

## INTRODUCTION

W. Bradford Wilcox and Kathleen Kovner Kline

**“BABIES CHANGE EVERYTHING.”** It is a refrain often heard by anyone contemplating becoming a parent. From sleep disruption to loss of free time, from financial worries to discipline conundrums, couples are frequently warned that after a baby life will never be the same again. Yet despite how much parenthood can feel like a leap into the unknown, millions of us continue to make that leap, every year. Some of us long for a warm bundle to hold against our chests, a smiling gaze to rivet us, a silly toddler to chase and buy toys for and make a fuss over at the holidays. Others imagine someone to throw a ball with, to tussle with on the floor, to teach life lessons, or pass on a bit of our legacy into the future. We know, all too well, what an impact we parents will have on our children. But what is less well known is how our children will change *us*, as mothers and fathers—even at the biological level.

Today, natural scientists and social scientists are learning a great deal about how babies change their parents and how mothers and fathers are changed in both similar and different ways. Animal studies of pair-bonding mammals are yielding fascinating insights into how fathers as well as mothers experience changes at the biochemical level, beginning even before the offspring is born. Meanwhile, social scientists are learning how parental investments in areas such as money, time, discipline, and play are both similar and different for fathers and mothers. It turns out that, for men and for women, parenthood changes both our bodies and our lives. Parenthood quite literally changes us from the inside out.

Why is this the moment to share and reflect on these findings? It is perhaps now more confusing and more daunting than ever to be a parent. In recent decades, profound changes have upended accepted notions of mothering and fathering, providing new opportunities but also often leaving new

mothers and fathers feeling as though they must figure out how to do their parenting jobs largely on their own.

Over the second half of the twentieth century, the United States saw widespread changes in women's labor force participation, in the time that fathers and mothers devote to their children, and in public attitudes toward the public and private roles of men and women.<sup>1</sup> In an effort to get more schooling, get established in a job, and find the right partner, many young men and women in the United States are taking more time to get married and to have their first child. Men and women are marrying on average about five years later than they did in 1970. The age at which a woman has her first child rose from about twenty-one in 1970 to twenty-five in 2006.<sup>2</sup> Later childbearing is especially true for college-educated women. Their average age at the birth of their first child is more than thirty.

Parenthood has also become a more intense and expensive experience. Today's parents devote more time and money to the parenting enterprise than did earlier generations. In the United States, it is estimated that residential mothers and fathers now spend 50 percent more time with their children than they did in 1975. According to 2008 figures from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the average family spends \$221,190 on each child, up from \$183,509 in 1960.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, as parenthood is starting later, people are having smaller families, and people are living longer, the intense experience of being a parent of children in the home now covers a smaller portion of the adult life course than it once did.

Parenthood can also be more isolating than it used to be. Recent increases in out-of-wedlock childbearing, cohabitation, and divorce make men and women much more likely to bear or rear children outside of marriage and to raise them alone. The retreat from marriage has been especially common among Americans without a college degree. One study found that more than 42 percent of children of less-educated women spend some time outside of a stable, married family in their first fourteen years of life, compared to just 19 percent of children born to college-educated women.<sup>4</sup> While most single parents have less help with the demanding tasks of child-rearing, even married parents today have less help from extended family and their community than did parents in previous eras.

These changes in parenthood have made some aspects of the contemporary transition to parenthood especially daunting. For many of us, there is no longer a shared script when it comes to marriage, work and family, and home life. The sacrifices that come with parenthood can be mystifying for adults who may have spent a decade or more living outside of a family and

have grown accustomed to an adult-centered lifestyle. Some couples feel that the arrival of a baby turns a marriage upside down. They discover that nothing stresses even a good relationship like the round-the-clock needs of a fussy infant.<sup>5</sup> Yet despite the challenges, parenthood remains one of the most transformative and meaningful events in our lives. Our children ground us and enliven us. They give us joy and satisfactions that we cannot imagine having lived without.

This book grows out of an academic conference on gender and parenthood involving seventeen scholars from the natural and social sciences at the University of Virginia in the fall of 2008. It seeks to provide scholars, journalists, policymakers, civic and religious leaders, and the public with a more well-rounded portrait of parenthood in America.

We edited this book because we believe that men and women will be intrigued by new evidence about the biological and social changes that parenthood brings about. We also suspect that learning about these findings will help make the transition to parenthood a happier one for men, women, and couples. Recent research suggests that parents can find the tests of parenthood more enjoyable when they find meaning in them and when they realize they are not alone.<sup>6</sup> We aim to help men and women better navigate the critical transition to parenthood by giving them a richer portrait of the changes, challenges, and opportunities that parenthood presents.

## NATURAL AND SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND PARENTHOOD

The volume begins by examining the evolutionary and biological underpinnings of parenthood before moving on to consider, from a social scientific perspective, how parenthood is and is not gendered, both in the United States and around the globe. What makes many of us want to be parents? Even if we are hesitant about parenthood, what aspects of our biology help us step up to the plate when the occasion arises? What happens to our brains and bodies when women become mothers and men become fathers? Are the stakes the same for each sex, or are they different? Why, across history and cultures, are women typically more involved in childcare? Why are some fathers very involved in their children's lives and others not at all? Finally, how do mothers and fathers approach parenthood in similar ways, and how do they approach parenthood in different ways, both in the United States and in non-Western cultures?

We are familiar with the most visible and dramatic ways in which pregnancy changes a woman's body—from increases in appetite to swelling abdomens. But today, science is probing ever more deeply into the mothering experience. From studies of mammals and of human mothers, researchers are learning just how profoundly motherhood changes women from the inside out. One surprising insight from this research that emerges in the chapter by psychologists Kelly G. Lambert and Catherine L. Franssen is that for humans and other mammals, the most critical reproductive organ just might be the brain.

In their chapter “The Dynamic Nature of the Parental Brain,” Lambert and Franssen note that for mammalian mothers, caring for their babies requires focused attention and an increased awareness of the environment. Mothers must guard their young against predators and other threats. They must also feed them, which makes finding food sources and maintaining food stores a constant challenge. To successfully raise their young, mammalian moms require the cognitive capacity not only to solve problems but to solve multiple problems at the same time—what some now refer to as “multitasking.”

To learn more about how motherhood builds the brains of female mammals, Lambert and her colleagues developed a series of maze experiments with rodents. These tests compared the cognitive abilities of rodents who had been mothers at least twice—some call them “multi-moms”—with first-time mothers and with females who had never had a litter. Her research showed that the mother rats learned more efficiently and retained their knowledge longer. These multitasking mothers had to prioritize tasks, tune out distractions, solve problems, make decisions, and change strategies when required. In one study in which the rats had to use their memories as well as their social awareness in a competition to find food, the multi-moms bested the competition 60 percent of the time, compared to 33 percent of the time for first-time moms and just 7 percent for the never-moms. The multi-moms triumphed too in studies of physical agility, balance, coordination, and strength.

Lambert and Franssen caution that it is difficult to say whether the brain boost seen in mother rats is mostly a product of the nurturing experience, or the biochemicals stimulated by the experience, or both. Whatever the exact causes, this research suggests that motherhood may boost the cognitive capacity of women in important and surprising ways, and with implications for their intellectual performance both in and outside the home.

Until recently, we might not have had reason to think that men experience much in the way of biological changes when they become fathers.

But researchers are now finding that in mammalian species in which both fathers and mothers care for their young, fathers too encounter physiological changes. Fathers also are changed quite literally from the inside out.

The male hormone that people are most familiar with is testosterone. A growing body of work suggests that men typically experience a drop in testosterone after becoming fathers, especially if they are living with the mother of their offspring. But the chapter by Charles T. Snowdon, a psychologist and zoologist, indicates that mammalian fathers who cooperatively parent with the mother of their children experience far more than just a drop in testosterone.

In his chapter “Family Life and Infant Care,” Snowdon notes that for mammalian fathers at least two processes seem to be at work during and after the birth of their offspring. Some biological changes seen in fathers seem to come from exposure to the mother of their offspring. But others seem to come from the active experience of caring for their offspring. Specifically, it now appears that first-time fathers begin experiencing hormonal changes *before* the birth of their offspring. Researchers speculate that these changes occur perhaps in reaction to scents emitted from the expecting partners and from affectionate interaction with the partner herself. For example, marmoset fathers showed increased prolactin, cortisol, estrogen, and testosterone during the course of their mate’s pregnancy. Marmoset fathers even gained weight during the pregnancy, apparently in preparation for the energy demands that helping to care for the new infant would require.

But the bulk of the biological changes seen in fathers appear to come after the birth, from their experience of actively caring for their young. In his studies of tamarin and marmoset males, Snowdon found that experienced fathers, like mothers, demonstrate enhanced boldness, food-finding abilities, and problem-solving. When presented with a needy pup, males with caregiving experience showed the greatest activation of the problem-solving and memory centers of the brain. He also found that marmoset males who were fathers were less likely to show interest in unfamiliar, ovulating female marmosets than males who were not fathers.

When Snowdon and his colleagues went deeper, they discovered that the prefrontal cortex of experienced marmoset fathers shows both changes in cell structure and an increase in the neuroreceptors for vasopressin. This hormone, along with oxytocin and prolactin, is associated with affiliation. Thus, at the biological level, involved fatherhood seems also to improve male mammals’ cognitive capacity, and to focus mammalian dads on their responsibilities to their young, even making them less distracted by available

females ambling by. It will be interesting to see if future research can replicate these results among human beings.

We are learning more and more about the biology of parenthood and its behavioral expression in nonhuman mammals. But what about humans?

For insights, we can turn to the fields of evolutionary psychology and cross-cultural anthropology. One of the primary tenets of evolutionary theory is that the species that survive are the ones that are able to adapt to their environment. Evolutionary success is not based on whether you survive—rather, success is measured by whether you are able to produce offspring who survive, reproduce, and carry your genes into future generations. Survival of one's offspring is in the interest of both the mother and the father, but their interests are not identical, as psychologists David F. Bjorklund and Ashley C. Jordan note in their chapter “Human Parenting from an Evolutionary Perspective.”

Drawing on the parental investment theory of biologist Robert Trivers, they suggest that over time males and females develop different psychologies related to their distinctive investments in mating and parenting, with men oriented more toward succeeding in mating and women oriented more toward succeeding in parenting. Because fathers are oriented more toward mating, women are more likely to demand “love and commitment, dependability, and emotional stability” before engaging in sexual relations with a man; by doing so they build on men's interest in mating to ensure “that they and their offspring will continue receiving resources necessary for survival.”

Bjorklund and Jordan's chapter also suggests that men and women's distinctive biological endowments and psychological orientations, which evolved over time in connection with their distinctive reproductive strategies, also translate into different strengths when it comes to parenting. Fathers, for instance, can translate their orientation toward “aggression, power, and dominance” into the protection of their daughters and—as a consequence—girls who grow up with their fathers are more likely to delay sexual activity and childbearing. Mothers, in turn, can translate their superior ability “to regulate [their] emotions” to establish a strong attachment with their children; in turn, this attachment provides their children with a secure emotional base for navigating the emotional and social challenges of life.

Bjorklund and Jordan are also careful to point out that particular socio-cultural conditions are more likely to favor higher levels of paternal *and* maternal investment. For instance, men are more likely to invest in one mate and in one set of children when they have a high degree of paternity certainty, when a culture demands monogamy of them, and when their

paternal investment increases the likelihood of their offspring's survival. Judging by their work, some aspects of contemporary social life favor high parental investments, while others do not.

Psychologist Marc H. Bornstein also stresses the importance of thinking carefully about how biology and the social environment both coproduce the experience of parenthood for men and women, as well as the development of gender identities among boys and girls; but he stresses the importance of social environment more than do Bjorklund and Jordan. Thus, even though behavioral gender differences result “from genetically, anatomically, or hormonally influenced predispositions” these differences are also shaped by the social environment in which the child develops.

In other words, socialization, not just biology, also matters in the development of gendered identities for boys and girls, mothers and fathers. Studies show, for instance, that adults are more likely to treat the same infant differently, depending on whether they think they are interacting with a boy or a girl. “Boys are described as *big* and *strong* and are *bounced* and *handled* more physically than girls who are described as *pretty* and *sweet* and are handled more *gently*.” This kind of treatment, in turn, reinforces the development of distinctively gendered identities among males and females over the life course.

Nevertheless, even though different societies treat gender in quite varied ways, what is a virtual human universal is that women tend to invest more in parenting—especially of infants and toddlers—than men. In Bornstein's words, “in almost all species and regions of the world, across a wide diversity of subsistence activities and social ideologies, observational studies indicate more maternal than paternal investment.” At the same time, as Western forms of schooling and popular culture become more influential in societies around the world, gender differences in parenting are in many societies becoming less salient. Thus, one of the questions Bornstein's chapter leaves the reader with is this: How do global shifts toward more egalitarian gender roles interact with “genetically, anatomically, or hormonally influenced predispositions” that tend to push males and females in somewhat different directions as parents?

In his chapter “Gender Differences and Similarities in Parental Behavior,” psychologist Ross D. Parke takes up a related question: How do mothers and fathers parent in similar and different fashions in today's world? Focusing largely on studies from the United States, Parke concludes that there are many similarities in the ways in which mothers and fathers approach parenting—and for a range of social, cultural, *and* biological

reasons. He points out that both mothers and fathers can provide children with the attention, affection, discipline, and socialization they require to thrive. And in many contemporary families, both mothers and fathers supply their children with the ingredients they need to thrive.

Take the care of infants—an arena of parenting that has traditionally been dominated by mothers. Parke and his colleagues have conducted studies that found that “mothers and fathers showed patterns of striking similarity” when it came to interacting with their newborns; “they touched, looked [at], vocalized, rocked and kissed their newborns equally” in this research. Parke also found that fathers can be as responsive to infants’ behaviors and verbal cues as mothers. After assessing his own research and the larger body of literature on this topic, Parke concludes that “both men and women seem to be equally competent caregivers and exhibit high degrees of similarity as caregivers.”<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, Parke also acknowledges that, even in relatively egalitarian societies such as the United States, parenting remains gendered in important respects. Mothers are markedly more engaged, more available, and more responsible for their children than are fathers in countries such as Australia, France, Japan, and the United States. The style of parenthood is also gendered. With infants and toddlers, for instance, fathers’ “hallmark style of interaction is physical play that is characterized by arousal, excitement, and unpredictability” whereas mothers are more likely to attend to infants and toddlers’ needs for feeding, diapering, and emotional security.

And while Parke stresses the social and cultural factors that are implicated in these gender differences, he also thinks that biology helps to explain these differences. Here, he believes that research on primates is instructive: “Biological factors cannot be ignored in light of the fact that male monkeys show the same rough-and-tumble physical style of play as American human fathers and infant male monkeys tend to respond more positively to bids for rough-and-tumble play than females.” In general, then, Parke paints a complex portrait of contemporary parenthood that suggests many areas of overlap between fathers and mothers, some areas of difference, and a range of biosocial reasons that help to account for the similarities and differences we now find among today’s mothers and fathers.

As organic systems of care, we know that families are not static organizations. They evolve and change over time in the ways in which they care for their members. Ayelet Talmi, in her chapter “Gender and Parenting Across the Family Life Cycle,” describes the ways in which mothers and fathers respond to changing developmental needs of children and other

household members, demographic forces, historical trends, and economic circumstances.

Incorporating a brief look at economic and demographic perspectives, Talmi proceeds to a closer examination of the family life course as it moves from couple formation, the transition to parenthood, the care of young and school-aged children, through meeting the needs of adolescents, the launching of young adults, to the later stages of retirement, caring for elders, and establishing reciprocal relationships of care and support with adult children. She notes that at each stage, factors internal to the family, such as the birth of a new child, or the developmental needs of a particular age, work in tandem with external factors such as employment options, or historical events to “drive renegotiation of roles and responsibilities and alter expectations regarding partner contributions.”

At each stage, mothers and fathers consider child-rearing needs, partner suitability to provide certain types of care, partner preferences, and economic realities as they decide how to divide domestic and paid labor. Gender similarities and differences appear more or less prominent at different family life stages. In addition to married heterosexual parents, Talmi considers how these issues are managed by single parents, same-sex parents, and parents who remarry. Talmi argues that the dynamic needs of the family, its internal constellation, and its external context shape the way in which parents orchestrate the care of its members throughout the family life course.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN, COUPLES, AND FAMILIES

The second half of this volume takes up the significance of gender and parenthood for children, couples, and families. We consider questions such as the following: What aspects of parental care are essential to the welfare of children? Do gender differences matter to the successful development of children? How do women wish to combine work and family life in today’s society? How does parenthood affect relationship quality among contemporary couples? And, what lessons can single parents learn from the literature on gender and parenthood? Once again, our contributors address these questions with an eye on both nature and nurture, and with an appreciation for the ways in which mothers and fathers experience parenthood in both similar and different ways.

In their chapter “Essential Elements of the Caretaking Crucible,” psychiatrists Kathleen Kovner Kline and Brian Stafford reflect on the crucial

role the biological and social environments that encapsulate babies play in fostering optimal early childhood development. Starting with the development of the fetus in utero, Kline and Stafford note that the “structural development of the brain is completed largely before birth” and point out that fetal mental development is closely tied to biological factors (such as maternal nutrition) and social factors (social support) that mothers experience during pregnancy. They then go on to outline the ways in which a young child’s optimal neurological and emotional development depends on the child successfully attaching to at least one caregiver and being raised in a social environment minimizing such risks as single parenthood, low maternal education, and stressful life events. Throughout their chapter, they are careful to specify the ways in which biological and social factors interact, for better and worse, to influence the development of children both in utero and in the outside world.

Overall, then, Kline and Stafford argue that the “caretaking crucible” that surrounds a baby before and after birth can greatly affect the child’s intellectual, emotional, and behavioral development, and for both biological and social reasons. They also acknowledge that their chapter focuses more on mothers both because “mothers have a biologically more intimate relationship with their offspring” and also because research on early attachment has focused more on mothers. Nevertheless, they think that fathers play an important role in the lives of young children, insofar as they make a genetic contribution to their children, they extend physical and emotional support to children and their mothers, and engage the “extended familial, social, institutional, and cultural systems that promote optimal child development.” Thus, one take-away message from Kline and Stafford is that even though mothers and fathers make distinct contributions to young children, they both play important roles in establishing the proper “caretaking crucible” for the bearing and rearing of young children.

Psychologist Rob Palkovitz extends the focus of this section beyond early childhood in his chapter “Gendered Parenting’s Implications for Children’s Well-Being.” His chapter offers conclusions that parallel many of those found in Parke’s chapter, in large part because both scholars believe that mothers and fathers both bring many similar talents to the parenting enterprise, even as they typically retain some distinctive gendered orientations to that same enterprise. Specifically, Palkovitz argues that the most fundamental factors associated with good parenting—such as “positive affective climate, behavioral style, and relational synchrony”—are often found in both mothers and fathers; moreover, in his view these factors are more important than the

distinctive factors associated with gendered parenting in fostering optimal child development outcomes.

Nevertheless, Palkovitz also concludes that children benefit from the distinctively maternal and paternal styles that mothers and fathers typically offer to their children. For instance, the literature suggests that fathers “play a particularly important role in stimulating children’s openness to the world in exciting, surprising, destabilizing, and encouraging them to take risks and to stand up for themselves.” He also notes that fathers play a key role in protecting the sexual and reproductive welfare of their daughters, insofar as “paternal absence has been cited by multiple scholars as the single greatest risk factor in teen pregnancy for girls.”

Most provocatively, Palkovitz reports that there is some evidence that parents who exhibit traditional (father exhibits primarily masculine traits, mother exhibits primarily feminine traits) or androgynous (both parents exhibit masculine and feminine traits) parenting styles have children who are better adjusted than parents who exhibit nontraditional traits (where parents primarily exhibit the personality traits of the opposite sex). He concludes that parents should take into account these findings, while also understanding that their own needs for fulfillment and family justice are important. Thus, from Palkovitz’s perspective, while parents should be aware of the ways in which children benefit from being exposed to traditionally sex-typed parenting styles, they also need to be attentive to the importance of creating a family context that is attractive and appealing to the parents as well.

In his chapter “Do Fathers Uniquely Matter for Adolescent Well-Being?” sociologist David J. Eggebeen also takes up the relative contributions of mothers and fathers to the welfare of adolescents and young adults. He analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a nationally-representative, longitudinal survey of more than 15,000 young persons in the United States, to determine the ways in which fathers offer contributions to their children that are additive, redundant, or unique in comparison to the contributions of mothers. He looked at a range of parental predictors—from parents’ education to parent-child closeness—and their links to depression and delinquency among teenagers in the second wave of Add Health, as well as at depression, antisocial activity, and civic engagement among young adults in the third wave of Add Health. An estimated sixty potential relationships between these parental measures and these adolescent/young adult outcomes were explored in his chapter.

Eggebeen found that 42 percent of the relationships between parental inputs and children’s outcomes were significant and additive. That is, in

these cases *both* mothers and fathers appeared to make similar contributions in reducing the odds that their adolescents and young adults experienced depression and antisocial behavior, or in increasing the odds that their children were civically engaged later in life. In another 12 percent of the cases, the parental contributions were redundant. That is, children appeared to benefit from the involvement, support, or education of at least one of their parents but the contributions of the second parent did not improve the child's outcomes as a teenager or young adult. Thus, in 54 percent of the associations between parental inputs and child outcomes, the contribution of one or both parents mattered for the welfare of the children in a way that does not seem to have been distinctively gendered. Accordingly, his study does provide some support for the notion that both mothers and fathers make important contributions to their children in ways that can often be similar.

But Eggebeen also found that 22 percent of the relationships between parental inputs and adolescents' outcomes were unique and statistically significant. (He found that 24 percent of the relationships between inputs and outcomes were not statistically significant.) This means that for slightly more than one-fifth of the outcomes, young persons benefited from the input of their father or mother, but not both. In particular, "fathers appear to especially make unique contributions to the well-being of their children through their human capital while mothers make unique contributions through their availability and closeness to their children." He concludes by suggesting that his research demonstrates that young persons living in intact families can benefit from the parental investments of both their mother and their father but "significant questions remain." In his view, what is not clear is if these patterns of gendered patterns of parental influence extend to cohabiting families, same-sex families, and other nontraditional families. More research is required to determine if fathers and mothers make contributions that are also additive, redundant, or unique in these nontraditional families that are similar or different from the types of parental contributions that are made in the intact, married families Eggebeen examined in his chapter.

Sociologists W. Bradford Wilcox and Jeffrey Dew explore the impact of gender on the division of parenting labor, family-work strategies, and marital quality among married couples with children in the contemporary United States. In their chapter "No One Best Way: Work-Family Strategies, the Gendered Division of Parenting, and the Contemporary Marriages of Mothers and Fathers," they argue that a broadly neotraditional set of arrangements now characterizes the lives of most married mothers and fathers in

the United States. They are “neo” in the sense that fathers are doing much more childcare now than they did forty years ago; most mothers work, and most married parents endorse egalitarian gender role attitudes. But they are also “traditional” in the sense that mothers still do markedly more childcare than fathers, most mothers do not work full-time, and most married mothers indicate that they would prefer to work part-time or stay at home.

Take, for instance, the time that parents devote to their children. Mothers continue to take the lead when it comes to the amount of time parents invest in their children. In spite of dramatic increases in maternal labor force participation since the 1960s, mothers are investing more hours in parenting than did mothers a generation or two ago, and they continue to outpace fathers. Wilcox and Dew point out that the total time that mothers in married-couple families spent in the presence of their children rose 17 percent from 330 minutes in 1975 to 387 minutes in 2003. The total time that fathers spent in the presence of their children rose 240 percent from 73 minutes in 1976 to 248 minutes in 2003. The time that mothers devoted to one-on-one interaction with their children, or primary time, increased 17 percent from 81 minutes in 1975 to 95 minutes in 2003. Likewise, fathers’ primary time tripled from 14 minutes in 1976 to 42 minutes in 2003. These trends illustrate the increasingly intense character of parenting in contemporary America, and the fact that parental investments of time in children continue to be gendered.

When it comes to work-family arrangements, Wilcox and Dew find that the vast majority of married couples with children have fathers who work full-time—91 percent in fact. By contrast, only 44 percent of married mothers worked full-time. Even more telling, only 18 percent of married mothers wished to work full-time. A plurality (46 percent) wished to work part-time, and 36 percent wished to be at home full-time. Finally, in examining the link between these patterns and the marital quality of contemporary women, they find that married mothers are happiest in their marriages when their work-family preferences are realized in practice.

Wilcox and Dew conclude by noting that no one ideal or pattern of behavior captures the organization of contemporary parents’ work and family lives; nevertheless, “most parents—including most mothers—do not wish to pursue an egalitarian work-family strategy where both parents work full-time.” In their view, this neotraditional “reality is often ignored by elite academics, journalists, and policymakers,” something they hope to remedy in their chapter on gender, work, family, and marriage among contemporary U.S. couples.

Psychiatrist Scott Haltzman tackles similar themes in his chapter “The Effect of Gender-Based Parental Influences on Raising Children: The Impact on Couples’ Relationships.” He points out that the dramatic investments that fathers and mothers make in their children as they respond to what some scholars call the “parental emergency”—that is, a child’s need for nurture, food, protection, socialization, and discipline—have important implications for their own marriage. The first is that women shift much of their relational attention away from their husband and their work, and toward their child(ren), whereas men tend to maintain their commitment to their work, in part because they see providership as a way of supporting their family. The second is that both parents typically take somewhat different approaches to parenthood, and often along gendered lines.

The divergent ways in which husbands and wives handle the transition to parenthood, and the parenting enterprise itself, can pose a real challenge to the quality of their married life. “Because a woman is less likely to identify herself with her job, and more likely to see her prime identity as wife or mother, she may feel a husband’s commitment to his workplace as abandonment,” notes Haltzman. Nevertheless, he maintains that couples need to work through these challenges, in large part because “research indicates the profound benefit of a child being raised with both parents.”

How can this be done? First, he points out that the research indicates that couples who realize that the challenges they face adjusting to parenthood are common ones do better. Second, couples do better when they receive support from friends and family, for instance, with babysitting help that allows them to maintain time for couple-centered activities. Finally, Haltzman believes that efforts to educate couples about gender differences in parenting will be helpful in providing husbands and wives with a new appreciation of the unique contributions that they both make to the welfare of their children. Or, in Haltzman’s words, “efforts should be made to educate society at large, and parents in particular, that gender differences in parents are real, and, rather than be extinguished or ignored, they should be embraced.”

Of course, more and more children are growing up in homes without both of their parents; for instance, one recent study found that 25 percent of U.S. children in 2009 were living in a single-parent home.<sup>8</sup> In their chapter “Single Mothers Raising Children Without Fathers: Implications for Rearing Children with Male-Positive Attitudes,” family scholars William Doherty and Shonda Craft point out that single-parent homes tend to be headed by mothers, that nonresidential fathers often lose regular contact with their children, and that, as a consequence, children often lose out

on the benefits of being exposed to a positive, consistent male role model. Moreover, this deficit can lead children to develop negative attitudes about fathers and men, especially if mothers express critical comments about the children's own fathers and men more generally.

In light of these realities, Doherty and Craft counsel single mothers to take three steps to help them provide their children with male positive attitudes. First, they encourage single mothers whenever possible to speak positively to their children about their fathers. Second, they advise single mothers to do what they can to encourage their children's fathers to maintain a consistent, authoritative presence in their children's lives. Finally, they urge single mothers to identify and involve positive male role models for their children, especially when nonresidential fathers are not playing a constructive role in the lives of their children.

How is this to be done? Doherty and Craft conclude by suggesting that single mothers "seek out positive relationships with men at a faith community, at work, or in other venues. It is important to show children long-term, positive relationships with men that are not sexual and that do not end in breakups. And it is important to have boys involved with men they can emulate, particularly if their father is not in their lives." They also acknowledge that any effort to promote male positive attitudes in communities marked by high levels of fatherlessness and male irresponsibility must also include an acknowledgment of men's failures. Still, because they wish to break the patterns of male irresponsibility and gender distrust that are endemic in some communities, Doherty and Craft contend that it is essential that community leaders, policymakers, and practitioners initiate a dialogue with single mothers in these communities about how to "raise children who value and trust men."

Clearly, this introduction suggests that readers will encounter areas of agreement along with contrasting, sometimes conflicting viewpoints among the book's authors. These occasionally jarring differences in assumptions, claims, and tone reflect the varied patterns of analysis and viewpoints that emerge not only from different academic disciplines, but also from the personal perspectives of the authors themselves. Readers will also notice that while we have attempted to provide some exploration of the diversity of patterns of family life through history and across cultures, this discussion is by no means comprehensive. The reader must be ever cognizant of the varied ways mothers and fathers have balanced their need for economic and physical survival with their efforts to create and nurture the next generation in a particular cultural milieu. The history of gender and parenthood is a work in

process, and readers should put the references, examples, and statistics cited in this book's chapters into their historical and cultural contexts, and carefully consider their relevance to the current era, particularly acknowledging the family workforce changes that have emerged in the United States in the wake of "Great Recession."

Overall, then, this book brings together a large body of natural and social scientific evidence that shows the manifold ways in which parenthood is a transformative event—biologically, socially, and psychologically—for both women *and* men. Moreover, the chapters found herein also indicate that mothers *and* fathers both play important roles in the biological, social, and emotional welfare of their children. In some respects, their roles are similar and at times even redundant, especially in relatively egalitarian societies such as the United States. But in other respects, the roles they play are unique, and in ways that suggest biology has a hand in the unique contributions that mothers and fathers play in the lives of their children. Moving forward, and given the dramatic shifts in family life and childbearing around the globe, it will be interesting to see how children and adults are affected, if at all, by the following social facts: more children are growing up apart from one of their biological parents and more adults are moving through the adult life course without having fathered or mothered a child.

## NOTES

1. Hakim 2000; Bradbury and Katz 2005; Bianchi et al. 2007.
2. Matthews and Hamilton 2009.
3. Lino and Carlson 2009. These figures are adjusted in 2008 dollars.
4. Wilcox 2010.
5. Whitehead and Popenoe 2008.
6. Cowan et al. 1985; Dew and Wilcox 2011.
7. Parke 1996:10.
8. Wilcox 2010.

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