high paternal investment in their children and having a reduced access to other females, men gain greater paternal certainty and are able to maintain more stable bonds with other men that can prove useful to them.

In evolutionary terms, it is smart strategy for a man to cuckold other men and get them to raise one's own children. But for the same man to be cuckolded by others is the worst possible evolutionary outcome. This may be the principal reason why men tend to be far more upset with their mate's sexual infidelity than vice versa (women tend to be more upset by the loss of their mate's emotional fidelity, which threatens long-term commitment and support.) Throughout recorded history, until recently, legal codes on every continent have strongly sanctioned adultery among married women while ignoring that of married men. And constraint of female sexuality by threat of male violence also appears to be a cultural universal.

"Scarce" eggs and the issue of paternal certainty clearly have the potential to set in motion an endless competition among men that can lead to violence, and this has often been the outcome. Male sexual jealousy is the leading motive in spousal homicides in North America, for example, and if one includes disputes among men over women it may be the leading motive in all homicides.<sup>33</sup> But the good news, as discussed below, is that the virtually ceaseless male rivalry, tension, violence, and wars that have been a hallmark of human history may have been generated mainly by the use of organized power for despotic purposes that accompanied the rise of complex human societies.<sup>34</sup> Such destructive violence was probably not so characteristic of the environment in which we were biologically formed. Moreover, it has declined in recent centuries with the rise of political democracy. Lethal male violence, therefore, is not necessarily "built into our genes."

## THE FATHER ROLE

To repeat the words of Jane and Chet Lancaster, the evolution of the father role can be summarized as "the channeling of male parental energy into the rearing of the young." There are a variety of ways that fathers can make parental investments in their young. Just as with their sexual and reproductive strategy, the parental strategy of males is more variable than that of females. This does not mean that fatherhood is an arbitrary social role, however, that anyone can play.

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<sup>33</sup> Daly and Wilson, *Op. cit.*, p. 294.

<sup>34</sup> Laura Betzig, *Despotism and Differential Reproduction: A Darwinian View of History* (NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1986).

Male parental investment occurs in two forms within the animal kingdom:<sup>35</sup> Indirect care, which involves the provider and protector roles, including food provision, building shelters, helping the pregnant and nursing female, and defending the home territory against intruders, and direct care, which includes feeding the young, carrying infants, baby-sitting, grooming and playing with the young, and sleeping in contact with the young. Two additional paternal roles are commonly found among humans: authority figure (head of household, disciplinarian, and leader of rituals), and culture transmitter or teacher.

The indirect-care provider and protector roles are found universally among human fathers. They can be considered the primal father roles. There is a remarkable cross-cultural consistency among adult human males that, to the degree they produce or extract provisions, these are redistributed to children either directly or through the mothers. With equal predictability, adult males serve as defenders of their own kith and kin when hostilities threaten. In most of the world's cultures the father--or at least an adult male--has also been the head of the household, and an active transmitter of culture to his children, particularly his older children.

Direct-care of the young is probably the most variable of all the elements of the father role. No human society is known to exist where males provide more infant and childcare than females, and in every society nurturing is regarded as primarily a "feminine" activity, suggesting a strong biological basis. Human males around the world today do very little caregiving during infancy.<sup>36</sup> In one cross-cultural comparison of 186 societies, the mother was the "principal" or almost exclusive caretaker of infants (age 0-2) in 90% of the societies, and in the remaining societies her role was at least "significant." In no society was the mother of infants not involved, or was the father the principal caretaker.<sup>37</sup>

Father contact with infants, however, is widely variable. In 4% of the 186 societies fathers had a "regular close relationship," with infants, 39% had "frequent proximity," 37% had "occasional proximity," 15% had "rare proximity," and in 5% there was "no proximity."<sup>38</sup> In another cross-cultural study, this time of just thirty-one societies, fathers never held their infants in five societies, occasionally held their infants in twenty-three societies, and held their infants on a regular basis in only three societies.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Devra G. Kleiman and James R. Malcolm, "The Evolution of Male Parental Investment in Mammals," in D. J. Gubernick and P. H. Klopfer (eds.), *Paternal Care in Mammals* (NY: Plenum, 1981).

<sup>36</sup> Jane B. Lancaster, "Evolutionary Perspectives in Sex Differences in the Higher Primates," in Alice S. Rossi (ed.), *Gender and the Life Course* (NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1985).

<sup>37</sup> H. Barry and L. M. Paxson, "Infancy and Early Childhood: Cross-Cultural Codes," *Ethnology* 10 (1971), pp. 467-508.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Reported in: Barry S. Hewlett, *Intimate Fathers* (Ann

The father's contact with and provision of direct care to children in most societies increases as they grow older. In all of the 186 societies the father's direct caregiving role increased as the child reached early childhood (age 2-5), while that of the mother's decreased. In 69% of the societies, fathers had regular or frequent proximity with children at this older age level.<sup>40</sup>

A reasonable conclusion from the cross-cultural evidence is that no one specific set of father roles is best suited to all circumstances, and that the father role depends heavily on local cultural and ecological factors. In some societies fathers are extremely involved at least with their older children, and provide them with substantial direct care, while in other societies fathers remain largely uninvolved.

### Evolution of the Father Role

The evolution of the father role may have taken place along the following lines.<sup>41</sup> Among the earliest members of the human family (Australopithecine hominids who lived on the forest edge in East Africa and relied on gathering and some scavenging for meat), the father role was probably minimal. A male would stay close to a female, providing some protection, probably in exchange for future sex, but both sexes were essentially independent in food gathering. The male's interest was in the female and not in her child (whose paternity was unknown). The child benefited only indirectly from the exchange, mainly in the form of extra protection against predators and other environmental dangers. Thus protection was probably the first element of the human father role that came into existence.

Over time and surely with the arrival some 1.5 to 2 million years ago of our own genus, Homo, and the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, mothers became increasingly dependent. Provision--the second of the major elements of the father role--came into being as males (the hunters) became the main source of food. Later, with the emergence of culture, the role of cultural transmission emerged. The technology of big-game hunting, for example, which was very important to the survival of the group, had to be taught by fathers to their sons.

The emergence some 120,000 years ago of our own species, Homo sapiens, further accentuated the development of the father roles of protection, provision, and cultural transmission. As long as big-game hunting remained a major food source, the direct involvement of males in childcare remained minimal (a conclusion based on the experience of the remaining big-game hunting societies that still exist today.) But as hunting technologies improved, and hunting became

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Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 158.

<sup>40</sup> Barry and Paxson, *Op.cit.*

<sup>41</sup> This relies heavily on the discussion in Hewlett, *Op. cit.*, Ch. 8. [Which one? Year needed.]

less of a full-time activity, the time available for fathers to be involved in the direct care of their young children increased. The direct care of children by fathers also was promoted through the strengthening of monogamy and the consequent increase in paternal certainty. Although they probably were seldom involved in the direct care of unweaned infants, fathers gradually came to have more contact with weaned infants and children.

### Sex Differences in Parenting

There is every reason to believe that the marked division of labor between males and females that occurred over the several million years of human evolution has left its mark on the biological endowment of each sex. The division of labor was one in which males were protectors and females were nurturers, males were hunters and females were gatherers, and both focused on the feeding of juveniles. No matter how politically correct the thought may be, it is foolish to think that sex differences related to parenting behaviors have somehow escaped the forces of evolution; indeed, as we have indicated, they lie at the very heart of the evolutionary process.

The most obvious biological differences between human males and females are the larger body size of males, and the presence of larger fat deposits in females, especially in the breasts and buttocks. These characteristics are directly related to the different mating and reproductive processes of each sex.<sup>42</sup> Going deeper, the neural and endocrine systems of males and females differ significantly as well. And a growing body of recent evidence has led to the conclusion that male and female brains are "wired" differently.<sup>43</sup>

In our environment of evolutionary adaptedness, men's hunter role required them to be aggressive, to travel long distances, and to navigate in foreign terrain. Men today--on average--show a higher aggression and general activity level than women. Men also have better developed spatial, long-range route finding, and targeting skills, which show up in better vision, spatial visualization, and mathematical reasoning. Males are better at object manipulation in space, rotating objects in their mind, reading maps, performing in mazes, and they have a better sense of direction.<sup>44</sup> These cognitive and behavioral patterns are undoubtedly affected by hormonal differences. Male skills are better developed when androgen ("male hormone") levels are high, for instance. Women are more skilled in these areas to the degree that their estrogen ("female hormone") levels are low, which occurs both after menopause and at certain times during their monthly cycle.

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<sup>42</sup> Lancaster, *Op. cit.*, pp. 3-27.

<sup>43</sup> Doreen Kimura, "Sex Differences in the Brain," *Scientific American* (Sept. 1992), pp. 119-125; Anne Moir and David Jessel, *Brain Sex* (NY: Lyle Stuart, 1991); Jill B. Becker, S. Marc Breedlove, and David Crews (eds.), *Behavioral Endocrinology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/Bradford Books, 1992).

<sup>44</sup> Alice S. Rossi, "Gender and Parenthood," in Rossi (ed.), *Op. cit.*, pp. 161-191.

Women's childbearing, home-tending, and local food gathering roles have similarly left their biological mark. This shows up most strongly in the areas of nurturing and social relationships. Women show greater sensitivity to touch, sound, and odor; they have better developed fine-motor capability and finger dexterity, and are more sensitive to social context and to facial expressions. Their perceptual discrimination is more sensitive to small changes in an infant's appearance and behavior. Women pick up nuances of voice and music more readily than men, and they are six times more likely to sing in tune!

Such female skills are also clearly related to differential hormonal levels. A high level of androgens in girls has been shown to be associated with a low level of nurturance. In one animal study, testosterone (one of the male hormones) administered experimentally to various mammalian females acted to reduce their nurturant behavior. In another study, preadolescent male rhesus monkeys raised in total social isolation were more aggressive and less nurturant towards infants presented to them for the first time than were preadolescent females raised under the same deprived conditions.<sup>45</sup>

Many of these male-female differences appear at a very early age and can therefore not be considered cultural. But this does not mean that cultures don't strengthen or diminish them in various ways, emphasizing some rather than others. It also does not mean that men and women can't be taught to excel in traits that are more pronounced in the opposite sex. While women are biologically more attuned to infant care, for example, some studies have suggested that men--with suitable training--can do the job nearly as well.<sup>46</sup> How strongly motivated men would be to the task, of course, is another issue. And however they are trained, men and women will probably continue to bring to parenting the underlying "styles" of their sex that are based in the very different reproductive roles of our evolutionary past.

## The !Kung San

How do we know so much about social life in our environment of evolutionary adaptedness? Most of our knowledge is highly conjectural. One key source of knowledge is the study of still extant human societies (sometimes called "living fossils") that many believe closely resemble the societies of our ancestors. One community regarded as most similar to the human

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<sup>45</sup> Reported in: Mary Maxwell Katz and Melvin J. Konner, "The Role of the Father in Anthropological Perspective," in Michael E. Lamb (ed.), *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (NY: John Wiley, 1981), p. 164.

<sup>46</sup> Kyle D. Pruett, *The Nurturing Father* (NY: Warner Books, 1987); Ross D. Parke, *Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Michael E. Lamb, Joseph H. Pleck, Eric L. Charnov, and James A. Levine, "A Biosocial Perspective on Paternal Behavior and Involvement," in Jane B. Lancaster, *Op. cit.* (1987).

societies of our evolutionary past is the !Kung San (formerly Bushmen), a relatively isolated, seminomadic hunter-gatherer group that lives in a semiarid region of northwestern Botswana on the edge of the Kalihari desert. They were featured in the popular movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy* of a few years back.

The !Kung San were first studied by anthropologists many decades ago, before they had significant contact with Western influence. Although recent research has shown that the San have always interacted with other African societies around them, and may have descended to their present region from more fertile areas relatively recently, they have preserved an independent hunter-gatherer lifestyle over centuries, even millennia. Anthropologists today vigorously debate the degree to which one can draw inferences about our past from such a group; after all, the San have also evolved over a long period of time and may not have been then what they are today.<sup>47</sup> But their conditions of life are so remarkably close to those which presumably prevailed among our hunter-gatherer ancestors, that the San may have much to tell us.

The !Kung San live in bands of some 30 people, which consist of a number of nuclear families together with the extended families of either or both spouses. The San family is usually monogamous; only about five percent of unions are polygynous, and those involve no more than two wives.<sup>48</sup> The women gather food in the nearby vicinity and the men hunt on regular hunting excursions away from the camp.

The parenting practices of the !Kung San have been summarized by anthropologists Mary Katz and Melvin Konner:<sup>49</sup>

Indulgence of infants and young children is as high as has ever been described for a human population, and older children are given much freedom and few responsibilities. Women carry infants more than half the waking hours, sleep with them, and nurse them several times an hour. Almost no restrictions are place on premarital sex, but traditional marriage occurs at early adolescence for girls and young adulthood for men. Since fathers are not occupied in subsistence activities for half the days of the week and are often available for parts of the remaining days [one anthropologist has referred to this group as the original leisure society], their potential contact with infants and children is high. They often hold and fondle even the youngest infants, though they return them to the mother whenever they cry and

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<sup>47</sup> See: Jacqueline S. Solway and Richard B. Lee, "Foragers, Genuine or Spurious?" (with following commentary), *Current Anthropology* 31-2 (1990), pp. 109-146; Edwin N. Wilmsen and James R. Denbow, "Paradigmatic History of San-speaking Peoples and Current Attempts at Revision" (with following commentary), *Current Anthropology* 31-5 (1990), pp. 489-524.

<sup>48</sup> Katz and Konner, *Op. cit.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

for all forms of routine care. Young children frequently go to them, touch them, talk to them, and request food from them, and such approaches are almost never rebuffed. Boys are not expected to become involved in hunting activity until early adolescence at the soonest and then follow their fathers and uncles on hunts for years before being able to conduct hunts themselves.

It is tempting to think that this is the most "natural," inborn mode of human parenting, the kind of parenting behavior to which we are biologically adapted. Indeed, many of its features, such as the close maternal solicitation and attachment and high paternal involvement, are highly recommended today by most pediatricians! But it is doubtful that we will ever have enough evidence to be sure.

Hunter-gatherer societies like that of the !Kung San have numerous other features that many people today would regard as admirable.<sup>50</sup> The San are a completely stateless and classless society, without even so much as a headman with any real power. They are highly egalitarian, with prestige based mainly on individual merit and performance. Each band is a unit of shared resource utilization, but there is substantial movement of people between bands. Although clearly a male-dominated society, as virtually all human societies have been, the !Kung San seldom mistreat women and children and are known to have relatively low levels of aggression and violence. Katz and Konner note that "homicidal violence occurs in this society, but wars were apparently very rare historically, and no wars had occurred for many decades at the time of the study. Preparation for fighting did not occupy the men in any way, and learning to fight was not considered an important skill for boys." One reason for the low level of warfare may well have been the very low population densities, and the lack of threat from competing groups.

## CULTURE TAKES COMMAND

It is hard to believe that life in our environment of evolutionary adaptedness was as idyllic as that of the !Kung San. But however it was, the hunter-gatherer lifestyle gradually came to an end for most people with what we call the rise of civilization. The rise of civilization, in turn, is synonymous with the growth of culture. The father role and family structure around the world today are found in widely variable forms, determined more by cultural differences than by biological predispositions. Cultural differences, in turn, are strongly related to level of economic and social development, and to ecological circumstances.

The warming of the earth led to the end of the Ice Age some 12,000 years ago. Since then (an extremely short period of time in the history of the species), human social life has changed dramatically.<sup>51</sup> In the twilight of the Ice Age, plant food resources increased and big-game hunting

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<sup>50</sup> R. B. Lee, *The !Kung San: Men, Women, and Work in a Foraging Society* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>51</sup> For an outstanding overview of these changes, see Gerhard Lenski, Jean Lenski, and Patrick Nolan, *Human Societies*, 6th ed.

declined in importance. This was also the time when rudimentary technologies of agriculture and the domestication of animals were discovered. New economic subsistence patterns and a more settled lifestyle came into being. Human societies grew in size and technological sophistication, and the density of population increased.

These changes caused a fundamental shift in people's attitudes toward reproduction.<sup>52</sup> When people perceive that the resources necessary to sustain life and reproductive success are abundant and generally available to all, as in the case of the !Kung San and presumably our evolutionary ancestors, the reproductive strategy is to have as many children as possible and share and share alike. Reproduction is limited only by the need of parents to sustain themselves, which in hunter-gatherer societies may have caused women to bear children only about once every four years (the case for the San.) This strategy still prevails today in remote parts of the world.

But with increased density of population and wealth, people came to perceive that resources are limited, that major differentials exist between who survives and who doesn't, and that survival is very much dependent on who controls the most resources. It was no longer sufficient merely to rear as many offspring as possible and hope that they would survive to reproduce. Reproductive strategies became individually tailored to maximize the use and control of resources. It became necessary to try to guarantee children access to resources in the form of education or inheritance, for example, so that they would have an advantage over other parents' children.

This new perception of resource scarcity led to a dramatic transformation in family life and kinship relations, including concern for the "legitimacy" of children, the rise of inheritance laws, and the careful control of female sexuality. The nuclear family gave way to living in complex extended families. As social life became more complex, the father role of authority figure and head of household grew in importance. At the same time, the status of women deteriorated. Sociologist Martin King Whyte found in a comparative analysis of data on 93 preindustrial societies, drawn from the Human Relations Area Files, that "in the more complex cultures, women tend to have less domestic authority, less independent solidarity with other women, more unequal sex restrictions...and fewer property rights."<sup>53</sup>

The emergence of agriculture, food surpluses and a settled life style led to the rise of "agrarian" societies. With the rapid growth in such societies of class hierarchies and eventually the state, cooperation and trust among kinfolk as the main bases of social order gave way to power and

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(NY: McGraw Hill, 1991).

<sup>52</sup> Jane B. Lancaster and Chet S. Lancaster, "The Watershed: Change in Parental-Investment and Family Formation Strategies in the Course of Human Evolution," in Jane B. Lancaster, *Op. cit.* (1987), pp. 187-205.

<sup>53</sup> Martin King Whyte, *The Status of Women in Preindustrial Societies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 172.

domination by the few, leading to the endless tribal conflicts, wars, and the many other violent forms of struggle for the control of resources that have characterized recorded human history.<sup>54</sup> The father role of protector took on new significance, and many fathers were pulled away to fight.

### Marriage and Divorce in Premodern Societies

Through the institutionalization of cultural norms and sanctions, complex societies became heavily devoted to socially controlling male and female sexual strategies. Marriage is one of the most important and certainly the most universal of social institutions. It can be defined simply as "a relationship within which a group socially approves and encourages sexual intercourse and the birth of children."<sup>55</sup> As this definition suggests, marriage is best thought of in terms of group norms rather than individual pursuits. Throughout most of recorded history, until recently, most marriages were arranged (although the principals typically had a say in the matter); they were less alliances of two individuals than of two kin networks, typically involving an exchange of money or goods between the networks.

Various theories have been put forth to explain the fundamental purposes of marriage, but certainly one purpose is to hold men to the pair-bond, thereby helping to insure high quality offspring and, at the same time, to control the open conflict that would occur if men were allowed unlimited ability to pursue the "cad" strategy with other men's wives. All marriages involve sexual rights and obligations, the most central of which is probably the male's right of exclusive sexual access to his wife. As demographer Kingsley Davis has stated:

The genius of the family system is that, through it, the society normally holds the biological parents responsible for each other and for their offspring. By identifying children with their parents, and by penalizing people who do not have stable reproductive relationships, the social system powerfully motivates individuals to settle into a sexual union and take care of the ensuing offspring.

Marriage is the basic institution through which cultures have sought to engage the fatherhood problem. Margaret Mead is once purported to have said that there is no society in the world where men will stay married for very long unless culturally required to do so. While biology may pull men in one direction, culture has tried to pull them in another. The cultural pull can be

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<sup>54</sup> For an intriguing perspective that the rise of complex, culturally-based societies represents a "social cage" that has produced tensions with our primate biological legacy, see: Alexandra Maryanski and Jonathan H. Turner, *The Social Cage: Human Nature and the Evolution of Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> Suzanne Frayser, *Varieties of Sexual Experience: An Anthropological Perspective on Human Sexuality* (New Haven, CT: HRAF Press, 1985), p. 248. Quoted in Fisher, *Op. cit.*, p. 318.

seen in the marriage ceremony. Reinforced by ritual and public acknowledgment, the ceremony stresses the long-run commitment of the male, the durability of the marital relationship, and the importance of the union for children. A major intent of the ceremony is to solidify a strong social bond in addition to the sexual tie.

Yet culture has never been entirely successful, obviously, in holding men to the pair-bond. Divorce is also an omnipresent fact in human societies, and in many societies the right of divorce is granted exclusively to men. As noted above, lifetime fidelity to one spouse seems not to be built into the human psyche, although it is clearly well within the realm of human possibility and has been achieved by many couples throughout the world. Anthropologist Helen Fisher has determined that the modal duration of marriage around the world is about four years, a time period she points out which may represent the birth spacing in the environment of evolutionary adaptedness.<sup>56</sup> In other words, males would stay with one female until their child was four years old (with possibly a little hanky panky on the side, she suggests), and then move on.

Societies differ greatly in the degree to which divorce actually takes place, but there are few societies in which it is totally absent (the divorce rate among the !Kung San may be about as high as modern societies<sup>57</sup>). Low divorce societies tend to be those in which women have little relative autonomy, especially in the economic sphere. Over the past one hundred and fifty years the growing economic autonomy of women is a principal factor accounting for increased divorce in modern societies.<sup>58</sup> The leading causes for divorce around the world, however, are drawn directly from the realm of evolutionary biology--adultery and infertility, both mainly on the part of women.<sup>59</sup>

In over 80% of the world's societies marital polygyny is condoned, as noted above, and in many of these societies it is actually preferred and practiced to the extent possible. Why do some societies permit extensive (simultaneous) polygyny while others do not? There is no definitive answer to this question, but many researchers have investigated it.<sup>60</sup> Polygyny may have been quite

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<sup>56</sup> Fisher, *Op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> Nancy Howell, *Demography of the Dobe !Kung* (NY: Academic Press, 1979).

<sup>58</sup> Roderick Phillips, *Putting Asunder: A History of Divorce in Western Society* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988); William J. Goode, *World Changes in Divorce Patterns* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>59</sup> Laura Betzig, "Causes of Conjugal Dissolution: A Cross-Cultural Study," *Current Anthropology* 30 (1989), pp. 654-676.

<sup>60</sup> E.g., Gary R. Lee and Les B. Whitbeck, "Economic Systems and Rates of Polygyny," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 21-1 (1990), pp. 13-24.

limited in the environment of evolutionary adaptedness, as we saw for the !Kung San. Due to the generation of great wealth and inequalities, polygyny probably increased with the rise of agriculture. Wealth is the essential for securing mates in polygynous societies; in all polygynous societies it is the well-to-do men who are most likely to have polygynous marriages. The polygynous system may have reached its peak in the harems of some Middle Eastern potentates, which consisted of as many as 1000 wives!

### Marriage and Fathering in Premodern Societies

Cross-cultural comparisons among premodern societies have much to say about the relationship of marital forms to fathering behavior. Father involvement with children is greatest in those societies based on gathering (not hunter-gathering) and primitive horticulture, in other words, societies in which women are major providers of subsistence resources and men are not so needed as hunters. Also, father involvement tends to be high in societies without accumulated resources or capital investments that must be defended; such societies do not regularly engage in warfare and men are therefore not so needed as warriors. In their marriage form, these societies tend to be monogamous and husband-wife intimacy is high.<sup>61</sup> In general, the more time that husband and wife spend together, the greater the likelihood that the father will be directly involved with his children.<sup>62</sup>

At the opposite extreme, father involvement is lowest in those premodern societies that practice herding and advanced agriculture--the agrarian societies. Both herding and advanced agriculture (after the invention of the plow) are conducted mainly by men, and men thus provide most of the subsistence resources. These also tend to be warrior societies. Father involvement is especially low in those polygynous societies where co-wives live in separate quarters and husband-wife intimacy is low, and where the nuclear family is deeply imbedded in an extended family network.

In premodern societies, as well as our own, the lack of father involvement with children has been shown to have important social consequences. Substantial cross-cultural evidence suggests, for example, that the degree of father involvement is strongly related to the amount of violence in a society. More specifically, weak father involvement is related to high male peer-orientation among boys, and to hypermasculinity and male aggression.<sup>63</sup> In the classic cross-cultural study of

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<sup>61</sup> S. T. Emlen and L. W. Oring, "Ecology, Sexual Selection, and the Evolution of Mating Systems," *Science* 197 (1977), pp. 215-223.

<sup>62</sup> E.g., Barry S. Hewlett, "Father-Infant Relationships Among Aka Pygmies," in Hewlett, *Op. cit.* (1992).

<sup>63</sup> E.g., Robert L. Munroe and Ruth L. Munroe, "Fathers in Children's Environments: A Four-Culture Study," in Hewlett, *Op. cit.* (1992).

childrearing done by the Whitings, a husband-wife team of psychologists, more cases of assault and homicide occurred in the two most "father-distant" cultures.<sup>64</sup> Many other studies have documented this low father involvement/high violence relationship. A typical explanation of it is that a "protest masculinity" develops in boys that are exclusively or mainly raised by their mother as a defense mechanism against cross-sex identity conflict. [TK]

Draper and Harpending summarize the cross-cultural evidence as follows:<sup>65</sup>

Male children born into matrifocal households exhibit at adolescence a complex of aggression, competition, low male parental investment and derogation of females and femininity...[while] male children reared in father-present or nuclear households show less interest in competitive dominance with other males and more interest in manipulation of nonhuman aspects of the environment.

There is a counterpart effect of low father involvement for girls [TK].

#### FATHERHOOD AND FAMILY IN MODERN SOCIETIES

After people had been living for many millennia in agrarian societies, a relatively few societies just a couple of hundred years ago shifted to an urban and industrial way of life. This is the way of life to which most societies in the world today appear to be headed.<sup>66</sup> Urban-industrial societies, of course, have created their own special problems. But they have dramatically reduced poverty and, through the associated rise of liberal democracy, eased those conditions in complex agrarian societies that generated gross inequalities of income and status. Women, for example, are today in the process of regaining the relatively equal status that they presumably had in hunter-gatherer societies.

In modern, urban-industrial societies, reproductive concerns about the quantity of children have given way to concerns about quality. Children in these societies require massive parental investments if they are to succeed, and childrearing has become extraordinarily expensive in terms of time and money. The low birth rates and small average family sizes found in these societies, therefore, may be considered an adaptive reproductive strategy.

In all modern societies, simultaneous polygyny is outlawed. Among the many reasons for

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<sup>64</sup> B. B. Whiting and J. W. M. Whiting, *Children of Six Cultures: A Psychocultural Analysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>65</sup> P. Draper and H. Harpending, "Father Absence and Reproductive Strategy: An Evolutionary Perspective," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 38 (1982), p. 255.

<sup>66</sup> William J. Goode, *World Revolution and Family Patterns* (NY: Free Press, 1970).

preferring monogamy is that it is fairer to both women and men, equality being one of the great values of the modern period. In keeping with the characteristics of monogamy, and also as sheer economic survival has decreased as a dominating motive in life, relationships between husbands and wives have become warmer, closer, and based more on affection and companionship.<sup>67</sup> Today, in America, we take for granted that monogamy is the natural and preferred form of marriage although, increasingly, the high marital breakup rate suggests that serial monogamy is the real institutional norm of our time.

The family system of modern, industrial societies--featuring monogamy and the co-residence of parents in the nuclear family, high husband-wife intimacy, a high divorce rate, and a major contribution by women to subsistence--resembles, in certain respects, that of the simplest gatherer and horticultural societies. Due to this resemblance, some have suggested that the cultural evolution of family structure has followed a curvilinear path: After millennia of complex, extended, and often polygynous family forms, modern societies have returned to the more nuclear family form that existed among our early ancestors. In the words of sociologist Pierre van den Berghe, "advanced industrial societies have recreated, through a long evolutionary path, much the same kind of mobile, seminomadic, nuclear, bilateral family, minimally restricted by collateral relatives [and] by extended kin obligations...as existed in the simplest, smallest societies."<sup>68</sup>

Yet there is a crucial difference between the nuclear family system of modern societies in the late 20th Century and that of our early ancestors--the lack of father involvement today. In the cross-cultural studies of father involvement, reviewed above, the few premodern cultures with strictly monogamous and nuclear families tended to have high father involvement. Moreover, as we saw with the !Kung San, the nuclear family form to which we may be biologically adapted is one with relatively high father involvement. Based on the evolutionary and historical record, then, ours is a family system that is unprecedented. Rather than recreating a prior family form, we may be in the process of developing a new and possibly untenable "post-nuclear" family system--the nuclear family, further isolated from relatives and from the surrounding community, and without the father.

The modern nuclear family system did not start out this way. At its inception, the nuclear family of modern times represented, in the words of historian Lawrence Stone, "one of the most significant transformations that has ever taken place, not only in the most intimate aspects of human life, but also in the nature of social organization."<sup>69</sup> Especially noteworthy characteristics were a high level of husband-wife intimacy, together with a high level of father involvement in the lives of children. The remarkable rise of the modern nuclear family several centuries ago, followed by its startling fall late in our own century, are issues worth pursuing in some detail.

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<sup>67</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (NY: Harper and Row, 1977).

<sup>68</sup> Pierre van den Berghe, *Human Family Systems: An Evolutionary View* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1979), p. 132.

<sup>69</sup> Stone, *Op.cit.*, p. 687.

## The Western Preindustrial Family

The route to modernity and the modern nuclear family began in northwestern Europe. In the early, preindustrial phases of our Western nuclear family system, father involvement was already much higher than in the extended family systems that prevailed elsewhere. There are some indications that the complex, extended family system may never have existed in the societies of northwestern Europe as it did in most other parts of the world during the preindustrial era. Why this part of the world was unique, and when it was that these societies broke away from the rest of the world to lead the trend toward the nuclear family, are questions that have commanded a great deal of scholarly attention but remain largely unresolved.<sup>70</sup> Whatever the reasons for its development, the nuclear family system, mainly through its ability to generate independent-minded yet socially responsible individuals, has been regarded as instrumental in enabling the nations of northwestern Europe to pioneer the break away from feudalism and generate both the industrial and democratic revolutions.

The major demographic characteristics of the northwestern European nuclear family system of the preindustrial era can be summarized as follows, based on studies by Peter Laslett, the scholar who played the leading role in the development of "the new demographic history:"<sup>71</sup> A large percentage of households consisting of a married couple and their offspring without the addition of other relatives; a relatively late age for marriage and childbirth, with a significant percentage of the population not marrying at all; only a few years separating the ages of husband and wife.

By today's standards, of course, preindustrial nuclear families in the West were patriarchal, authoritarian, and imbedded in kinship networks. But in comparison to complex, extended family systems in most other parts of the world, these early nuclear families were associated with weak kinship authority, less rigid segregation of the sexes and greater equality for women, and more personal freedom.

In its basic demographic structure, the preindustrial nuclear family was not very different from the modern nuclear family of the industrial era that was to come. In other crucial respects, however, it was a world apart. Particularly lacking was any sense of familial privacy. Preindustrial nuclear families were less kinship-oriented than extended families, but they were still strongly community-imbedded. The families existed in small, close-knit communities, and the family-community boundary was highly permeable. Childrearing was a community phenomenon,

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<sup>70</sup> Richard Wall *et al.* (eds.), *Family Forms in Historic Europe*; Jack Goody, *The Development of Family and Marriage in Europe* (1983); Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500-1914* (1980); Michael Mitterauer and Reinhard Sieder, *The European Family* (1983).

<sup>71</sup> Peter Laslett, *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

and many adult males were involved in the task. Here is how Lawrence Stone has described the English family as it existed before the late sixteenth century:<sup>72</sup>

an open-ended, low-keyed, unemotional, authoritarian institution...it was neither very durable nor emotionally or sexually very demanding....Lacking firm boundaries [it] was open to support, advice, investigation and interference from outside, from neighbors and kin, and internal privacy was nonexistent.

This was the family system, with its strong community-imbeddedness, that was transferred to America by the early English colonists. Historian John Demos has said of the early Puritan family:<sup>73</sup>

The family and the wider community are joined in a relation of profound reciprocity; one might almost say they are continuous with one another....Families and churches, families and governments, belong to the same world of experience. Individual people move back and forth between these settings with little effort or sense of difficulty.... Family relationships were effectively discounted, or at least submerged, in this particular context.

The community culture, one should add, was a deeply religious one, and religious precepts guided virtually all aspects of daily life.

Most American colonial families were engaged in farming or craft work; the family was a unit of economic production and the home a place of work, as had been the case for most families throughout history. Largely based on economic considerations, the marriage bond was more functional than romantic and marriages were thought to have been relatively cold and unemotional. By today's standards, the family was relatively unstable in terms of membership turnover, not because of divorce but because of early deaths. It has been estimated that in the early 17th century in colonial Virginia, only 31% of white children reached age eighteen with both parents still alive.<sup>74</sup> Also, each household had a high turnover of membership due to the fluctuating presence of servants.

The colonial family, like its English cousin, was still relatively patriarchal and authoritarian. The father was the towering figure and unquestioned ruler.<sup>75</sup> It was believed at the time that men

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<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Harris, *Op. cit.* (1983), p. 137.

<sup>73</sup> John Demos, "???", in Virginia Tufte and B. Meyerhoff (eds.), *Changing Images of the Family* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 46-48.

<sup>74</sup> D. B. Rutman and A. H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750* (NY: W. W. Norton, 1984).

<sup>75</sup> E. Anthony Rotundo, "American Fatherhood: A Historical Perspective," *American Behavioral Scientist* 29-1 (1985), pp. 7-25.

were endowed with more "reason" than women, and thus were born to rule in both public and domestic affairs. Fathers controlled all property, and they had to give specific approval (or disapproval) to the courtship and marriage-making of both sons and daughters. To the degree that older relatives lived nearby, kinship authority was still fairly important and the eldest male relative served as the overall family patriarch.

Fatherhood was remarkably strong and unproblematic among the Puritans, demonstrating the power of culture to shape our lives. All adult men expected to become fathers and there was an enormous amount of father presence in the lives of children.<sup>76</sup> Most care of infants and young children was performed by women, but the father was the predominant parent for older children, especially (but by no means exclusively) sons.<sup>77</sup> The childrearing prescriptions of the time, for example, were addressed almost entirely to fathers. Because the home was an economic production unit in which both fathers and mothers participated, fathering was an extension, if not a part of, the routine activities of daily life. Sons, especially, worked side by side with their fathers from their earliest years until their own marriages.

To the degree that schools existed, the teachers were always men. But most of the formal teaching was done by fathers in the home, and the emphasis was on the teaching of moral and religious matters. It was believed that children come into the world inherently "stained" with sin and sinful urges, and the father's job was to restrain and contain these urges through discipline and moral teaching. By today's standards, the Puritan father's authority would be considered stern and rigid.<sup>78</sup>

### The Modern Nuclear Family

This highly father- and community-involved family situation generally prevailed in the European-settled parts of America through the Revolution and up until the early 19th century. At that time, the introduction of new non-animal sources of energy and the factory system of production, or industrialization, together with the growth of towns and the movement of people to cities, or urbanization, initiated a momentous and thoroughgoing reorganization of social life. In the family sphere what historians call the "modern nuclear family" arose, and with it came the modern "companionate" marriage, based on love and romance, plus new social roles for fathers as well as mothers. With industrialization, "family life," in the words of historian John Demos, "was wrenched apart from the world of work."<sup>79</sup> For the first time in human history, on a large scale, the

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<sup>76</sup> John Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and Life Course in American History* (NY: Oxford, 1986), Ch. III: "The Changing Faces of Fatherhood," p. 47.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>78</sup> Peter N. Stearns, "Fatherhood in Historical Perspective: The Role of Social Change," (1991).

<sup>79</sup> Demos, *Op. cit.* (1986), p. 32.

family became a unit of consumption rather than of economic production. With urbanization the small community withered, and family and community life grew increasingly separate from one other. Eventually the family became a kind of refuge from the larger society, what Christopher Lasch has called a "haven in a heartless [read: urban-industrial] world."<sup>80</sup>

The modern nuclear family was smaller than its preindustrial predecessor, even more nuclear in the sense of being split off from relatives, and more stable because there were fewer early deaths of husbands and wives. But it was the tone or quality of family life that made the modern family truly unique. The new family form was emotionally intense, privatized, and child oriented; in authority structure, it became relatively egalitarian; and it placed high value on individualism in the sense of individual rights and autonomy.

Today, this family type is often denigrated by scholars in the politically correct belief that it dreadfully oppressed women. Yet the "Ozzie and Harriet" nuclear family that largely prevailed in America for a century and a half--what we now call the "traditional nuclear family"--actually represented for women a significant advance. As Carl N. Degler has noted: "the marriage which initiated the modern family was based upon affection and mutual respect between the partners, both at the time of family formation and in the course of its life. The woman in the marriage enjoyed an increasing degree of influence or autonomy within the family."<sup>81</sup> Lawrence Stone has suggested that this was "the first family type in history which was both long-lasting and intimate."<sup>82</sup>

The big winners from the emergence of the modern nuclear family, however, were not women but children. Degler again:<sup>83</sup>

The attention, energy and resources of parents in the emerging modern family were increasingly centered upon the rearing of their offspring. Children were now perceived as being different from adults and deserving not only of material care but of solicitude and love as well. Childhood was deemed a valuable period in the life of every person and to be sharply distinguished in character and purpose from adulthood. Parenthood thus became a major personal responsibility, perhaps even a burden.

Parenthood was as much a responsibility and burden for fathers as for mothers, albeit in different ways, and parental investment in children in this era, on the part of both men and women, probably reached an all-time historical high. More than ever before, children became ends in themselves, persons whose happiness and sound upbringing was the major focus of parents, and of society.

As income-producing work left the home, so did the men. Fathers increasingly withdrew

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<sup>80</sup> Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World* (????).

<sup>81</sup> Carl Degler, *At Odds* (???, 1980), pp. 8-9.

<sup>82</sup> Stone, *Op. cit.* (1977), p. 679.

<sup>83</sup> Degler, *Op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

from their direct-care parenting roles and specialized in their indirect-care provider or breadwinner role. Fathers clung to their authority role of family patriarch and head of household, but with a new dependency on large work organizations and a growing absence from the home during the day, this position became more and more difficult for them to maintain. Even as their household authority declined, however, most men remained dedicated to their children and actively involved in their upbringing. They maintained their cultural-transmission roles of intellectual leader, and of occupational guide and model for their sons, plus their authority role as final arbiter in family discipline.

It should be pointed out that high father-dedication to children during this era might well have been fostered by the extraordinarily high paternal certainty that prevailed. This was mainly the result of a strict code of sexual behavior for both men and women, which limited premarital sexuality and adultery.

The fathers' gradual withdrawal from direct care did not pose, at first, a net loss for children. As fathers left the home, mothers became the primary parent--caretaker, socializer and educator--even for older children. There was a new idealization of "motherhood," and a spate of new childrearing and homemaking advice literature was directed toward mothers. The belief arose that women were morally superior to men--pure, upright, sensitive, and the true civilizing force in life. It was now women who were supposed to raise their children to be morally straight (and also to keep their men on the proper moral path in an increasingly complex society.) If a family breakup occurred, children were awarded to mothers rather than fathers, especially during what was referred to as a child's "tender years."

Thanks to growing affluence, many families were able to make do on the outside incomes of their male wage earners. Unmarried women typically were in the labor force, but at time of marriage they were expected to leave and become full-time mothers and housewives. Such restriction to the home is often regarded today as a social cost to women. But it is not clear that the women of the time actually felt that way. With fathers away at work and in public life, mothers became the masters of the home. Homes became larger and, especially in the middle class, embellished with whole new lines of domestic goods. And, with a full-time mother-homemaker freed from much of the menial drudgery of times past, the home quickly overcame the community as the center of social life.

Both sexes thus moved apart into what is frequently called by scholars "separate spheres" of life. That men are best adapted to life outside the home, and women are best adapted to the life of a homemaker, was believed at the time to be entirely normal and natural. This division was, after all, not very different from the sexual division of labor of our evolutionary ancestors.

As the 19th century plunged on, an extraordinarily high measure of social order, optimism and sense of social progress came to prevail. By the end of the 19th century, for example, rates of crime in America reached lows that have never before or since been seen. Decency and order were the ideals of the day. As historian James Lincoln Collier has summarized, "Pre-marital pregnancy rates dropped sharply, alcoholic intake was down two-thirds from the dizzying heights of the

previous era; church attendance rose dramatically, homes, farms, and streets became cleaner, casual violence was curbed." And, with waves of new technological inventions and organizational innovations, individual achievement may have reached new highs. Although we can never be certain, it is not unreasonable to hold that the high parental investment in children, a fundamental characteristic of the modern nuclear family, was a major force in generating these unprecedented social advances.

By the turn of the 20th century, however, family danger signs were beginning to appear. This family system, while highly successful in its day, was not to last out the new century. Father absence was to grow, to be followed later by mother absence. The family was to pull away still further from the extended family of relatives, and from community life. Community life, and society in general, was to shift away from a focus on children and become increasingly detrimental to child well-being.

In 1900, few fathers any longer anchored their identities in the role of domestic patriarch. Their assigned role was to be a reliable provider/breadwinner and also to take care of "practical matters" around the home, such as car repair and house maintenance. As fathers lost authority in the family, they became psychologically more remote from family life. It did not help matters that the commute to work increased in length and time, keeping fathers away from the home for longer and longer periods each day. Work life and domestic life came to be felt by men as ever more distinct from one another; the home was women's sphere, and there was growing resistance by males to participation in domestic activities. "Without a commanding, patriarchal role to play in the family," notes historian Anthony Rotundo, ".. men let their wives take full responsibility for the children, rather than fall into a secondary role and suffer a blow to their masculine pride."<sup>84</sup> This was the family pattern, for example, that Robert and Helen Lynd found in Middletown (Muncie, Indiana) in the 1920s.<sup>85</sup> The wives of Middletown were wholly responsible for the organization of household affairs, for child care and the disciplining of children, and for arranging the family's social life.

As egalitarianism swept the country, respect for dad's authority (and for hierarchy in general) declined still further. Fathers came to be depicted in popular culture as "incompetent" compared to mothers.<sup>86</sup> The loss of paternal authority was a contributor, especially between 1900

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<sup>84</sup> Rotundo, *Op. cit.*, p. 14; Joe Dubbert, *A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1979).

<sup>85</sup> Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (NY: Harcourt Brace, 1929).

<sup>86</sup> Randal D. Day and Wade C. Mackey, "The Role Image of the American Father," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 3 (1986), pp. 371-388; Peter G. Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1986); Ralph La Rossa, Betty Ann Gordon, Ronald Jay Wilson, Annette Bairan, and Charles Jaret, "The Fluctuating Image of the 20th Century American

and 1920, to the emergence of adolescence as a new stage of life and to the rise of the teenage peer group, or "youth cult" as it was called. The new power of youth was strongly in evidence in Middletown in the 1920s.<sup>87</sup>

Masculinity, in turn, came to be defined more and more in terms of ambition and achievement.<sup>88</sup> For males, major themes of popular culture early in the 20th century were the glorification of competitive athletics, physical prowess, virility, and intense scorn for effeminacy and frailty. These themes were fed by a growing body of cowboy, adventure and escape literature. Masculine humor became disparaging of marriage and family responsibilities.

Also by the turn of the 20th century, the so-called "companionate" family had come into full flower. The marriage relationship was based, for possibly the first time in history, much more on intimacy and companionship than on economic considerations; romantic love was in full flower. This change led to many marriages being stronger, warmer, and more egalitarian. Unfortunately, however, compared to the harsh demands of economics, affection is a slender reed on which to hang a lasting marriage. Over the course of a lifetime, affections can change. As marriage lost its bond of economic production and became heavily based on emotional considerations, more marriages began to breakup and the divorce rate climbed.

Following a steep climb in the divorce rate in the 1880s and 1890s, America faced its first national "family crisis" around turn of the century. The third annual meeting of the newly formed American Sociological Society, in 1908, was devoted to problems of the family. The titles of many of the papers presented at the meeting raised questions we still grapple with today: "Are Modern Industry and City Life Unfavorable to the Family?" (Answer: Yes); "How does the Access of Women to Industrial Occupations React on the Family?" (Answer: Poorly); "Is the Freer Granting of Divorce an Evil?" (Answer: No, but increasing divorce is a serious problem); "How Far Should Members of the Family be Individualized?" (Answer: Not too far).

The authority position of fathers in the home took yet another dip in the Great Depression. Having made breadwinning their main family contribution, fathers' lives were shattered as unemployment reached over 25%. Few features of the Depression are so firmly stamped on our minds than that of the unemployed dad, a kind of third thumb around the home.

Before it began to collapse in a major way, the modern nuclear family had its final moment of flowering in the so-called 50s era following World War II. This was a time of unparalleled

Father," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53-4 (1991), pp. 987-997.

<sup>87</sup> Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (NY: Basic Books, 1977); John Modell, *Into One's Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States, 1920-1975* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

<sup>88</sup> Demos, *Op. cit.* (1986), p. 60.

affluence in America, and it was this affluence that permitted large segments of the working class to achieve the middle-class family lifestyle that had long been their dream. An era of remarkable family togetherness ensued, with high birth rates that no one had predicted and that had not been seen since the prior century. The domestic, child-centered family flourished. High employment and high incomes brought back the strong male breadwinner (and, to some extent, the head-of-household male leadership role as well), and permitted many families to move to the suburbs and live in their own single-family houses.

The new suburban, familistic lifestyle was not without problems, however. Fathers were physically absent much of the time due to the long commute, and mothers were still further isolated from the larger community. The home was now the one and only center of life, but it was a relatively lifeless home, isolated from relatives and typically without servants, in marked distinction from middle-class homes of the 1800s. Although they had an education almost equivalent to that of their husbands, suburban mothers were still stashed away at home, while all of the action seemed to be taking place in the distant urban, and mostly male, world. This was the set of conditions that led Betty Friedan to write *The Feminine Mystique*, helping to launch the modern women's movement and remarkable and dramatic recent shift of mothers out of the home and into the workplace.<sup>89</sup>

Other social commentators of the time suggested that the isolated mother had become too strong in the home, a phenomenon labeled "Momism." Bring back dad, the good family man, they argued (little did they know what lay ahead!). They contended that fatherhood was important to give meaning to men's lives, and to counteract the overabundance of maternal care. It was believed that the combination of too much mothering and inadequate fathering lead to insecurity in male identity, in other words, to a nation of sissies.

In 1954, *Life* magazine announced the domestication of the American male.<sup>90</sup> According to psychologist Joe Pleck, this new role-image was "the first positive image of involved fatherhood to have a significant impact on the culture since the moral overseer model of the colonial period."<sup>91</sup> Actually, what we today call the "new father" role began to emerge early in the century. The shorter work week and the growth of leisure time allowed more fathers to be at home. And new psychological principles were being purveyed that suggested fathers should be more friendly and open with their children, and less what psychologist Kyle Pruett has referred to as the "distant, remotely involved patriarch, perpetually absent from the nursery."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Betty Friedan, TK

<sup>90</sup> "The New Domesticated Male," *Life* 36 (4 Jan 1954), pp. 42-45. See also, *Parents Magazine*, 1947.

<sup>91</sup> Joseph H. Pleck, "American Fathering in Historical Perspective," in Michael S. Kimmel (ed.), *Changing Men* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1987), p. 90.

<sup>92</sup> Pruett, *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

Alas, the positive image of the domesticated male was not to prove very persuasive. The 1950s era suddenly ended, the birth rate plummeted, and the dramatic "social revolutions" of the past three decades--the sexual revolution, the divorce revolution, and the women's liberation movement--were launched. As women went into the labor force, young men in large numbers further rejected domesticity and even the masculine ideal. The laid-back and thoroughly family-rejecting hippie became a model for many men, and all "rigid gender roles" became something to be eschewed at all costs. Marriage fell out of fashion, replaced by the rapidly growing phenomenon of living together outside of marriage.

In summary, American fathers have been losing authority within the family, and psychologically withdrawing from a direct role in childrearing, almost since colonial times. Yet until recent decades, this does not seem to have had a detrimental effect on their children. To the contrary, up until the 1960s the general well-being of American children steadily improved, not only because of economic, educational, and medical gains but also due to the extraordinarily high parental investments in children that was the modern nuclear family's signal achievement. Despite their gradual withdrawal and loss of authority, most fathers maintained a strong physical presence in the lives of their children, providing economic support and protection. Many fathers over time also became more "tender" and less authoritarian with their children, concerned for their children's psychological as well as moral well-being.

Part of the gain in child well-being has come, no doubt, from the growing presence of biological parents in children's lives due to increased longevity. Until the generations of children born in the 1960s and 1970s, the proportion of teenagers living with both their natural parents--an important measure of family structure--had gradually increased. In the first few decades of the century, about 75% of all children were still living with their natural parents by age 17.<sup>93</sup> This percentage went up to an all-time high for the generation born in the late 1940s and early 1950s, reaching close to 80%.<sup>94</sup> Thus more children were probably living with their biological fathers during "the 50s" than at any other period of world history.

But in the last three decades, this demographic advantage has been lost. As we have discussed in earlier chapters, the modern nuclear family has been in a free fall. Father absence has climbed to epidemic proportions. Whereas death was the main cause of father absence in 1900, in recent decades it has been divorce. And the fastest growing cause today is nonmarital births. Despite continuing economic, educational, and medical gains, the well-being of children has deteriorated, and the growth of fatherlessness appears to be heavily involved. We have returned to

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<sup>93</sup> Christopher Jencks and Barbara Boyle Torrey, "Beyond Income and Poverty: Trends in Social Welfare and Among Children and the Elderly Since 1960," in John L. Palmer, T. Smeeding, and B. B. Torrey (eds.), *The Vulnerable* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 1988), Table 10.10.

<sup>94</sup> Larry L. Bumpass and James A. Sweet, "Children's Experience in Single-Parent Families: Implications of Cohabitation and Marital Transitions," *Family Planning Perspectives* 6 (1989), pp. 256-260.

the primal, prehistoric family form of our evolutionary past, but without the father!

## THE FATHERHOOD PROBLEM TODAY

[Concluding points to be covered]

1. The human family, a biological arrangement for raising children, has always involved fathers as well as mothers. Although their actual fathering roles have varied, fathers have a biological predisposition to assist with childrearing. Fathering behavior, and to a certain extent monogamous pair-bonding, is built into the nature of men. In many periods of our evolutionary history, when local ecological conditions permitted or required it, father involvement with children has been very high.
2. The inherent sexual strategies of males dictate that fathers are also pulled in other directions, away from making large paternal investments in their children. This is the fatherhood problem. Men have the strong capacity to father, but cultural sanctions are necessary if their paternal investments are to be maximized.
3. Men are more likely to make large paternal investments if they are assured of paternal certainty; if they know that the child they are fathering is genetically their own.
4. In evolutionary terms, father roles may have developed in the following order: protection, provision, cultural transmission, and direct care. The development of the father role of authority figure is more indeterminate. It is a reasonable proposition that the earlier in human evolution a role was developed, the more imbedded it is into our psyche. Thus we should expect that the protector role is the one that comes most naturally to men, and the direct-care role least naturally.
5. The need for parental investments in children is higher today than ever before. In order to succeed economically in an increasingly technical society, children must be highly educated. In order to succeed socially and psychologically in an increasingly complex culture, children must have strong and stable attachments to adults. Non-family institutions can help with education, but family and close-kin groups are essential for socioemotional success. Evolutionary biology tells us that parents and other close relatives are most likely to have the motivational levels necessary to devote the time and attention to their children that can make each child feel loved and special.
6. We have returned to a family form not unlike that of our early ancestors, but one that is increasingly isolated socially and lacking a male presence. Modern nuclear families have become separated, first from the larger community, and then from close relatives. The burden and responsibility of childrearing now falls almost exclusively on the parents. With this kind of burden and responsibility, it is more important than ever that mothers and fathers remain together, and devoted to the task. Yet today nuclear families are breaking apart at a growing rate, with an ever larger number of men voluntarily abandoning their children.
7. Fathers are separating from their wives and children, basically to pursue the "cad" strategy, for

three main reasons:

a. Cultural sanctions holding men to the pair bond have weakened. The best example of this is the "deinstitutionalization" of marriage; marriages today are based solely on the fragile tie of affection for one's mate, and they can be broken unilaterally on a whim.

b. Most of men's historical and partly in-bred roles have been discarded. Their protector role has long since been taken over by public authority, their cultural transmission role has been heavily taken over by schools, and their provider and authority roles are now largely shared with women. This leaves only the direct care role, the traditional role of women and a role for which men are biologically least well equipped.

c. Especially compared to Victorian times, there has been a dramatic decrease in paternal certainty. The growing extra-marital sexuality of men, and more importantly of women, means that men can be less and less sure of their progeny. This is powerful but little discussed legacy of the sex revolution.

8. How to resolve the fatherhood problem, and bring fathers back, remains an unresolved issue. Also unresolved is the question, if fathers do come back, what should their role be? Substitute mother, assistant mother, some kind of new father? One answer to this question that began to emerge in mid-1970s is the androgynous father. Just as the mother is now doing outside the home what fathers have long done, the father should do in the home what mothers have long done. The father's contribution to the family should be graded, in effect, by the long-time standard of the mother. At the very least, this represents a new and radical reconception of the role of fathers.