

The Nature of Fatherhood

by Karl Zinsmeister

An Institute for American Values Working Paper
for the Symposium on Fatherhood in America

Publication No.: W.P. 11

Institute for American Values

November 1991

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The Evolution of Fatherhood

If we are to understand the importance of fathering and father absence we must start with our biology.

As Harvard scientist Stephen Jay Gould points out, "human babies are born as embryos, and embryos they remain for about the first nine months of life." If women gave birth when they "should" in biological terms, human babies would remain in utero for up to a year longer than the nine months they already do. The reason they are born "premature" instead is elemental: very few human female pelvises could expel a neonate the size of a one-year old baby. Human labor is already quite difficult compared to other mammals, and newborns are only 40 percent the size of the average one-year old. More importantly (since skull diameter, as any mother will be happy to tell you, is the real limiting factor in vaginal birth) the brain of a 9-month-gestation newborn is only about one-fifth its final size.

Premature birth solves a human physiological dilemma, but it creates a cultural one. While monkey infants can navigate independently and find and cling to their mother when they need her, while newborn horses can run from danger just a few hours after birth, while other animals can hunt, dig, swim or fly within days of arrival into the world, human young remain utterly helpless, unable even to control their own temperature, see clearly, roll over, or grasp for many, many months. They spend most of their time asleep. Primitive fetal reflexes continue for many months, and the most minimal skills of communication and locomotion don't emerge for many months. Even the healthiest of babies requires intensive care and supervision.

And the incapability of humans extends far beyond infancy. It is a long time even after we begin to walk and communicate before we are finally able to survive on our own. While most mammals are autonomous and essentially full-grown within a year, it takes our brains about fifteen annual cycles to reach their final capacity, and our bodies even a little longer. We are slower to develop to independent maturity than any other living animal, by far.

This problem is made even knottier by the fact that human culture is so complex no individual can even begin to be a competent citizen until he or she has absorbed an enormous dose, literally years and years worth, of intensive teaching and acculturation. The fundamental peculiarity of homo sapiens is that we are learning animals -- dependent upon inherited cultural knowledge rather than instinctual skills or physical competencies for our mastery of our environment. Until we've absorbed millions of bits of information from our progenitors -- on everything from safe foods to language to the simultaneous uses and dangers of fire -- we are at the mercy of the outer world. (Indeed, it is only through absorbing this store of cultural information that we even become human, as the animalistic behavior of feral children and the catatonic outcomes among solitary-confined children, for instance, demonstrate.)

The combined result of our premature launch and our heavy dependence on cultural transmission is an extraordinarily long and demanding childhood. While the pattern among our closest competitors the great apes is for each mother to have a single infant nutritionally dependent upon her for a period of five years, plus perhaps one juvenile aged 5 to 10 who self-feeds in the background, among human foragers a single mother can easily have three, four or even more dependents, of up to age 15, wholly reliant upon her for care and feeding. The long juvenile period for human offspring is compounded by the fact that we can breed throughout the course of a year, and can produce a string of offspring in close succession. (Most other mammals go into "heat" and breed only infrequently -- chimpanzees give birth at five-year intervals.)

Absent a critical cultural adaptation, human beings could never have thrived in the face of these various biological constraints. But they did fashion an adaptation, and it was a cultural invention of unsurpassed brilliance, namely: the family. The family, which is found nowhere else in creation in its human form, captured male energy and channelled it into the childrearing process.

In this way, pregnant and lactating human females won an ally during their periods of vulnerability and strain. Frail, dependent youngsters gained the benefit of not one but two protectors, producers and caretakers -- and under this joint nurturing structure reproductive success soared. Even prior to the advent of the civilized era, one out of every two human offspring born was raised to adult maturity, compared to between 10 and 30 percent for other primates and group-hunting carnivores (which lack any counterpart to the nuclear family). Moreover, most human juveniles reached maturity as especially competent and sociable beings.

By linking fathers to mothers and children, the family allowed higher civilization to evolve in its full resplendence. But the institution of fatherhood has always had powerful natural pressures working against it. Under the mammalian reproductive process, females automatically make heavy personal investments in every one of their offspring -- they gestate the fetus within their own uterus, they deliver it under strain, they nurse the newborn for several months with their own milk made by a body running at doubletime. The almost universal reliability of female mammals in caring for their young is considered by biologists to begin with an instinct to protect these large investments.

Mammalian males, however, have no such investment at stake, and typically cannot be counted on to care for their offspring. Most, including higher primates, choose to maximize their biological potential through multiple matings with as many accessible females as possible rather than by being an attentive parent. Humans have chosen to re-order this instinctual pattern, to their great benefit. But it is important to recognize that biological instincts apply a continuing crude pressure against paternal care of children, a pressure which has exerted itself to different degrees in different historical contexts.

The Early History of Fatherhood

As we look through the early records of higher civilization we find that most successful societies got fathers involved with their children in ways that far exceeded mere protection and food sharing. Compared to other ancients, the Greeks (among the upper class at least) were not notable for the quality of their family life -- historian John Sommerville argues that the insecurity of Greek culture, as seen in their exhausting competitions for recognition and their tragic view of life, "shows a craving for the love their parents could not give." Nonetheless, even Greek fathers were required, by one of Solon's laws, to be accountable for the schooling of their sons. If a child was not taught a trade he would not have to support his father in old age. Even before this law, most free Greeks would have considered it shameful if a father did not see to it that his offspring received a liberal education.

The Hebrews had a more enthusiastic image of their children -- fairly early on they interpreted their laws as forbidding any form of infanticide, for instance. Like the Athenians, the Hebrews came to view education as a lifelong enterprise and a central responsibility of fathers in particular. The sacred texts spelled out specific paternal duties, for instance teaching one's offspring to swim. Children were brought along to Temple, where study of the written laws had become important. Unmarried men were not allowed to teach the young, but the husbands and fathers who specialized as teachers of the law came to be the most revered individuals in the community.

Roman fathers were more thoroughly involved with the upbringing of their children than most counterparts ancient or modern. The Roman conception of a family head carried sober responsibilities, not only to existing members but to children's children and other future descendants. The selling of a family farm, for instance, was unthinkable because no price could compensate a long string of future heirs for their loss. The explicit goal of the Roman childrearing system in the years of the Roman Republic was to produce a good family man, "self-controlled, dutiful to parents and kindly to kindred," as Cicero described him. The educational writer Quintilian, whose work *The Training of the Orator* had a powerful influence on Western thinkers right up until recent centuries, warned against overemphasizing literary aspects of a child's education for fear of obscuring the family's appropriate goal of producing a good person.

In Rome as everywhere else in human history, mothers were the primary nurturers of young children, and also had some responsibility for education and character-building (as did Jewish mothers to an extent). But at age seven a Roman boy became his father's constant companion -- helping him with his work, serving as acolyte in religious observances, accompanying him on visits to friends, even attending the Senate if his father was of the Senatorial class. "In the midst of the affairs of state, fathers insisted on spending hours with their sons and grandsons, teaching them swimming, riding, reading and writing, and the laws and history of Rome," writes Sommerville. And to a slightly lesser extent fathers were expected to

devote time to daughters as well. As Rome acquired an empire and became luxurious and overstretched these healthy relations began to change. By the beginning of the Christian era Roman fatherhood, the Roman family, and Roman civilization in general were in decline.

The Traditional Good Father of England and America

If we look at the more direct sources of our contemporary family patterns we see that fathers were also extremely important during America's colonial era. Puritan fathers in particular were notably active. Again, there was a sexual division of labor, with mothers attending more to the child's physical needs and fathers concentrating on educational and spiritual care, but the concerns of both parents were broad. The diary of Ralph Josselin, a Puritan minister of the second half of the seventeenth century, makes note of his children's sicknesses and their recoveries, and shows that he interested himself in their weanings and breechings (when boys were put into pants). It does not have anything to say about punishments. When a son ran away he recorded his concern and prayed "Lord let him not outrun thy mercy....change his heart, make us wise to win him to thee."

Puritans produced many useful childhood innovations, including plans for universal education and social aid for schools. Under their pressure, new academies were opened throughout England during the mid-1600s, as well as a third university. New scientific subjects were allowed into the curricula. There was even talk of educating girls. (Many of these measures were overturned following the Restoration.) Puritan men produced the first handbooks of advice on childrearing for parents, as well as the first books, poems and plays written specifically for young people. Throughout, and in contrast to later patterns, the Puritans saw the father as the primary catechizer of children, and not only on religious topics.

Many of the Puritan attitudes rooted deeply in England and America, and outlived the passing of Puritan cultural dominance. A New England father writing in 1716 to inform his own father of a child's death reflects his sincere interest in the youngster as well as great tenderness: "A sensible, quiet, meek, yet cheerly-tempered child, strongly-natured, hearty, fat. How often have we pleased ourselves with the thoughts of your seeing this your pretty grandson who had so manly, beautiful and graceful a look." Around the time of the Revolution it was a commonly expressed belief in both America and England that affection for children was evidence of a good and healthy nature.

At the same time, family traditions other than the Puritan one were abroad throughout the English-speaking world. The wealthy Virginia planter William Byrd (1674-1744) -- who modeled his life after the distinctly non-Puritan English gentlemen of his day -- betrayed a perhaps less child-interested perspective when commenting on the death of his two-year-old son: "My wife was much afflicted," he wrote, "but I submitted to His Judgment better, notwithstanding I was very sensible to my loss, but God's will be done." Aristocratic families tended to take a more

leisurely and less earnestly devoted approach to childrearing.

On the whole, though, men at the time of America's founding were quite committed to and active within their families. "Colonial fathers often showed a keen interest in the infants and toddlers of the household, [though] it was the mothers who fed the little ones, cared for them, and established intimate bonds with them," writes family historian Anthony Rotundo. "When children reached an age where they could understand what their parents told them (probably around age three) the lines of parent-child connection changed. Fathers began to tutor all their children in moral values at this point." Fathers spent most of their time in the immediate presence of their children.

Sociologist Frank Furstenberg has suggested that the 18th century father's influence on his children typically exceeded even that of the mother's. Certainly it is true that until the mid-1800s the standard practice in cases of marital disruption was to award custody of the children to the father. Colonial-era sermons, child-rearing manuals and other prescriptive literature addressed both parents, and when the texts did address a single parent it was usually the father, on account of the special importance he was assumed to have in intellectual and religious training.

The Colonial father's most common interventions with his children, however, may have been practical ones. As he entered his teens Benjamin Franklin was on a track to become a tallow chandler when his father became aware of the boy's dislike for that trade. Fearful that Ben might run away to sea as his older brother had, Mr. Franklin began taking leisurely walks with his dissatisfied son, arranging that they should "see joiners, bricklayers, turners, braziers, etc., at their work" so that, as Ben tells us, "he might observe my inclination and endeavor to fix it on some trade or other on land." At length, the father apprenticed his son to a printer so the boy might indulge his love of reading.

It can be seen that traditional fatherhood at the beginning of our national history involved a remarkable amount of daily care, oversight, companionship, and concern, particularly with older children. To my mind, one of the richest depictions of this archetypal good father of rural, pre-industrial days can be found in William Wordsworth's lyric ballad "Michael" (written in 1800). The poem's namesake is a diligent and manly shepherd who early on expresses his deep and active interest in his only son Luke.

...to the thoughts

Of the old Man his only Son was now
 The dearest object that he knew on earth.
 Exceeding was the love he bare to him,
 His Heart and his Heart's joy! For oftentimes
 Old Michael, while he was a babe in arms,
 Had done him female service, not alone
 For dalliance and delight, as is the use
 Of Fathers, but with patient mind enforc'd

To acts of tenderness; and he had rock'd
His cradle with a woman's gentle hand.

And in a later time, ere yet the Boy
Had put on Boy's attire, did Michael love,
Albeit of a stern unbending mind,
To have the young one in his sight, when he
Had work by his own door...

At one point Michael addresses Luke directly:

...My Son,
To-morrow thou wilt leave me; with full heart
I look upon thee, for thou art the same
That wert a promise to me ere thy birth,
And all thy life hast been my daily joy.
I will relate to thee some little part
Of our two histories; 'twill do thee good
When thou art from me, even if I should speak
Of things thou canst not know of.----After thou
First cam'st into the world, as it befallsè
To new-born infants, thou didst sleep away
Two days, and blessings from thy Father's tongue
Then fell upon thee. Day by day pass'd on,
And still I lov'd thee with encreasing love.
Never to living ear came sweeter sounds
Than when I heard thee by our own fire-side
First uttering without words a natural tune,
When thou, a feeding babe, didst in thy joy
Sing at thy Mother's breast. Month follow'd month,
And in the open fields my life was pass'd
And in the mountains, else I think that thou
Hadst been brought up upon thy father's knees.
--But we were playmates, Luke; among these hills,
As well thou know'st, in us the old and young
Have play'd together, nor with me didst thou
Lack any pleasure which a boy can know.

Michael reflects upon the their joint labors amidst the fields and flocks and tells the boy,

...I will begin again
With many tasks that were resign'd to thee;
Up to the heights, and in among the storms,
Will I without thee go again, and

All works which I was wont to do alone,
Before I knew thy face...

Upon Luke's final leavetaking for a faraway city Michael asks him, as a last gesture, to lay the cornerstone of a sheepfold father and son were to have built together on the family land.

When thou art gone away, should evil men
Be thy companions, let this Sheep-fold be
Thy anchor and thy shield; amid all fear
And all temptation, let it be to thee
An emblem of the life thy Fathers liv'd,
Who, being innocent, did for that cause
Bestir them in good deeds. Now, fare thee well--
When thou return'st, thou in this place wilt see
A work which is not here, a covenant
'Twill be between us--but whatever fate
Befall thee, I shall love thee to the last,
And bear thy memory with me to the grave."

The Shepherd ended here; and Luke stoop'd down,
And as his Father had requested, laid
The first stone of the Sheep-fold; at the sight
The Old Man's grief broke from him, to his heart
He press'd his Son, he kissed him and wept;
And to the House together they return'd.

In rich romantic expression, this is characteristic paternal feeling as it has ebbed and swelled through human breasts across millenia. The pity is that for nearly two-hundred years since the making of this poem the daily experience of fatherhood has discouraged the fatherly flow far more than it has bolstered it.

The Emaciated Fatherhood of Modern Times

By the time Alexis de Tocqueville visited America in 1831 and 1832 it was already clear that as men took up new industrial positions outside the home they were abandoning domestic responsibilities and shifting their child-guiding roles to their wives. As the wage-earning revolution wrought by industrialism decoupled work life from home life, the father's responsibility to his family gradually shrunk to little more than economic provisioning. This carried costs for fathers, children and mothers alike. Children lost the distinctive benefits (to be spelled out in some detail in a later section of this paper) of interacting with a father. Women found that as men and economic production left the home they were left alone in a puerilized

environment. And men suddenly found themselves standing, as Rotundo put it, "outside the strongest currents of feeling that flowed between generations in a family."

There was a vicious-circle aspect to the marginalization of modern fathers -- the less they were physically present the less informed and competent in family tasks they became. This made them ineffective on those occasions when they did try to participate or intervene. Failure led in turn to further pull-back. And so forth. Increasing numbers of fathers, even ones who were highly effective in the world of paid work, became pathetic figures at home, enjoying neither the confidence nor the real affection of their progeny, and so retaining comparatively little authority.

The separation of fathers from children was compounded by the separation of children from men generally, a problem which reached its peak only fairly recently. As Ann Dally points out, "even a generation or two ago, it was much easier than it is today for men and children to have social contact with each other." Working men were more visible in neighborhoods, and, prior to our urban breakdown, safer to approach while they toiled.

There is no longer a milkman or baker with a horse and cart who lets the children ride with him.... There is no longer a cobbler working at his open door with hammer and nails and chatting with the children.... The man who used to call to cane the chairs and sharpen the knives no longer comes. The segregation of men from children is almost complete. It is now unlikely that a child can make friends with a man outside his own family. Even if he does, the relationship is likely to be regarded with suspicion because, in our society, we tend to see sex in everything.... Because of these changes, a whole generation of men has grown up who, unless they are involved professionally, have virtually no contact with or experience of children other than their own.

This cannot help them be good fathers.

These structural changes coincided with certain attitudinal developments that also had the effect of degrading fatherhood. For one, movement (beginning in the 18th century) away from the ideal of a church militant and toward a more nurturant spirituality caused many men to stop participating in organized religion. Because mothers continued to join churches they were increasingly viewed as the appropriate guide for the child's religious upbringing (and of course religious education was for many generations the entree into other forms of education).

As part of a larger "feminization" of American culture, the family itself was redefined during the run-up to our modern era. What sociologists refer to as the family's "affectional function" (typically, over the centuries, the forte of mothers) gradually overpowered all other family modes and purposes. Authoritative, productive and training roles, where fathers had traditionally played large parts, were increasingly stripped away from families and either discarded or delegated to public institutions. This left families with relatively little to do but "love" one another, which is of course an engrossing task but perhaps too narrow a base on which to balance so much human aspiration.

Part of the responsibility for this re-definition of the family can be traced to the nostrums of philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (that most incompetent of fathers, who pried five bastards from the arms of his servant-mistress for deposit on the doorstep of the local foundling hospital). Rousseau (1712-1778) brought disfavor on the idea that childrearing ought to be focused on civilizing, disciplining, and blank-slate-marking. His theories popularized the idea of the natural child, innately right-seeking, who would only be corrupted insofar as his nature was subjected to external curbs. Here was impetus for a shift away from "paternal" (directing) family modes, and toward "maternal" (comforting, supporting) ones.

Society seemed to prize traditional fatherliness less and less, and by the dawn of the modern era fathers occupied a pitifully weakened position within the family. A Harper's Bazaar writer noted in 1900 that "the suburban husband and father is almost entirely a Sunday institution." Writing in 1950 in his classic *The Art of Teaching* Gilbert Highet argued that "a Sudanese tribesman, a Jivaro Indian, a Borneo highlander trains his children far more purposefully and far more successfully than many fathers in the mightiest cities of the civilized world." And the decline had not then even reached its bottom. Child developmentalist Urie Bronfenbrenner found that in a twenty-five year period concluding in the mid-1970s there continued to be a steep fall-off in interaction between middle class children and their fathers.

Today, the dispensability of fathers is a message trumpeted throughout mass culture. Wall Street Journal film reviewer Julie Salamon cites a typically popular story line from the 1980s television hit "Moonlighting." The female protagonist, well into an out-of-wedlock pregnancy, decides on a whim to marry a man she met on a train, then divorces him three days later. Her pal David, who may or may not be the baby's father (neither he nor she knows) waits pathetically for her to decide whether to marry him. Seeking to become a Better Person in the meantime, he helps another unmarried friend through her Lamaze classes and labor. He imagines she is growing interested in him, only to find her barely interested in even conversing once she locks her moony eyes onto her baby.

Even within television's trophy intact-family, *The Cosby Show's* Huxtables, father is most often an amiable and slightly foolish foil for his children's precocities and his wife's no-nonsense wisdom (the models for this go back through *Family Ties* to *Ricky Ricardo*, *The Honeymooners* and beyond). Not only stage mothers but stage children as well tend to have relatively little interest in fathers these days. In fact, beginning with the blockbuster movie *E.T.* and culminating in the early 1990's with the smash *Home Alone* the guardians of American pop idiom have been developing a theme of omni-competent children who don't need fathers OR mothers, who are actually better off when the bumbling grownups just get out of the picture altogether.

An unfortunate aspect of our current real-life situation is that many fathers are not only (as we will see) providing their children with little in the way of daily attention, but also -- in this era where occupational crusading is supposed to be the substitute fatherly mode -- are failing to serve as much of a Worker-Hero. The simple fact is that Dad's workplace is remote, and his job description usually intangibly fuzzy (not many lumberjacks left). What the majority of American

children see of their father most often is a man at leisure -- homo weekend, padding around in slippers, fondling the remote-control, chirpily cheerleading for the athletic triumphs of somebody else's Pop. He appears boyish, weak, passive and ineffectual. That there is another face to the man is not always obvious to a child with eyes locked on the Barcalounger.

For this, fathers themselves are largely at fault. Modern labor has divided into the narrowest of niches and many fathers not only fail to adequately acquaint their children with their world of work, but fail to use their recreational time to take up the outdoor activities, shared chores, and other joint family projects that can easily provide sons and daughters with equivalent lessons in self-control, discipline, endurance and so forth. Several generations into the fatherhood collapse it is a sad fact that some contemporary fathers are simply not masterful enough themselves to be much of an inspiration to their children.

Fathers may be good at torts, or selling cars, yet unable to fix even the commonest objects around them. Some are too flabby to respond to strong physical challenges. Most are unsure how to nurse any of the plants or animals with whom we share the planet, uncertain as to which electric wire is the one that will stop your heart. Far too many are unable to solve and surmount the kinds of problems that families have always relied on fathers to handle. Certainly our environments have become more complex; but modern masculinity has also become impoverished. We are too much attracted to the "dial 911" solution. These are trends that men must work individually to reverse, for males who can't themselves decode and conquer at least important hunks of their external world will never be wholly successful progenitors.

Flying from Fatherhood

And then there is a problem even larger than paternal impotence: paternal flight. We are currently in the midst of an unprecedented level of voluntary separation of fathers from their children. The reluctance to take up fatherhood pertains even at the level of consciousness. These days, Furstenberg points out, "fertility histories from males are notoriously unreliable because many men simply 'forget' children living outside the household. My own study of unmarried youth in Baltimore showed strikingly higher reports of offspring among females than males, and recent reports indicate that many males are simply reluctant to acknowledge children they do not see or support."

This, of course, is not particularly a new pattern. What is new is the extent to which family abandonment has become a middle class behavior, practiced by men and women, but particularly men, with ample resources yet inadequate commitment. Currently, only 60 percent of all minor children in this country live with both of their biological parents (and in nine out of ten cases it is the father who is absent). The proportion of youngsters living in intact families declines with age, ranging from 70 percent of pre-schoolers to 50 percent of 15 to 17 year-olds.

Looking at our situation in terms of the fathers rather than the children, it is remarkable to note that close to a majority of today's fathers will abandon a child at least temporarily. The commonest route is through divorce, with abandonment of children born out of wedlock a close second. The presence of young children in the home does deter fathers (though not mothers) from seeking a divorce, according to researchers Joan Huber and Glenna Spitze -- it seems fathers realize they are likely to lose touch with their children should the marriage end, something mothers fear less. That deterrent is apparently not decisive, however, given that one-third of all children currently experience the breakup of their parents' marriage.

When one overlaps these family abandonment trends with today's simultaneous disinclination to produce children in the first place, a remarkable shift becomes clear: In 1960, prime-age men (20 to 49) spent an average of more than twelve years each living in the company of young children. Yet when demographers Peter Uhlenberg and David Eggebeen calculated the comparable figure for 1980 it was just 7 years -- a 43 percent decline in father-child confraternity in just two decades. This is not likely to increase mutual appreciation.

But perhaps sharing a roof is not so important. Do off-premises fathers keep up in other ways? The simple answer is no. At present, a majority of American children who live in mother-headed families have essentially no contact with their biological father, and receive little or no material support from him. 1981 data from the U.S. National Survey of Children showed that about half of all single-parent youngsters had not seen their biological father at all during the preceding twelve months, and another sixth had seen him only once or twice. Only one-sixth saw their fathers an average of once a week or more.

In pondering how all this father detachment came to pass we have to begin with some of the biological realities mentioned in the beginning of this paper, and realize that (as we'll discuss further in a later section) men have always felt drawn away from family duties by instinctual and selfish pressures. What's changed lately is the weakness of the countervailing forces -- such as marriage, sexual restraint, social stigmas and sanctions -- that traditionally led men back toward their responsibilities.

Marriage rates, for instance, have recently fallen to their lowest level in decades, and various forms of less permanent sexual cohabitation are at all-time highs. Just from 1970 to 1990 the proportion of men who were unmarried rose from 21 to 50 percent among 25-29 year-olds, from 12 to 35 percent among 30-34 year-olds, and from 10 to 26 percent among 35-39 year-olds, according to U.S. Bureau of the Census figures. The personal explanations vary. "I could not marry her because I had not grown up," Mr. Lance told the New York Times Magazine. "Rowing is more certain than bar hopping...I know just how I'm going to feel afterwards, and I know it'll be here for me every day," stated Mr. Knezevich. Mr. Cherney explained that "the thought of commitment is real scary. I think one reason we get along is because we both have one foot out the door." "I was afraid of losing my childhood by getting married," said Mr. Kirk in the Philadelphia Inquirer. Mr. Parmet reported "I saw that family life took a lot of daily effort." Typical older unmarried-male clients, the founder of a large nationwide "video dating service" states frankly, are "unfocused, selfish, and

commitment-phobic."

Many modern males seem to be fleeing not just the demands of children, but extra-personal bonds and entanglements generally. New York University professor of psychology Paul Vitz writes:

... men increasingly seem to fall into two categories. There are men who remain strong but devote their energy, strength, and intelligence exclusively to their own individual well-being.... They distance themselves from women, who are seen mainly as sex partners, while marriage is understood as something to be avoided, or as merely a current arrangement to be temporarily maintained until something or someone better comes along.

Many other men, often unconsciously, cease being men at all. They become nice androgynous creatures. But they are also indecisive, unreliable, and weak. This new type of American...was at first welcomed by many women, especially feminists. But now the complaints are coming loud and strong.

Indeed they are. Commenting in 1990 on the 25th anniversary of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, Hilary Ryan wrote "Today's Cosmo girl doesn't shun marriage, she wants it. But for some reason, the same man who succumbs to the Cosmo Look and shares the night with her--maybe even the apartment--doesn't want to marry her. He is, as Allan Bloom puts it, 'sensitive, nurturing, caring...and fleeting.'" Writer Frederica Mathewes-Green recently complained that "After 20 years of sexual revolution, social expectations of male responsibility have plummeted to almost zero. The presumption is that men just want to use women for sex and then walk away; the sole obligation they feel toward these women extends just as far as one-half the abortion fee." "There is a New Man," insists author Maggie Gallagher, "but he doesn't act like Dustin Hoffman. He lives with women and off women's salary. He refuses to marry and settle down. If he does marry and have children, he won't see any more of them than his father did. If he is single or divorced, he will probably abandon his children."

While there is an element of exaggeration in some of this rhetoric the behavioral contentions are, at very least, factually accurate for a large population of American men. The imagery is hardly new; the previous generation had its James Bonds and Hugh Hefners. But relatively few men actually patterned their own lives on those fantasy models. In 1960, 84 percent of all men between the ages of 25 and 44 were married (the comparable figure today is 66 percent), and of men who got married during the 1950s, 70 percent are still married today. The total fertility rate in 1955 was 3.6 births per woman (versus 1.9 now). And births out-of-wedlock accounted for only 4.5 percent of all new arrivals in 1955 (compared to more than a quarter now). In a single generation the Bachelor Dream has gone from sub-culture to mainstream lifestyle. It has never been easier to fly from the obligations of fatherhood (pre- or post-conception) than in our individualistic, liberated, feminist present.

While the reluctant fathers may trouble us spiritually, it is the absent fathers who are immediately worrisome. Many are denying their children needed financial assistance: economic

prospects in female-headed families with children are not good, and many hover near a lower-class subsistence level. Just as they have exploited a falloff in attitudinal sanctions, some irresponsible fathers have taken advantage of welfare safety nets to ease their family departures. Drawing lessons from his studies in Sweden and elsewhere sociologist David Popenoe points out that fathers "can now abandon their wives and children with little fear or anxiety, thanks to the government, that the family members left behind will suffer serious economic consequences." Even in countries like the U.S. with more limited welfare programs public agencies have now supplanted parents as the main sources of support for millions of children, with scant or no penalty to the scofflaws.

And probably even more important in the long run than their frequent withholding of economic sustenance is the fact that absent fathers deprive their offspring of necessary psychological support. Only about a third of all children with an absent father say they have a positive relationship with him, and more than two-thirds say they "do not want to be like their fathers when they grow-up." Next we will look at some of the specific things that children estranged from their fathers miss out on.

The Effects of Father Absence

We know without any question that single-parent families, of whom the vast majority are mother-headed, have lots of problems, particularly in their effects on children. Compared to two-parent counterparts, children from broken or unformed families are two to three times more likely to have emotional or behavior problems, only half as likely to be high academic achievers, two to three times as likely to be expelled or suspended, and more than twice as likely to drop out of school altogether. If they are girls they are one-third more likely to be sexually active. If they are boys they are apt to be in trouble with the law -- 70 percent of the delinquents in state reform institutions grew up in single-parent or no-parent families, and a similar fraction of all adolescent murderers share that background. Children in decayed families are more likely to use drugs, to end up on welfare, to experience abuse, even to suffer serious childhood illness or injury.

We know that the poverty rate for single-mother families is six times that of two-parent families, and that the structure of a child's household now overpowers factors like education, race and residential locale in determining his standard of living. While all the unhappy outcomes listed above continue to hold even after adjusting for income, it is true that lack of financial wherewithal is one source of female-headed families' weakness. Another flaw is simply that they are short-handed -- one brain, one mouth, one pair of hands and eyes can't do as much parenting as two could.

But there are also problems associated specifically with the fact that they lack the presence of the masculine parent. Let me begin by noting that children in widowed families,

while not without their own problems, behave differently than children whose father has abandoned them. For example, daughters of widows tend to be shy and timid with boys their own age, and anxious and insecure with grown men, while daughters of divorcees tend to be boldly (though inefficiently) flirtatious, and sexually inviting with both pre-adult and adult males. The father's active alienation or withdrawal seems to have an extra effect on the child beyond that of simple absence.

The consequences of father deprivation also differ between girls and boys, with boys generally the harder hit. (Studies have shown that growing up in a home lacking the same-sex parent is hard on both boys and girls, but boys are far likelier to have to.) Fatherless boys tend to have trouble concentrating in school, to do poorly on intelligence tests, and to have difficulty with math, and father absence has been shown to be associated with learning disabilities. Psychiatrist Peter Breggin has suggested that many of the boys diagnosed as "hyperactive" (HA), or as suffering from "attention deficit disorder" (ADD), are actually victims of DADD -- dad attention deficit disorder.

Boys lacking a father at home are often confused about their sexual identity. We know that compared to counterparts from intact families they engage in more activities traditionally considered to be feminine, and that they play more like girls -- exhibiting, for example, more verbal and less physical aggression. (The same effect is sometimes seen where the father is present but emotionally distant or otherwise ineffectual.) This tendency can develop in unpredictable ways as the youngster ages, with many fatherless boys later veering toward a defensive hyper-masculinity.

This may partly explain why boys in female-headed families often develop a coercive relationship with their mother, as several researchers have demonstrated. Fatherlessness significantly increases the likelihood of a boy becoming violent, and it is very common for mothers -- not to mention teachers, counselors and other mother-surrogates -- to have difficulty handling fatherless teenage boys. As Washington Post columnist Judy Mann concluded after relating a difficult incident from her own family life a few years ago, "there's a lot to be said for an authoritative male presence in the business of raising children -- and with all the billions we have spent...perhaps we have not appreciated that enough."

Some of our difficulties with these young men may lie in our persistent failure to better accommodate their male natures. Leon Podles suggests this is particularly true among father-deprived urban minority children. He writes "I don't think being male and aggressive is a bad thing," but notes how grindingly ill-matched many of these boys are to the schools and other institutions that now receive them. "Boys and girls develop to different rhythms and at different times. Put a boy in a school with a curriculum designed for girls and taught by women whose main desire in life is that boys behave like girls, and any self-respecting boy will likely end up with the attitude of Huckleberry Finn toward 'sivilization,'" argues Podles. "Boys are allowed to stay if they will agree to behave like girls, and most white boys go along to some extent. Black boys don't. Why should they? Why can't some schools be run for boys by men?"

It seems to me transparently true that the way to convert male tendencies toward violence and aggression into pro-social uses is through traditionally male channels and male languages. Contemporary critics who rail against professional sports and toy swords, who attack the "mystique" of masculinity, show no understanding whatever of either male psychology or realpolitik. The only way to confront strength is with strength. Rather than fantasizing we can re-make destructive aggression into non-aggression we ought to re-make it into constructive aggression.

Podles calls for introduction of father surrogates into unapologetically male-oriented academies as a means of helping our most troubled boys. "A dozen military schools in each inner city, complete with uniforms, drill, and supervised study, staffed by retired black and white officers...would go far [toward] giving black boys a shot at a decent life. The Army is the one institution in our society in which black men have succeeded in great numbers and largely on their own merits. Aggressiveness, if disciplined, can be a valuable asset."

I recently interviewed the principals of two special schools that the Detroit and Milwaukee public education systems tried to set up, in 1991, specifically for black males. These impressive black men spoke harshly of the liberal establishment's blockage (in the form of a National Organization for Women/ACLU lawsuit) of their experimental attempts to provide special compensations for endangered innercity males. Feminists "declare a monopoly of gender victimization," so they and their allies "will have no single-sex schools in the public system," rues Podles. "Better many black boys die bleeding from gunshot wounds in an alley ... than allow any government policy that presupposes there are significant differences between the male and female of the species, and that the differences sometimes work to the disadvantage of the male."

And father-deprivation is by no means a problem limited to our inner-cities. One large longitudinal survey in England found that the disproportionate tendency toward delinquency among fatherless boys and girls held especially true within middle-class families. Because it is new and because it is occurring where the numbers and the cultural authority lie, middle-class fatherlessness -- in both its "absent" and "distant" forms -- may end up being the most significant threat of all.

Urie Bronfenbrenner has suggested it is an important factor in the rise of modern-day alienation. Nathan Gardels reminds us of the lessons of the Frankfurt School studies on character structure in Nazi Germany, which showed (contrary to conventional assumptions that authoritarianism arose because of the dominance of the German father) that it was actually the absence of fathers too busy working in their factories, and an authority vacuum in the family, that created the aching to belong which was eventually satisfied by the Fuhrer. Indeed, fatherless American boys express their own aching to belong through participation in a type of grassroots "fascism" existing in U.S. cities right now: the street gang. The relationship between street gang membership and mother-headed families is so close that one observer has characterized gangs as "the flower on the vine of single-parent life."

Father flight appears to transmit itself across generations. We know that boys who

experience paternal absence are subsequently more likely to get divorced themselves. The same phenomenon is true for girls, with the interesting difference that girls need only experience "problems" in their relationship with their father, rather than full-scale absence, to significantly increase their chances of divorce. Fathers who are aloof, or hostile, tend to have daughters who are insecure in their role as women, according to researcher Norma Radin. "The father affirms the daughter's sex-role orientation in a way unlike a mother can affect her son's."

As I've already pointed out, there are actually two common responses among girls affected by father absence. One, most evident in cases where the father has died, is characterized in withdrawal and shyness. The commoner syndrome, particularly associated with divorce, is marked by flirtatiousness and sexual precocity. The fatherly relationship is also implicated in the occurrence of teenage pregnancy.

In a recent study of new mothers, psychologist Brenda Hunter found that the women who scored highest on father rejection -- saying they could not always trust or count on their fathers -- were least likely to embrace the mothering role. There are many other indications of this deep connection. Girls who have been separated from their fathers, says Judith Wallerstein, become "afraid of being abandoned." Mavis Hetherington's studies of such girls found that they were uncertain and apprehensive in relating to males. They scored high on the Manifest Anxiety Scale and showed an unusual amount of hair-pulling and other tics when facing male interviewers. There are reports that females who had no meaningful affectionate contact with their fathers have more problems as adults in achieving orgasm.

What Do Fathers Do for Children?

To consider what fathers do when they are present rather than absent let's step back for a moment and take the largest view of fatherhood. Bronislaw Malinowski argued that the main thing a father does for his children is to place them in the broader social context, and it does seem that fathers more than mothers bring their understanding of the requirements for living outside the family to the relationship with their children. "Men feel they are acting most as fathers when they can interpret the world...and sponsor the children...into a place in [it]," states Robert Weiss on the basis of his studies of successful middle-class men. "Exclusive rearing by women restricts young children's environmental exploration and encourages emotional dependence," writes sociologist Alice Rossi in her summary of the evidence.

The writer Ellen Wilson Fielding has encapsulated the mother-father difference this way: "A mother worries that a child will fall out of a tree or into a pool or down a stair; her husband makes reassuring noises -- 'I'm watching him' -- from 15 yards away." She goes on to point out that the child profits from both modes of fostering. The mother's anxious attention "assures him that he is loved and looked after, and teaches him about caution," while the father's acceptance of risk-taking "bolsters his confidence in his ability to meet life's challenges."

Gilbert Highet has suggested that the central responsibility of parents to their children is less to love or control than to teach. "You can give a child as much love as it can absorb and still make it an idiot unfit to face the world; while the best and surest way to control your child is to explain the rules you intend to enforce," he writes. Highet says there is a great quantity of learning which can never be reliably acquired anywhere except in the home, and he emphasizes the special importance of the father as teacher.

The original form of teaching, of course, one that utterly suffuses childhood, is that of emulation. But it is not merely as positive models that fathers have their effect. In arguing that the father's influence may, sometimes in backhanded ways, be unusually important in the spasmodic appearance of genius, Highet points out that some fathers educate their children "by neglecting them...by bullying and thwarting them...by being their friends." Beethoven's father was a drunk and often a brute, and revolt against the man was a paramount aspect of Beethoven's life, yet it was the father who taught the son both violin and clavichord at age four.

One of the things a father who invests in his children does (in ways we don't really understand) is give them a strong internal locus of control. "There is no question that when a father's relationship with his children is warm, they grow up more secure, not only in the world but within themselves," says psychiatrist Kyle Pruett. A part of this is raw time an important part of this. One study by psychologists at the University of California at Berkeley found that three-year-olds whose fathers worked more than 40 hours a week outside the home showed more anxiety than children whose fathers worked shorter hours.

That same study found the children of long-working fathers to be less warm, and less adept at tasks like role-playing and object classification. Both of these findings have been borne out in other studies elsewhere. We know that babies who've spent a great deal of time with their fathers are more sociable, vocalize more, show a greater love of play, and seem more eager to be picked up. Infants who are securely attached to both parents show greater interest in unfamiliar strangers than infants attached only to their mothers. Among older children, popularity and ease of making friends correlates with lots of physical play with fathers. As for cognitive development, offspring of affectionate fathers score higher on intelligence tests, have stronger problem-solving skills, and do better in school than those of distant fathers. There is evidence that children of solo mothers have poorer math aptitude, and that daughters especially do better in math when fathers are available.

When examining the family tasks of each gender there is a tendency (associated with Freud among others) to separate out the male role as one of projecting authority and building conscience while the mother loves, softens, and nurtures. There is reason to be cautious in this: It's clear the training and the nurturing impulses are both present in fathers and mothers alike, and always have been, and that children simultaneously love and respect each of their parents. In a given home, there is nothing to be gained by making the father the heavy and the mother the softie.

Just the same, there is no denying this: fathers tend to be far more effective at discipline. Hetherington and others have shown that in both divorced and intact families, children are more likely to obey fathers than mothers. In families without a father, children have much more serious problems with social control. They are far more likely to be impulsive, to cheat, and to have trouble delaying gratification. "Children really do see their fathers as the judging parent...who might even find them wanting, who brings something like the world's standards...to bear upon their performance and behavior," says Fielding.

One interesting U.C.L.A. study of 443 young people found that while "mothers are more active than fathers in helping youngsters with personal problems...with regard to youthful drug use, fathers' involvement is more important" than mothers'. Frequent drug use was half-again as prevalent in mother-dominant homes as in father-dominant ones. There was also a range of outcomes among the fathers, depending upon how active they were in enforcing family rules. In families with strict fathers, only 18 percent of the children used drugs and alcohol, compared to 27 percent where fathers were less strict, and 40 percent in homes with permissive fathers.

It would be idiotic to suggest that among the different traits and capacities mothers and fathers bring to the family any one set of qualities is superior to another. The point is, these varied skills and outlooks combine in lovely ways to give children all they need. In James Levine's phrasing, "a child who is highly involved with both parents has a rich emotional palette from which to draw." No amount of conscientiousness on the part of a mother can fill the hole left when a father fades away, so instead of enjoying what Selma Fraiberg has referred to as "the vast range of human feeling which centers around two parents" many children are getting only a shrunken facsimile.

How Are Fathers Different?

Having already established that fathers get different results, it will come as no surprise to us that they use quite different methods. Kyle Pruett points out that "the infant experiences his father as someone very distinct from his mother" -- distinct in appearance, size, scent, texture, sound and, most of all, style of interaction. In simplest terms, fathers tend to hold their babies to play and stimulate, while mothers do so to caretake and soothe.

In videotaped interactions with infant's under three months old fathers tend toward staccato bursts of physical and spoken stimulation, exciting the child with unpredictable bursts of tickling and lifting. Mothers are generally gentler and address their babies with soft, repetitive, imitative sounds, while fathers use rhythmic pats to maintain contact. Fathers tease more, and use fewer toys. Father-play is more positively received by infants, and their play "bids" are more likely to be accepted than mothers'.

As early as his third week, pediatrician Berry Brazelton observes, an infant has different

responses to his father and mother. When father approaches the baby will hunch his shoulders and lift his eyebrows in anticipation. For mother he is more likely to prepare for nuzzling. If he hears his mother's voice behind him he will begin to root, his face will soften, and his arms and legs will slowly and smoothly cycle. The father's voice from behind will stop the smooth movements momentarily, and when they start again they will be jerky. Patterns of these sorts among both parents and infants have been found in multiple studies conducted in a number of different countries. In methodical clockings of interaction time it is generally discovered that dads spend about twice as much time on play (versus caretaking) as mothers do.

One notable divergence between fathers and mothers is that fathers are much less confident in their ability to succeed at infant care. In a number of investigations it is clear that most fathers don't even try to get significantly involved in the care of the newborn. A 1981 study by LaRossa and LaRossa shows that fathers tend to act clumsily with new babies and to reify them (act as if they were "things" rather than persons with whom interaction is possible), while mothers tend to embrace and throw themselves deeply into early mothering. Role-embracing mothers deny that one cannot interact with a baby, believing it just occurs on a non-verbal level. They quickly come to accept that the infant has "interpersonal competence" where the fathers see none. Alice Rossi comments on this and other similar studies by saying, "men tend to avoid major involvement in infant care because infants do not respond to their repertoire of skills, and men have difficulty acquiring the skills needed to comfort the infant."

This is true even of fathers who are in extended contact with their infants. One of the LaRossas' subjects was a professor named Stuart who devoted four mornings a week to infant care while his wife taught. As his son increasingly stayed awake during those mornings Stuart found he was unable to comfort the child and developed feelings like "anger, frustration, sometimes I go pound my fist on the wall or something like that." He generally avoided direct interaction with the baby when possible. His descriptions of what interactions did occur were characteristic of the paternal pattern: "I continually will teach him things, or try to: how to hold his bottle, how to get it if it's fallen over to one side....Right now I am trying to teach him how to roll over....He should know by now, but he's got this funny way. He tries to roll over with his arms stuck straight out."

During this same period, Stuart was taking increasing delight in his two-year old daughter. Note the sources of his satisfaction: "My older child now is verbal...she dresses herself, takes care of herself, goes to the bathroom by herself, everything, a more or less autonomous being...and I just enjoy that tremendously." The definite pattern is for fathers to begin to enter the child care scene with vigor only once the child is walking and talking, and for their participation to grow as the child gets older. By the time youngsters reach school age, the average father's interaction level with his children often attains or nearly attains the mother's, depending on family type, employment patterns, and so forth.

Even at older ages, though, there are differences between typical mother and father interactions. Toddlers often come to pursue fathers as "an exciting source of adventure," clinicians tell us, and through rough play with him develop an "I can do it myself" attitude.

Fathers are more likely than the mother to encourage children to explore the outer levels of their competence and withstand frustration. They do more direct teaching and cognitive stimulation, their play has a coaching emphasis, and they tend toward puzzles, word games, and "training" toys.

A splendid real-life example of the peculiaristic response of a good father was recorded by the poet Robert Browning, whose father taught him verse-making, and Greek -- as well as the importance of an energetic attack on life, and gaiety and optimism, and much else. Browning recounts how, as a boy of five, he came across his father reading Homer and asked what the book was about. "The siege of Troy," answered Browning Sr. "What's a siege?" inquired the son, at which point father leapt to his feet and began to reconstruct Troy in the living room. A principality of chairs and tables arose, and in an armchair on the top of the heap he plunked Robert. "There now, that's Troy, and you're King Priam, and," pointing to the cat, "there's Helen of Troy, beautiful and sleek." And so on. Two or three years later, Browning's father gave him a translation of The Iliad, and later encouraged him to start it in Greek.

Fathers burrow in deeply in a few areas. There is merit to Ellen Wilson Fielding's observation that "a father is more likely to take a compartmentalized approach" in his interactions with children, while a mother is more likely to switch between categories, to respond quickly, to combine and recombine activities and information. On the whole, fathers seem to be tutors in expertise while mothers give lessons in overall living. Given these recurrent patterns of family life we might agree with G. K. Chesterton that "it is not difficult to see why ... the female became the emblem of the universal and the male of the special."

As children get older, one area where father specialists frequently practice their trade is in crisis management. In his extensive interviews with fathers, Robert Weiss captures many examples. Some are proverbial:

Boots is going out with a fellow and they came in an hour and a half late. Well, I got excited about that. I told the young fellow I didn't think we needed him around here any more. And he had enough moxie in him, which I give a lot of stock to, he came back two days later and wanted to sit down and talk. I give the kid a lot of credit. That told me he has something behind him. The reason why they were late, they were at his boss's house and the electricity went off in the town. And I said, "I don't want to hear that. If you have a commitment, you meet it. No matter what happens." We talked and he knew where I stood.

Other interventions fit more unusual circumstances. One poignant case was of a father who engineered a turning point in the life of his second son. Mr. Leary, an official in state government, noticed that his ten year old was solitary and uncommunicative and seemed unhappy. He resolved to help his boy find a place in the world outside the home, and cut back on his work hours as part of that effort.

Bobby.... had no friends and no interests. And I told my wife that we had to find

something. There was a recreation center in town.... He read through the whole catalog and picked riflery. The next day my wife called me up and told me that they had told him he had to be twelve years old and he had broken out crying. He'd been upstairs crying ever since and I should come home. So I said, "Well, we finally found out what the boy wants. I don't know what the hell I'm going to do about it, but I'll find out." I started off by getting a permit to carry a firearm and then buying a rifle and getting a membership in a rifle club.

Father and son would go to the range after work and shoot. Mr. Leary got an adult-sized rifle customized to make it easier for Bobby to handle, and as Bobby grew he upgraded his equipment. Mr. Leary picks up the narrative:

By the time we got his third rifle, I guess by the time he was twelve, he was shooting in competitive outdoor matches....When he was fourteen he won in a match for adults. We would leave home every Sunday morning to go somewhere for the rifle match. It might be a hundred miles away, it could be five hundred miles away. We would go for overnight trips quite a bit when he was thirteen or fourteen.... We enjoyed that.... Bobby became quite good, and that gave him a measure of self-respect so that he would try other things.... But we had an awful hard time getting that fellow out of his shell. I worked at it from the time he was ten until he was about sixteen.

On a more everyday basis, Weiss reports, the men in his study "demonstrated their love for their children as fathers typically do. They worked for the children, took joy in their existence, and were pleased that the children could look to their mothers for nurturance and to them for applause for achievement. They thought of themselves as available should they be needed, and were grateful when there was no need."

It's easy, argues Weiss, to underestimate men's investment in their children because they so often display that investment by being somewhere else -- working hard. A father's aggressiveness, whether at work or in other circumstances, can itself be considered a kind of nurture, in the sense that it is his contribution to the family's prosperity and safety. "As often happens when men become fathers, Mr. Crane's work became even more important to him when his children were born. Along with all its other meanings, his work became a way of providing for his family. This, Mrs. Crane did not entirely understand."

Possibly one reason men express their love for their children differently is because they feel it differently. Weiss' interviews suggest that fathers love their children as individuals, but also as carriers of the family efforts and hopes and principles. This may express itself in a more objective devotion.

The interviews also suggest, however, that fathers can become heavily involved in daily care when need arises. A Mr. Harris reported that prior to the break-up of his marriage, he had been very close to his children. "We had done a lot of things together in the sense of working

outside." When he won custody of his ten year old daughter and six year old son, however, the meaning of closeness changed.

Initially my worst fear was that I wouldn't be able to cook for them, that I couldn't feed them.... I used to make up a list of menus to take me through the next ten years.... It wasn't that bad, actually. I burned things and I made a lot of mistakes. But the kids were very understanding. They'd say, "That's all right, Dad. So it's burned. Just cut off the bottom."

Mr. Harris came to take pride in his caretaking. Asked about times when he felt most fulfilled as a father he answered:

Well, putting Bobby in the bathtub the other night so I could get all the dirt out of all the wounds he'd got during the day and then putting a band-aid here and a band-aid there and one over here and a big bandage on his knee. I guess that's a time. And when they enjoy a meal, I feel good about that.

Biological Differentiation of Mothers and Fathers

Even primary-care-giver fathers don't mother, however, a finding that makes most observers conclude that much more than socialization is at work in the differentiation of parenting behavior. Studies of untraditional families in the U.S., Europe and Australia -- for instance married couples in which the father stays home with the children -- have shown that "egalitarian" fathers share most of the same standards and behaviors as traditional fathers. An investigation by Michael Lamb of Swedish fathers who had taken parental leave to care full-time for their infant children found that they remained less likely to hold, tend, vocalize with, smile at, and display affection toward their babies than mothers (whether working- or at-home-).

It oughtn't come as an enormous surprise that men and women parent differently. There stretches a long train of successive factors separating the sexes -- beginning with dissimilar genetics (XX chromosomes for females, XY for males), then gonadal differentiation of female and male fetuses in the first trimester, proceeding through different body hormones produced by different glands, right on up to different neural organization in the brain -- before we finally reach the caboose of diverging social behaviors.

The brain differences are interesting. Animal studies show that brain cells change their shape when treated with testosterone. On the basis of this and other evidence it is theorized that the brains of male and female humans, like their bodies, develop differently according to the amount of testosterone circulating in the child around the time of birth. It is known that in the brains of 4-year-olds, girls show more advanced cell growth in the left (language-dominant) hemisphere and boys in the right hemisphere (which is dominant in visual and spatial skills,

music, face recognition and emotions). We also know that within the right hemisphere, more of the available space is devoted to visual-spatial functions among males than among females. Human male brains also show more rigid separation of functions between the two hemispheres, while female brains are less tightly organized, less "lateralized."

It's been suggested that one implication of all this may be that males have more restricted verbal access to their emotions than females. A fresh anatomical discovery further increases the plausibility of this: research finds that the bundle of fibers which carries information between the two brain hemispheres, the corpus callosum, is larger and more bulbous in females than in males, suggesting easier and more frequent communication between the brain's two halves among women.

Beyond the variations in basic brain architecture there is evidence that circulating sex hormones cause differing responses to children among men and women. On the basis of rodent and ungulate studies a number of theorists have speculated that an innate predisposition to respond to infant signals may be stronger in females than in males. The male sex hormone seems to account for the different reactions of male and female rhesus monkeys to presentation of an infant monkey: When adults who have been raised in isolation (to avoid socialization effects) have an infant placed in their cage the males are more likely to strike it, the females to nurture it. (If violence is the flip side of nurturance it's interesting to note that in every single human society for which we have anthropological evidence, the males act more aggressively than the females.)

Studies of the persistence with which young monkeys and young humans seek contact with newborn siblings also show a clear gender divide. In monkey groups mothers usually try to keep both male and female siblings away from newborns, but pubescent females persist in seeking proximity while males do not. Human toddlers show similar behavior, with girls seeking contact while boys more readily go off when mother is with an infant. Other human studies show that female newborns cry more readily than males in response to the cry of another infant, and that small girls try more often than boys to comfort their mother when she appears to be distressed.

Animal research has taught us that it is possible to invoke nurturant behavior toward the young (i.e. "mothering") by administering female sex hormones to prepubescent males and females. At the same time, one study has shown that the act of carrying their offspring causes male marmosets to experience an increase in circulating levels of certain hormones, so hormonal "priming" could conceivably have some effects on both sexes.

Many human behaviors in which females perform strongly happen to be traits which would be useful to a caretaker of offspring. For instance, women of all ages are better able to "read" people without verbal cues (typically, test-takers will look at a picture of someone expressing a strong reaction and try to identify the emotion). Women score higher in empathy and affiliation. Psychological research by Carol Gilligan finds that while men emphasize autonomy and perceive danger in intimate situations, women find impersonality threatening. (These findings hold up regardless of worldly ambition, for instance among groups of women

and men where everyone is going to medical school or law school.)

In 1987, Alice Rossi summarized the "growing accumulation of evidence of biological processes that differentiate the sexes."

Females show greater sensitivity to touch, sound, and odor; and have greater fine motor coordination and finger dexterity. Sounds are judged to be twice as loud by women as men; women pick up nuances of voice and music more readily, and are six times more likely to sing in tune as men....Men show greater acuity than women [in] vision [and] greater sensitivity to light....Gender differences in social and cognitive skills are also found: females are more sensitive to context, show greater skill in picking up peripheral information, and process information faster; they are more attracted to human faces and respond to nuances of facial expression as they do to nuances of sound. Males are better at object manipulation in space, can rotate objects in their mind, read maps and perform in mazes better, and show a better sense of direction. Males are more rule-bound, less sensitive to situational nuance. Most of these differences meet the criterion of precultural influence in that they show up at very early ages.

She illustrates this last point with the findings that infant females are most attracted to facial expressions, versus moving objects for males, and that girls are best soothed by a human voice while boys respond to physical contact and movement.

Primate research provides further evidence of precultural differences in behavior and perception between males and females. Dutch scientist Frans de Waal has shown that "in chimpanzee communities, the male strategy is to be competitive within a hierarchy....The female strategy is to emphasize cohesion and commitment in a few relationships." He believes these different patterns are genetic.

Rossi draws some implications of the biological findings for parenting behavior:

There is some predisposition in the female to be responsive to people and sounds, an edge in receiving, interpreting and giving back communication....It also suggests an easier connection between feelings and their expression in words among women.

When it comes to caring for a nonverbal, fragile infant, says Rossi, "women have a head start." By contrast, men are well equipped to deal with the rough-and-tumble play and exploration of older children. Noting that the same gender differences crop up in examinations of solo mothers and fathers, of men and women in intact families, in general psychological research, in human physiological studies, and in the animal world, Rossi concludes that the differing parenting styles of men and women root not merely in "socialization" but in basic sexual dimorphism.

Psychiatrist David Gutmann argues that before parenthood and then, particularly, later

on in life, male and female roles often relax somewhat. But during the "parental emergency" -- his term for the intense coping demands that parents suddenly face when a child arrives -- virtually all mothers and fathers divide their labors more sharply by gender. When the real pressures of child-minding are on, most couples shift crisply toward traditional patterns of sex differentiation.

This is not to say parenting behavior is unchangeable, or that social context doesn't matter. It is clear that the biological program is, as research scientists say, "plastic." We've already demonstrated that male competence for nurturing extends further than what most men ever call on, and there is some evidence that men have become slightly more involved in traditionally female family tasks as attitudes have changed. But there is not even a hint that family role androgyny is ever likely to occur among humans. Instead, there appear to be strong physiological and bio-chemical barriers against it.

The Universal Predominance of the Mother

Even in places where enormous exertions have been made to counterbalance traditional mothering and fathering patterns and to minimize gender differences the effect has generally been minimal. On the Israeli kibbutz, family patterns (not to mention occupational tendencies) have now reverted to where they nearly mirror those of the outside world, with mothers in the traditional role of main family caretaker. In Sweden, where for more than a half century a mighty apparatus of social engineering machinery has borne down against traditional domestic arrangements (measures include universal two-week paternity leaves at full salary, nine-months of parental leave at nearly full pay, another three months at partial pay and an optional six months of unpaid but protected leave -- all presented with a massive public campaign to convince fathers to use it and subsidized research on the fathers who don't -- plus free parent education courses with a special emphasis on reaching men, requirements that an employer must subtract up to two hours from the workday of any parent with a child under eight who asks, leave at full salary that can be used by parents for sickness or school adjustment problems of children up to age twelve, and so forth) the results have been, in the words of a Social Democrat deputy social minister, "disappointing." Few men have taken advantage of any of the parental leave provisions, and surveys show that men spend only about 22 percent of the time women do on domestic duties. Several generations into Sweden's great experiment toward a world without gender walls, conflicts over sex roles remain the second leading problem seen by marriage counselors.

In other countries too, a number of studies confirm that even when working hours or other circumstances permit increased family involvement without jeopardizing career roles or prospects, the effect on family involvement by men is modest. And it is not only in group averages that we see people hewing pretty closely to this same sexual script -- any observer looking closely at behavior rather than rhetoric will find there aren't even many individual

non-conformists in this area.

I personally know one family with a "stay-at-home-dad" and working-mother arrangement that seems very successful, and tales of "new fathers" and Mr. Mom types are a media favorite today. But these are exceedingly rare families. Child psychologist Jay Belsky, who has researched such arrangements, says these fathers "are special dads, progressive dads, modern dads, the dads who can tolerate it." The difference between most mothers and fathers, he says, is the difference between "competence and performance, between 'can' and 'will.'" While Belsky believes that "dads have to pitch in more," he says it is a "pipe dream" to think that mothers and fathers will ever be interchangeable in their care for the young.

Evidence of this can be seen in an interesting study of four types of families living in Los Angeles -- traditional married parents, unmarried parents, solo mothers, and communal-living parents. It found that even in the radical families parenthood brought a reversion to more traditional gender roles (and movement toward social conventionality generally), and that in all of them mothers were the primary care providers until the child was at least eighteen months old. An Australian study of families in which both parents shared childcare equally (in some cases via the father staying home while the mother worked) found at the two-year follow-up that only one in six of the households had maintained their non-traditional lifestyle. A different, quasi-random, sample of Australian families estimated that in only one to two percent of the country's homes were fathers as or more involved with children than mothers.

The observation echoes and re-echoes through the family literature: "In almost all cultures and most species it is primarily a female responsibility to care for the young." "Virtually all families everywhere have an internal distinction in authority based on age and distinct sex roles; the man takes a more instrumental role and the woman a more expressive role." "In almost all cultures direct paternal involvement is a discretionary activity, whereas provisioning is mandatory."

And it is not merely due to fatherly preference that things are so ordered. Investigations of what influences a father's decision to spend time on family work find that most men take on extra responsibilities only with their wife's endorsement. And many wives, apparently, are not looking for a lot more participation. One 1980s national report found that just 23 percent of employed and 31 percent of non-employed wives said that they would like "more help with the children" from their husbands. Another survey of only employed wives found that 42 percent wished their husbands would "spend more time taking care of or doing things with the children." The third parties involved -- the children -- also generally prefer mom's care, as seen in Michael Lamb's finding that distressed or ill youngsters will consistently turn to their mother.

The main source of resistance to this abundant evidence of female dominance in childrearing comes, in my view ironically, from the female-potential movement. Strangely, modern feminists have chosen to dislike many of the things women, for internal reasons, do best. They disdain the particularly female ethics and humanities. They openly covet male competences and ape pathetically the ancient male dictates of what comprises a successful and

satisfying life. Spending time cultivating and acculturating children became a controversial practice, liable to inflame a defender of female expression, only after we allowed it to be redefined as an uninteresting and unworthy undertaking. I ask you: Is the unfolding of an original human personality really the banality, the awful chore, it is frequently portrayed as? Or could nurturing children in their critical years be a natural and deeply humane impulse that produces satisfactions within the nurturer every bit as profound as those inspired in the recipient?

G.K Chesterton once said "It is the curse of the modern philosophy of strength that it is ridden with the fallacy that there is only one kind of strength and one kind of weakness. It forgets that size is a weakness as well as littleness; that the camel is just a weak for the purpose of going through the eye of a needle as the microbe for carrying a load of hay." Only if we cease fleeing from the concept of sexual difference and complementarity will we begin to notice and treasure the varieties of human accomplishment.

And when we do, we won't have to look very far to become sexual ambivalents. Consider: Right from conception, males are more susceptible than females to physical disease, developmental difficulty and environmental assault. Although 140 males are conceived for every 100 females, 35 of these male fetuses will die during gestation. Three fourths of all babies stillborn before four months are males. At birth, females are four to six weeks more mature neurologically than males, which persists in their earlier acquisition of language, verbal fluency, and memory retention. Males are more vulnerable to malnutrition. Communication disabilities like stuttering and dyslexia are several times more prevalent among males than females, reading blocks and other learning problems are three to five times as common. Males are more commonly color-blind and left-handed, and suffer more night terrors. They experience much more schizophrenia, autism, hyperactivity, delinquency, suicide and homicide than females. They are far more likely to end up homosexual.

One observer has described the male as "a bundle of energies that is always threatening to disintegrate. The female is much more stable and secure." Psychologist Dee Shepherd-Look writes in the Handbook of Child Development that "until adulthood it is difficult to find a pathological condition in which the incidence among females is higher than among males." Even as adults, men have weaker immune systems, twice as much heart disease, more alcoholism, less elastic blood vessels, and seemingly less elastic learning curves as well. And that doesn't even begin to get into matters like trustworthiness, honesty, generosity, closeness to God and ability to remember a birthday. If males are the superior sex, it's a very mixed gift.

Inadequate Family Involvement Among Contemporary Fathers

One thing is startlingly clear: modern fathers (and modern mothers too) ought to be far more involved in the daily life of their children than they currently are. Estimates of fatherly

interaction with children vary widely according to the definition of interaction (does eating dinner with the child count or only one-on-one play, instruction or conversation?) and the method by which it is measured. Levels also vary by the age of the child. One study of infant-father exchanges which relied on fathers' reports arrived at a daily average of fifteen to twenty minutes. A study which used estimates by mothers came up with an average of just under 70 minutes per day for infants aged eight to ten months. Other studies of children from kindergarten to tenth grade arrive at figures ranging from a 1/2 hour to 2 1/2 hours of father-child interplay per day. Time-diary studies, which are probably more accurate than those using estimates, tend to produce the lower-range figures.

Fathers are particularly unlikely to take responsibility for their children -- in the sense of periods of time where they are solely in charge. Three-quarters or more of contemporary fathers do not regularly take any responsibility for daily care. In one study, 60 percent of fathers of pre-school children had never taken sole responsibility for their children.

What is perhaps most troubling from the child's point of view is that paternal involvement doesn't seem to increase that much even when mothers are employed and thus absent. In families with employed mothers the amount of time fathers spend with children is much closer to (and among older children sometimes even equal to) the level of mothers. But this is not the result of much increase by fathers. Rather, it is equal-opportunity slighting -- the child is getting little time from either parent.

Clearly, fathers can do better. And there is some indication they may have begun moving, marginally, in that direction. The famous Middletown studies showed that 10 percent of all fathers were reported by mothers to spend no time with their children in 1924, compared to 2 percent in 1976, while the proportion spending more than 1 hour a day increased. Time-diary studies of domestic work done by men (including but not limited to child care) show no change from the 1960s to 1970s but an 18 percent increase from the 70s to the 80s (a far bigger increase than achieved by men in Canada, Denmark, Holland, Japan, Norway or the U.K.). The increases did not even come close to counterbalancing drastic drop-offs by women, however.

There are claims that nearly one-third of working fathers have refused a new job, promotion or transfer that threatened to reduce their family time, and some companies say that up to a third of all male employees will at least check a box expressing curiosity about part-time work options (though there is scant real-life interest in this among males presently in the corporate world). Surveys by James Levine show 72 percent of working fathers expressing conflict between work and family these days, up from 12 percent in 1978.

Certainly the careerist pace seems to have ratcheted up over the last generation. Washington editor Howard Means writes:

My father, a respectable man in a respectable job now many years retired, rose most work days at 8, was in the office toward 9, and back home again for lunch by 12:30; by 2 he would be back in the office again, and by 5:15 we could

generally count on his being home. Today, in Washington, were I a teenager and he a working man still, bound to the same schedule, I would feel obliged to invent excuses for him. By the very measures of his day, he would be a failure.

Businesses and professions have always wanted as much of an employee's time and energy as they can possibly extract, and that is forever to be expected (even desired) of them. It is up to workers to decide where their paid labor fits in their larger scheme of values and priorities, and it is to be remembered that it is workers, collectively, who will ultimately dictate the accepted pace of the work world.

This is of course especially true for holders of higher level jobs, who enjoy more leverage than lower-skilled employees. But then it is precisely at the higher levels of our jobforce where the work-at-the-exclusion-of-all-else mania is most virulent. The wife of NBC News correspondent James Polk has lots of company among partners of the power-lunch-set in her discovery that, as she told the Washington Post, "sometimes I feel like a single parent with a visiting boyfriend who pays the bills." Sociologist Arlie Hochschild has shown that working-class husbands who wished their wives could stay at home actually did slightly more around the house than ostensibly more liberal middle-class professionals who proclaimed support for the idea of their wives working while resisting doing any housework themselves.

Blue collar working schedules can be somewhat friendlier to the concept of fatherly family involvement. On the blue collar block where my own family lives my fellow fathers are, respectively, a plumber, a drugstore manager, a self-employed film developer, a rain gutter installer, and a heating/air conditioning installer, and all through the course of the day there are fathers coming and going, dropping off supplies, taking kids to school or picking them up from practice, eating lunch at home, watching over naps, breaking up quarrels, and so forth.

Obviously, there is no right way to divide parental responsibilities -- but two parents will always beat one and a lump (to borrow Kyle Pruett's phrase). Each family must work out its own accommodations. In some the dad might be responsible for driving the kids to school and watching them on Saturday and Sunday. In others he might cook. Perhaps he will be in charge of games, baths, and all story reading. Among the five million couples where the wife earns more than the husband (only a portion of those have children present) maybe some at-home fathering will be feasible. As we've seen, it won't be the same as at-home mothering, but for some couples who can pull it off it might make economic sense.

The point is, fathers owe their children more energetic contributions toward a successful homelife than many are currently making. A ball game once a week, dragging Jimmy along to your tennis or bowling match, or propping the kids in front of the TV while chewing over the newspaper is not going to cut it. A family trip to Aruba is no compensation for the chronically missing.

Nor are fathers going to be in much position to complain about the flight of mothers from homes full of children until they do something to make sure the mothers of their own offspring

have regular breaks and time off, ball games and gab sessions of their own, chances to discuss family problems in detail, and lots of emotional support, material reinforcement, and physical backing. As critical as direct fatherly attention to children is, Urie Bronfenbrenner has found that the most effective and important influence on family success most fathers can exert is through their "assistance provided to the mother herself."

Washington, D.C.-area father Douglas Pollack has written of his family compromise: when his son turned one, well launched by a year of full-time at-home mothering, Pollack shifted to a four-day work schedule and began taking every Friday off to be with his boy. This allowed his wife Mary Beth to maintain her physical therapist's license -- which was both economically and psychologically useful -- while their child continued to benefit from the unconditional interest and attention of "a totally biased parent." Mary Beth "brought back a renewed enthusiasm for mothering and an increased appreciation of being able to do it at home," and Douglas got to know his children "in a way that most men, sadly, never realize." Nine years and a baby sister later, the "experiment" is still going strong.

Father Jon Heddleston made an even sharper break. A responsible corporate job kept him travelling frequently from home, and preoccupied with work plans on weekends. He did paperwork in the recovery room during the birth of his second son. He remembers one day when his boys were preschoolers, leaving his Connecticut house for his New York office while his wife was too sick to get up from the sofa. He had to go, he recalls, because his work "was SO important." Eventually, he made a decision: "I loved my job, but I loved my wife and kids more. At the time, I was thirty-one and had achieved every career goal I'd ever set....It was time for me to redefine success."

Heddleston and family moved to the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia where he became a newspaper editor at one-fourth his previous salary. Today he is a high school English teacher, and knows "what being a successful father and husband is, and I'm a better man." "I was there the morning Chad didn't want to ride the school bus because he was afraid of some "big kid." I read him a passage from the Bible. He got on, his confidence restored. I was there when my wife suffered two miscarriages -- and it never occurred to me what I might have missed at work those days." The personal choices he sees around him, Heddleston says, remind him of an old Barbara Streisand refrain: "I don't want much; I just want more."

It is quite common to find worry among older men that they have failed to be an adequate father to their children. Over a third of the successful men studied by Robert Weiss expressed such misgivings, and he reports that "our methods, since they required clear evidence for categorization of a man as feeling regret or guilt, would be likely to produce an underestimate." The second most common reason for wives wanting a divorce, a study of 600 couples found, is "neglect of home or children" (ranking right after mental cruelty). Perhaps the most persuasive reason for men to join more heartily in the business of family-making is the fact that, as evidence analyzed by Joseph Pleck has shown, "the more time a father invests in his children, the happier and more integrated his own life will be."

The Comfortable Congruence of Fatherhood and Manliness

Men sometimes fear that when they enter fatherhood they will have to acquire some difficult and foreign new set of skills. But fathers needn't remake themselves or put on masks to succeed in family life -- the sometimes lost point is that normal male traits are useful in the home. A child doesn't need two mothers. If Ali McGraw actually thinks she is going to get her wish for a husband "brave enough to say 'I feel fragile and inadequate right now, and I'd like some time to myself to cry,'" well, then let's hope she has a very affectionate cat. Fathers will bring their basic natures to the family just as mothers will bring theirs.

At the same time, the emotional sensitivities fathering encourages should be welcomed. Winston Churchill and Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov (who repulsed Napoleon's invasion of Russia) are just two of the prominent men I am aware of who were notoriously quick to tears with no impairment to their manliness. And with respect to the children, warm fatherly involvement actually produces stronger, not weaker, sexual identity and character, in boys as well as girls. As Michael Lamb states: "One of the best established findings is that the masculinity of sons and the femininity of daughters are greatest when fathers are nurturant and participate extensively in the child-rearing." Researchers have also shown that children who have lots of exposure to both their male and female parents come to possess certain socially desirable traits of both sexes -- scoring high on masculinity and femininity scales alike -- and that this gives them significant advantages in cognitive ability and scientific productivity, as well as producing the highest levels of self-esteem and self-confidence.

Fatherhood needn't be the goofy, ineffectual, surrendering kind of armchair role it is frequently presented as under modern typing. It needn't accommodate uneasily to traditional masculine imperatives. Quite the opposite: fatherhood is a time when most men become more aware of their distinctive maleness than ever, and being a father provides enormous opportunities for exploring and expressing male instincts that now have few other outlets. For many men, fatherhood is the last natural, deeply male role left to them.

Living in cramped cities, wearing pressed clothes, working and existing constantly in chatty, confining, rule-bound bureaucracies, cut off from nature, increasingly passive and individually powerless, anonymous and solitary even in crowds -- primally thwarted in so many ways, where are modern men to find any of the freestanding autonomy of historical man, of the animal kingdom male? The average man has no chance to occupy a millennial niche as tender of the earth, or hunter, or warrior, or chief, or landowner, or knight, or husbandman, or wilderness tamer, or monk or even "head of household" any more. But most still have an opportunity to be fathers. And as co-leaders of their small-tribe they have a chance to make a difference, to craft a world in which they really matter.

Contemporary men in the pre-fatherhood and post-fatherhood phase can be rather

comical, sometimes even pitiful, to behold -- auto-oriented and pleasure focused, terribly interested in games of all sorts, obsessed with physical decline, sensitive of ego, insecure of position. Whether mirror-gazing, self-expounding bachelor or golfball chipping retiree, the little boy in many men is never too far from the surface. Fathers are of course not wholly different from men of other types or phases, but because they have a "project" and are surrounded by palpable reminders of their immediate personal importance and social responsibility they tend to be less uncertain, and silly, than many of their modern counterparts.

A man's residence in his family is a billboard-sized tribute to his willingness to accept the consequences of his actions, and in the drives to provide, protect, exemplify, teach, judge, discipline and comfort there are goals, purposes, and fulfillments aplenty for men. Flock-tending, with its mix of fostering and defense, of cultivation and safeguarding, provides reliable and socially-productive fulfillment of authentically powerful male impulses. As I write this I can hear the answering machines click on: "Good heavens, he's calling for return of the Neanderthals," plus formulaic speeches about patriarchy, and how the only thing men want to do is lord it over others. I can hear charges that I am nostalgifying the long overdue passing of male domestic dominance and tyranny.

My answer: I do not idealize the paternal dictatorship. I know such households exist, but I believe strongly that what most men wish to do for their families is not to control and manipulate but to secure and support, in love and justice. And I believe strongly that when men are thwarted from filling those instinctual roles, they actually become more rather than less likely, in their frustrated impotence, to resort to tyrannizing, petty power-mongering, and violence. It's worth remembering that the most fiercely misogynistic males in America today are the emasculated lovers and sons of our inner city matriarchies. Rap anthems of rape and torture are the advertising jingles of a world wholly devoid of male authority.

Fathers granted a measure of social respect and allowed some personal leadership will be far saner, fairer and gentler than men denied authoritative roles and influence altogether. It's because they don't have the elemental satisfaction of proudly sustaining a clan with resources won in the larger world that so many men today resort instead to pointless "provings" of their manhood through bravado and bluster. The most elemental male creed is "I shield and support, therefore I am." Some of those men who are frozen out from shielding and supporting find other ways of proving their existence: "I hurt, therefore I am," is one twisted alternative. The graffiti boy's proof is "I deface, therefore I am." The gang banger reasons, "I kill therefore I am." The street libertine says "I impregnate, therefore I am. Respectable hedonists on the upper side of the class divide babble "I feel pleasure, therefore I am." And all of these are expressions of a stunted -- not an exaggerated -- masculinity.

Social Constraints as a Contribution to Male Success

Though the utopianisms of sexlessness and anti-masculinity won't do the job, it's true that the masculine nature needs to be carefully bounded. We've already discussed the evolutionary premiums and biological factors which work against male monogamy, child nurture, and full family participation -- how men by their very nature tend to flee from their sexual effects. The family is a natural environment for females, but an artificial one for males, and men have always had to be won over, or coerced, into taking up their family responsibilities. Yet if men had not been lured into concern for their mates and children advanced human society could never have grown up.

Nor would men themselves be safe from self-destruction without the institution of the family. Men unconnected to families have enormously higher rates of violence and criminality than do fathers and husbands. Their style of living makes them several times likelier to be victims of crime too, and likelier to be involved in accidents, to be murdered, to commit suicide. Unattached men drink much more heavily, are more likely to succumb to chronic disease, and are committed for psychiatric treatment many times more often. They are less likely to be in the labor force, they work fewer hours, and they earn much less than fathers and husbands of the same age and level of education. Unattached males completely predominate in sexual violence, drug trafficking, terrorism, and military adventurism.

In trying to cope with these dangerously drifting males, Alice Rossi writes, "the machine cultures of the West have shown no inventiveness in developing new social institutions capable of providing individual loyalty and social integration to replace the bonds of the family." The reason they've failed so miserably, I would suggest, is that there is no foreseeable alternative -- "the family is the only institution," to quote George Gilder, "that works on the deeper interior formations of human character and commitment." So the result, according to Rossi, is that "unattached males roam the interstices between socially cohesive groups, kill, and are themselves killed and maimed."

Yet these very same men, once linked to wives and children in webs of responsibility, can live radically different lives. It is not so much that their natures change as that they acquire new ends. G.K. Chesterton once wrote that "the watch-dog fights while the wild dog often runs away. Of the husband, as of the house-dog, it may often be said that he has been tamed into ferocity." An alteration in aims has a transforming effect on behavior. To a degree untrue of women, men are Jekyll and Hyde creatures, and the family is their brilliantly-concocted antidote.

A hint as to how the makeover may take place is suggested in the work of Konrad Lorenz. In his many animal studies Lorenz discovered no species with enduring bonds and attachments among its members without the simultaneous presence of intra-species aggression. He then showed that rituals of courtship, mating, friendship, love and greeting are often very slightly modified versions of battle behaviors, triumph dances, and other "characteristic motor patterns of aggression." Lorenz speculates, for instance, that the human smile is a subtle variation on the primal threatening gesture of teeth baring. What is taking place among bonding animals, then, is a great triumph: aggressive energies are being stolen and "redirected" toward socially productive ends. In psychoanalyst Selma Fraiberg's summary, "aggression is made over in the service of

love." (Chesterton's aphorism about watch dogs and wild dogs may be even wiser than he knew.)

There is another, darker, implication to all of this: if the understanding presented here is accurate, then ritualized family formation is more than our ladder to cultural success, it is also our main bulwark against anarchistic interpersonal violence, specifically male violence. "The progressive modification of the aggressive drive takes place under the aegis of the love drives. Where there are no human bonds there is no motive for redirection, for the regulation and control of aggressive urges," writes Fraiberg. If the fraction of men operating outside family commitments continues to rise in the future, our social tempest may grow beyond any expectation.

What are the possibly forgotten means by which men have been won into cooperative domesticity in the past? Studies of paternal involvement among humans and nonhuman primates show remarkable agreement in centering male decisions to participate in family life and childrearing around just a few preconditions: One is monogamy. Indeed, one of the very few places other than among humans that extensive paternal care exists is among the small number of monogamous primates. A related precondition is certainty of birth -- studies show men take care of their children if they're sure they are the father, and recognized as such. A final factor is female encouragement for paternal care. The keys, apparently, are the ancient ones: enduring marriage and sexual restraint. In other words, faithful legal families.

Together, this evidence on the importance of social institutions in channelling male energies makes it seem astonishing, and even suicidal, that women would ever collaborate in weakening the restraining authority of the family. Historically, of course, women did no such thing. Well aware of their vulnerability in a world without constraints women have traditionally emphasized the importance of fidelity and stability in affairs of the heart, and have urged those qualities on their menfolk. As family historian John Sommerville puts it "women have always had the job of conserving social values and customs while men are testing the limits." If in our current era women have given up the social braking and restraining effort and moved toward the traditionally male position of *laissez faire* in sexual matters, then all bets may be off on the direction of cultural evolution in the years ahead.

Toward a More Natural Family Life

Feminist Barbara Ehrenreich, in a proposal that is at least plainspoken, urges that "we accept the male revolt" (which is her term for the last generation's family trends) "as a historical fait accompli and begin to act on its economic consequences for women" -- by which she means we ought to increase welfare spending for single mothers. In my view, that prescription represents a disastrous miscalculation of the long-term tolerability of father flight, as well as a weak understanding of its causes and susceptibility to reversal.

I've argued that the turn away from fatherhood is not nearly just a matter of "revolt," but a push-pull phenomenon, with longstanding selfish motives being released by a sequence of sometimes inadvertent and sometimes just idiotic social changes downgrading male roles. By my lights, meekly accomodating these historical trends would represent nothing more than a surrender to misery. Ehrenreich herself seems aware of this danger when she worries aloud: "Are we acquiescing to a future in which men will always be transients in the lives of women and never fully members of the human family?" But her final conclusion -- that women should live independently on state-guaranteed incomes because the state is more reliable and less troublesome than hard-to-manage men -- reeks of fatalism.

It's true the deep male inclination to flee sexual responsibility will never disappear. But that's no reason to give up and assume it must dominate male behavior in the future, beyond all reach of personal disciplines and social management. After all, we have several thousand years of human history from which to draw examples of healthy fatherly participation. The key is to convince ourselves this is a dragon which needs slaying.

Another of Ehrenreich's errors, in my view, is her reduction of the sexual partnership to little more than an economic arrangement. Any decision to give up on both-parent parenting carries enormous problems that extend far beyond economics. I've discussed some of the many ways that children will be stunted by the absence of their father, and mothers disadvantaged by the absence of their male compatriot. I've warned of the likely inhospitability of any society in which boys grow up without male oversight and large numbers of men roam without connection to women and children. Given these large, even mortal, stakes, I don't believe surrender can even be considered in the matter of father disappearance.

Just as ill-advised as Ehrenreich's retreat to the solo-female family, in my view, is the wishful thinking that proposes to remake fathers into interchangeability with mothers. I've argued for sharply increased paternal involvement in all aspects of family life and childrearing, and I would support ambitious reforms in the ways we live, work and think in order to tie men more closely to their children. However: sooner or later, society is going to have to face the reality that on the large issues -- at-home dads, infancy care by fathers, 50/50 responsibility for nurture, and so forth -- most men will, to put it simply, not be moved. Not ever. Fathers can contribute enormously to their families, but they are not equipped to mother, and no amount of good intentions is going to substantially overthrow fundamental male and female proclivities on this.

Nor is there any indication that this is something desired by everyday men and women. "Neither sex likes the other when they're androgynous," states sociologist Popenoe. He points out that the break-up rate of androgynous couples is very high. His investigations in Sweden show that women lose sexual interest in androgynous men, and that because androgynous arrangements do not appeal to men they don't get married and won't have children. "The kinds of things that men and women like in a partner," says Popenoe, "are not the similarities but the complementary differences." Christopher Lasch agrees: "It is our biological differences that excite us. That progressive men and women have lost sight of this obvious point suggests that

they are dangerously out of touch not just with 'Middle America' but with common sense."

Certainly, there are areas where men are able and willing to take on more domestic and nurturing tasks. But they will do so only insofar as they are confident they'll also be allowed to participate in family life and the larger world in the traditional male ways. If fathers feel trapped in responsibilities they are ill-equipped to fulfill, many of them will simply flee the whole family-making process. In this way, insistence on fully interchangeable sex roles becomes more than quixotic or fruitless, it actually becomes counterproductive. Men repelled by unrealistic domestic expectations become more aggressive, tyrannical and dominating, not less, and the women and children they walk away from are left heavily burdened.

I see, then, three possible responses to the fatherhood dilemma. We can collapse into a bleak sexual separatism, where family life and child-rearing are increasingly the domain of women alone. Or we can follow the pan-pipers of androgyny and pretend not to be sexually differentiated animals, constrained in how fully we can remake one another; this would leave each of us warring against our own blood and bone, and I expect that the frustrations thus inspired would also accelerate the sad and impoverishing separation of men from women and children. Or as a third alternative we could follow a less radical but far more humane and practical path, and do the following:

- * Accept that in most families women will be the field marshals of childrearing and men the staff-sargeants.
- * Lean unrelentingly on the staff-sargeants to make sure they do not become shirkers and slackers.
- * Work creatively to reconcile child-rearing realities with the legitimate aspirations of contemporary females for wider social opportunities and higher status. (Of which the largest part, in my opinion, should be a forceful campaign underlining the point that people engaged in acculturating humanity's next generation are not wasting those years.)
- * And most generally, learn to accept, then enjoy, the powerful, complementary, cruel, delightful, inevitable impulses that are our human nature. In short: strive to live harmonious natural lives within the occasionally unnatural confines of our modern era.