

LIFE WITHOUT FATHER



COMPELLING
NEW EVIDENCE THAT
FATHERHOOD
AND
MARRIAGE
ARE INDISPENSABLE
FOR THE GOOD OF
CHILDREN AND SOCIETY



DAVID POPENOE

LIFE WITHOUT FATHER

*Compelling new evidence that fatherhood and marriage are
indispensable for the good of children and society*

DAVID POPENOE

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, Massachusetts

London, England

Copyright © 1996 by David Popenoe
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America

First Harvard University Press paperback edition published in 1999 by arrangement with
The Free Press, a Division of Simon & Schuster Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Popenoe, David, 1932–

Life without father : compelling new evidence that fatherhood and marriage are
indispensable for the good of children and society / David Popenoe.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 0-674-53260-0 (pbk.)

1. Fatherless family—United States. 2. Fatherhood—United States. 3. Fathers—
United States. 4. Paternal deprivation—United States. 5. Children of single parents—
United States. 6. United States—Social conditions. I. Title.

HQ756.P65 1996

306.874'2—dc20

95-46233

Designed by Carla Bolte

Preface

The ideas in this book are an outgrowth of many years of thinking about family problems in a number of modern societies. The genesis of the book probably lies in Sweden, where I lived with my family for several years in the early 1970s and taught at the University of Stockholm. We loved our time in Sweden, and we highly value the progressive and enlightened character of Swedish society. But over the years it gradually became clear to me that, despite the benevolence of the welfare state which has largely removed from families economic pressures and uncertainties that loom so large in our country, childrearing couples in Sweden were breaking up at a remarkable rate, and children in great numbers were being separated from their biological fathers.

In America, the same trend exists in an even more flagrant form. The United States and Sweden, of course, stand at opposite political poles, one being the most laissez-faire of the industrialized societies and the other the most welfare-state oriented. In America, therefore, with the partial exception of the tiny percentage of families who actually are “on welfare,” it can hardly be claimed that the welfare state is the main cause of the family problem. A more important cause here is an untrammelled market—the opposite of the welfare state. Yet a trend so powerful as to be found prominently in both of these nations must be generated largely by a culture that transcends all modern societies, and this thought was the basis of my first family book, *Disturbing the Nest: Family Change and Decline in Modern Societies* (1988). The book examined the family-related cultural trends—especially in Sweden but in comparison with Switzerland, New Zealand, and the United States—that are part of what we have come to label “modernization.” It concluded that in each of these modernized nations the family has markedly declined as an institution.

Since then, in America, the “family values” debate has taken over the headlines. The present book is a contribution to that debate from the perspective of a social scientist. Some of the ideas in this book were

first formulated at meetings of the Council on Families in America, an interdisciplinary group of family experts and scholars from across the political spectrum, of which I serve as cochairman. I owe a large debt of gratitude to the members and associates of the council, especially Jean Bethke Elshtain, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, Don S. Browning, Leon R. Kass, Mary Ann Glendon, Sylvia Ann Hewlett, William A. Galston, David Blankenhorn, Allan C. Carlson, Norval D. Glenn, Judith Wallerstein, Judith Martin, Theodora Ooms, Steven Bayme, Gloria G. Rodriguez, and Vesna Neskow. Our deliberations over several years have been exceptionally stimulating. Conversations about fatherhood with Wade Horn and Don Eberle of the National Fatherhood Initiative, and the work of Amitai Etzioni, have also been particularly influential. The students in my family courses at Rutgers University have, over the years, been another major source of intellectual input.

I extend special thanks to Barbara D. Whitehead and Allan C. Carlson for reviewing portions of chapters 3 and 4; to Lionel Tiger and Helen Fisher for reviewing portions of chapter 6; and to Susan Repko for providing research assistance throughout. At the publisher's, Martin Kessler provided enormously helpful editorial assistance throughout the book writing process, and Abigail Strubel guided this book through production with a sure hand and continuous good cheer.

Undoubtedly, my greatest debt is owed to the members of my own family of marriage. It is from them that I learned firsthand how to be a father. My beloved wife of thirty-six years, Kate, has provided me with nothing less than a higher education in all matters of living. She also, with a wife's devotion for which I shall eternally be grateful, read and helped me to improve every page of this book. My two daughters, Rebecca and Julia, have made fathering the single most meaningful and worthwhile activity of my life. They have also enriched this book appreciably by reading and commenting on portions of it and by providing information from their areas of professional specialization as adults: anthropology and pediatrics, respectively.

This book is dedicated to the memory of my father, Paul Popenoe (1888–1979). He lived a long and immensely useful life, which included the raising of four sons. As but one small indicator of his many fatherly successes, he still exists as a brightly shining beacon in my own life.

Contents

Preface vii

Introduction 1

PART ONE: FATHERLESSNESS

1. The Remarkable Decline of Fatherhood and Marriage 19

2. The Human Carnage of Fatherlessness 52

PART TWO: FATHERS IN HISTORY

3. Victorian Fathers and the Rise of the Modern Nuclear Family 81

4. The Shrinking Father and the Fall of the Nuclear Family 109

PART THREE: WHY FATHERS MATTER

5. What Do Fathers Do? 139

6. The Essential Father 164

PART FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

7. Reclaiming Fatherhood and Marriage 191

Notes 229

Index 265

Introduction

“Fathers should be neither seen nor heard,” Oscar Wilde once wrote. “That is the only proper basis for family life.” With each passing year, American society has increasingly become an immense social testing ground for this proposition. Unfortunately for Wilde’s reputation as a social analyst, to say nothing about the health of our society, the results have proved highly unsupportive. American fathers are today more removed from family life than ever before in our history. And according to a growing body of evidence, this massive erosion of fatherhood contributes mightily to many of the major social problems of our time.

This book provides an analysis of the American experiment of fatherlessness. Drawing from the social sciences, history, and evolutionary psychology, it examines the nature and meaning of fatherhood and reviews the trend, the evidence, and the social consequences of the removal of fathers from families and the lives of their children. Regrettably, as I shall point out, America is at the vanguard of social trends and impulses that are affecting fatherhood and children in all modern societies.

The print pages and airwaves have been filled with discussions of fatherhood in recent decades. Yet most discussions have focused on just one issue—how to get fathers to share their traditional breadwinner role and take up a new (for them) child-care-provider role. The call from younger women has been loud and clear: We need a new conception of fatherhood, a “new father,” one who will help equally in the home just as women now strive to help equally in the workplace; one who will share the “second shift” with his mate.

The father’s role—what society expects of fathers—has indeed changed enormously in recent years. Fathers are expected to be more engaged with their children and involved with housework—if not nearly as much as most women would like, certainly far more than the past generation of fathers would have thought possible.

This role change has been highly positive in most respects. But with all the concentration on “role equality” in the home, the larger and more ominous trend of modern fatherhood has been mostly overlooked. We have been through many social revolutions in the past three decades—sex, women’s liberation, divorce—but none more significant for society than the startling emergence of the absent father, a kind of pathological counterpart to the new father.

While the new father has been emerging gradually for most of this century, it is only in the past thirty years that we have witnessed the enormous increase in absent fathers. In times past, many children were left fatherless through his premature death. Today, the fathers are still alive and out there somewhere; the problem is that they seldom see much, if anything, of their children.

The main reason for contemporary father absence is the dramatic decline of marriage. Divorce rates have skyrocketed in the past thirty years, and even more recently we have seen a veritable explosion in the rate of unwed motherhood. What this means, in human terms, is that about half of today’s children will spend at least a portion of their growing-up years living apart from their fathers.

As a society, we can respond to this new fatherlessness in several ways. We can, as more and more of us seem to be doing, simply declare fathers to be unnecessary, superfluous. This is the response of “single parents by choice.” It is the response of those who say that if daddies and mommies are expected to do precisely the same things in the home, why do we need both? It is the response of those who declare that unwed motherhood is a woman’s right, or that single-parent families are every bit as good as two-parent families, or that divorce is generally beneficial for children.

In my view, these responses represent a human tragedy—for children, for women, for men, and for our society as a whole. I am writing this book to tell you why. My main emphasis will be on children. I hope to convince you, especially those of you who rely on empirical evidence before you make up your mind, that the evidence is strong: Fathering is different from mothering; involved fathers are indispensable for the good of children and society; and our growing national fatherlessness is a disaster in the making.

THE DECLINE OF FATHERHOOD

The decline of fatherhood is one of the most basic, unexpected, and extraordinary social trends of our time. The trend can be captured in a single telling statistic: in just three decades, from 1960 to 1990, the

percentage of children living apart from their biological fathers more than doubled, from 17 percent to 36 percent. If this rate continues, by the turn of the century nearly 50 percent of American children will be going to sleep each night without being able to say good night to their dads.

No one predicted this trend, few researchers or government agencies have monitored it, and it is not widely discussed, even today. But its importance to society is second to none. Father absence is a major force lying behind many of the attention-grabbing issues that dominate the news: crime and delinquency; premature sexuality and out-of-wedlock teen births; deteriorating educational achievement; depression, substance abuse, and alienation among teenagers; and the growing number of women and children in poverty. These issues all point to a profound deterioration in the well-being of children. Some experts have suggested, in fact, that the current generation of children and youth is the first in our nation's history to be less well-off—psychologically, socially, economically, and morally—than their parents were at the same age. Or as Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan has observed, “the United States . . . may be the first society in history in which children are distinctly worse off than adults.”¹

Along with the growing father absence, our cultural view of fatherhood is changing. Few people have doubts about the fundamental importance of mothers. But fathers? More and more the question is being raised, are fathers really necessary? Many would answer no, or maybe not. And to the degree that fathers are still thought necessary, fatherhood is said by many to be merely a social role, as if men had no inherent biological predisposition whatsoever to acknowledge and to invest in their own offspring. If merely a social role, then perhaps anyone is capable of playing it. The implication is one of arbitrary substitutability. Not just biological fathers, but any competent actor who has studied the part can easily step in: mothers, partners, stepfathers, uncles and aunts, grandparents. Perhaps the script can even be rewritten and the role changed—or dropped.

FATHERS: ESSENTIAL BUT PROBLEMATIC

Across time and cultures, fathers have always been considered by societies to be essential—and not just for their sperm. Indeed, until today, no known society ever thought of fathers as potentially unnecessary. Biological fathers are everywhere identified, if possible, and play some role in their children's upbringing. Marriage and the nuclear family—mother, father, and children—are the most universal social institutions

in existence. In no society has nonmarital childbirth been the cultural norm. To the contrary, a concern for the “legitimacy” of children is another cultural near universal: The mother of an illegitimate child virtually everywhere has been regarded as a social deviant, if not a social outcast, and her child has been stigmatized.

At the same time, being a father is universally problematic for men and for their societies in a way that being a mother is not. While mothers the world over bear and nurture their young with an intrinsic acknowledgment and, most commonly, acceptance of their role, taking on the role of father is often filled with conflict, tension, distance, and doubt. Across societies, fathers may or may not be closely engaged with their children, reside with the mother, or see their father role as highly important.

The source of this sex-role difference can be plainly stated. Men are not biologically as attuned to being committed fathers as women are to being committed mothers. Left culturally unregulated, men’s sexual behavior can be promiscuous, their paternity casual, their commitment to families weak. Yet in virtually all societies, especially modern societies, both child and social well-being depend on high levels of paternal investment: the time, energy, and resources that fathers are willing to impart to their children.

That men are not perfectly attuned to fatherhood in biological terms is not to say that fathering behavior is foreign to the nature of men. Far from it. Evolutionary scientists tell us that the development of the fathering capacity and high paternal investments in offspring—features not common among our primate relatives—have been a source of enormous evolutionary advantage for human beings. Because human young are more dependent on adults for a longer period of their lives than any other species and human mothers require a great deal of help if their children are to survive, a key to human evolution was the capturing of male effort to the goal of childrearing. It is almost certainly the case that the human family is the oldest social institution, at heart a biological arrangement for raising children that has always involved fathers as well as mothers.

In recognition of the fatherhood problem—that fatherhood is essential but also somewhat problematic—human cultures have realized that sanctions are necessary if paternal investments are to be maximized. The main cultural carrier of sanctions is the institution of marriage, a major purpose of which is to hold men to the reproductive pair bond. Simply defined, marriage is a relationship within which a community socially approves and encourages sexual intercourse and the birth of children. It is society’s way of signaling to would-be parents of children that their long-term relationship together is socially important.

As evidenced by the vows of fidelity and permanence that almost universally are part of the wedding ceremony, an important purpose of marriage is to hold the man to the union. Margaret Mead once said, with the fatherhood problem strongly in mind, that there is no society in the world where men will stay married for very long unless culturally required to do so.

FATHERHOOD AND MARRIAGE

Today, because the great social complexity of modern societies requires longer periods of socialization and dependency for children than ever before, the need for adult investments in children has reached new heights. In order to succeed economically in an increasingly technological society, children must be highly educated. In order to succeed socially and psychologically in an increasingly complex and heterogeneous culture, children must have strong and stable attachments to adults. Nonfamily institutions can help with education, but family and close-kin groups are essential for socioemotional success. Parents and other close relatives are still the persons most likely to have the motivational levels necessary to provide the time and attention that children need to feel loved and special.

Yet at the time when the childrearing task is ever more demanding and male assistance with the task is ever more important, cultural sanctions holding men to marriage and children have dramatically weakened. Marriage, once both sacred and economically essential for survival, is today based solely on the fragile tie of affection for one's mate. And whereas the institution of marriage once legally bound a couple with a high degree of permanence, marriages can now be broken unilaterally on a whim.

The United States has by far the highest divorce rate in the industrialized world. The chance that a first marriage occurring today will end in divorce stands at around 50 percent—by some estimates as high as 60 percent. The chance in the middle of the last century was around 5 percent. In the past three decades alone, the divorce rate has doubled or tripled, depending upon how one calculates it.

Marriages are not only breaking up in large numbers, but the institution itself is in decline. The marriage rate is dropping. In place of marriage we are witnessing the rapid rise of nonmarital cohabitation, which by its very nature implies a lower level of commitment. More problematic still is the increase in "single parenting by choice."

There has emerged in the last decade or two a tendency for women to go it alone. It would be nice, many of these women report, if the perfect man came into the picture. But he is not around, so I am going

to have a child anyway. This phenomenon was made culturally memorable by the *Murphy Brown* television episode in which Murphy decided to have a nonmarital child and that fact was celebrated nationwide. Like Murphy, but typically without her level of economic resources, more and more women report with each passing year that they, too, might have a child if they are unable to find the right man.

The lifestyle of the single parent, rather than being eschewed, is becoming socially accepted as part of a new wave of tolerance befitting the contemporary celebration of diversity. Even marriage and family-relations professionals have come to extol "alternative lifestyles." Textbooks that used to be entitled *Marriage and the Family* (read: married-father-included) are now entitled *Intimate Relationships* or the all-inclusive *Families*. The growth of unmarried mothers on welfare has raised some national ire, but many on the Left believe that there is a new national "right" for such mothers to have as many children as they want and immediately receive support for those children from taxpayers.

With this kind of cultural acceptance, it is little wonder that the percentage of out-of-wedlock births in America has increased 600 percent in just three decades, from 5 percent of all births in 1960 to 30 percent in 1991.² If the percentage keeps climbing at its current rate, 40 percent of all births (and 80 percent of minority births) will take place out of wedlock by the turn of the century.³

THE SHRINKING FATHER

Contemporary fatherhood faces an additional challenge. The father's role has shrunk drastically over the years. American fathers have been losing authority within the family and psychologically withdrawing from a direct role in childrearing almost since colonial times.

The Puritan father was a domestic patriarch; he was not only the family's chief provider and protector but also the moral authority and chief educator, at least of his older children. In the last century, however, the focus of the family turned to mothers. With the rise of a major new family form—what historians label "the modern nuclear family" but what most people today know as "the traditional family"—the father's main role became family breadwinner. Legally and socially fathers became the second parent, and their direct role in the home increasingly was marginalized. Finally, with the waning of the modern nuclear family in this century, even the breadwinner role has eroded.

Today men are being asked to return to domestic roles. Fathers are badly needed as comprehensive childrearsers on an equal basis with

mothers. Not only does this represent a radical shift from recent history, but increasingly men are asked to become major caretakers for infants and toddlers, a role they never before in history have had to embrace.

THE FATHERHOOD DEBATE

Could it be that the era of fatherhood is at an end, that the fatherhood problem can be resolved by simply getting rid of fathers and perhaps substituting someone or something else in their stead? Is there something new and different about modern societies that makes single parenthood a reasonable option and makes these societies increasingly immune from the age-old proscription against illegitimacy? Have we become so free and individualized and prosperous that the traditional social structures surrounding family life no longer have the importance that they have had in all of human history to date?

Positive answers to these questions have been forcefully argued. The argument contains these key elements:

- Women no longer need men for provision or protection, the traditional male family roles. For provision, most women now have independent access to the labor market; and if they don't, they have access to government-supported welfare programs. For protection, women have the police, and in any event it is usually their male partner from whom they must be protected.
- Both single mothers and their children have been unfairly stigmatized over the generations. This has been grossly unfair to mothers as well as to the children who did absolutely nothing to bring about their plight. Societies today are able, thankfully, to correct this age-old injustice.
- Male-female family life is inherently inequitable, a patriarchal institution wherein men have always dominated women. Men are selfish, irresponsible, psychologically untrustworthy, even intractable. If women are to achieve true equality, therefore, we must find some alternative to the nuclear family.
- Men frequently leave their wives and children in the lurch, especially in times of crisis, either through psychological withdrawal or outright desertion. It is safer for a woman never to begin counting on a man.
- It is not clear that fathers any longer provide something unique to their children. There is not much they do that mothers do not, or cannot, do just as well.

There is some truth, of course, to each of these points. Many women today are perfectly capable, in economic and other terms, of raising children by themselves. The traditional stigma against illegitimacy is

something that few people want to bring back. There does seem to be some kind of inherent inequality between men and women, if nothing more than that men are bigger and stronger and more aggressive. The selfish, irresponsible male is not uncommon. And since some fathers and mothers do carry out the same childrearing activities, the question of why we need both is a reasonable one to ask.

But the aim of this book is to try to convince you that this no-father argument is fundamentally wrong. If we continue down the path of fatherlessness, we are headed for social disaster.

FATHERS AND MOTHERS

It is the rare child who does not wish to grow up with both a father and a mother. We should ask the question, why do children have this desire? Despite their sometimes wanting candy for breakfast, children do have, after all, a certain wisdom about life. Is it simply that they don't want to be any different from their friends? Is it merely something they have been taught to say? I think not.

Every child comes into the world totally dependent upon adults, especially the parents to whom they were born. To a large extent children's life chances come from who cares for them and how they are cared for. Of course, children are surprisingly flexible and malleable; some can thrive in the most intolerable of circumstances. But this fact says nothing about the life chances for the multitude. I suspect that children instinctively realize that the world is made up almost equally of two sexes, that each sex possesses biological and psychological traits that balance and complement the other, and that each sex brings something unique and important to children's lives.

Whatever the basis for children's primal desire for a father and a mother, the weight of social science evidence strongly supports the rationality of their wish. In my many years as a functioning social scientist, I know of few other bodies of evidence whose weight leans so much in one direction as does the evidence about family structure: On the whole, two parents—a father and a mother—are better for the child than one parent.⁴

There are, to be sure, many complicating factors to the simple proposition that two parents are best. Family structure is only a gross approximation of what actually goes on within a family. We all know of a two-parent family that is the family from hell. A child can certainly be well-raised to adulthood by one loving parent who is wholly devoted to that child's well-being. But such problems and exceptions in no way deny the aggregate finding or generalization. After all, to take another

much-publicized area of research, plenty of three-pack-a-day smokers live to a ripe old age and die of natural causes.

What does the social science evidence about family structure and child well-being actually show? Researchers Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur recently examined six nationally representative data sets containing over twenty-five thousand children from a variety of racial and social-class backgrounds. Their conclusion:

Children who grow up with only one of their biological parents (nearly always the mother) are disadvantaged across a broad array of outcomes . . . they are twice as likely to drop out of high school, 2.5 times as likely to become teen mothers, and 1.4 times as likely to be idle—out of school and out of work—as children who grow up with both parents.⁵

Sure, you may say, that is because one-parent families are poorer. But here is the researchers' conclusion about the economic factor:

Loss of economic resources accounts for about 50 percent of the disadvantages associated with single parenthood. Too little parental supervision and involvement and greater residential mobility account for most of the rest.⁶

Many other researchers, whose work is reviewed in this book, have come up with similar conclusions. The evidence covers the full range of possible effects, from crime to school achievement. Social analysts William A. Galston and Elaine Ciulla Kamark report, for example, that

The relationship [between family structure and crime] is so strong that controlling for family configuration erases the relationship between race and crime and between low income and crime. This conclusion shows up again and again in the literature.⁷

Based on such evidence, a strong case can be made that paternal deprivation, in the form of the physical, economic, and emotional unavailability of fathers to their children, has become the most prevalent form of child maltreatment in America today.⁸

Is the missing ingredient in the single-parent family simply a second adult who can provide “parental supervision and involvement”? It is in part, but only in part. Consider this conclusion of McLanahan and Sandefur: “Children of stepfamilies don’t do better than children of mothers who never remarry.”⁹

The main missing ingredient in a growing number of families today, I shall argue, is the biological father. He can be replaced adequately here and there, and obviously not all biological fathers are good fathers, but in general males biologically unrelated to their children cannot be expected to have the same motivation and dedication to raising those

children as males raising their own biological offspring. The incidence of sexual abuse among stepfathers, for example, is far higher than among biological fathers.

It is not my intent to stigmatize step- and adoptive parents. Those alternative family forms where parents are doing their job well deserve our deepest respect; those experiencing difficulties should be provided both compassion and tangible assistance. My point is this: Being a father is much more than merely fulfilling a social role. Engaged biological fathers care profoundly and selflessly about their own children; such fatherly love is not something that can easily be transferred or reduced to the learning of a script. Why many biological fathers themselves are now becoming disengaged from their children is, of course, a puzzling phenomenon and a focus of this book.

THE UNIQUENESS OF FATHERS

What is unique about fathers when compared to mothers? Studies show that virtually all children clearly distinguish a mother role from a father role, even if some contemporary adults do not seem to be able to.¹⁰ Fathers and mothers differ, just as males and females differ. Part of the reason is cultural, to be sure, but only part. Inborn biology is also a major contributor.

You would never know it from reading today's typical social science textbook, but there is a large and growing body of biological evidence for an array of fundamental male-female differences. Indeed, this evidence has begun to dominate the science news. A recent cover story in *Time* magazine is typical. An article on "sizing up the sexes" began: "Scientists are discovering that gender differences have as much to do with the biology of the brain as with the way we are raised."¹¹ The time has come to view all human behavior as representing a combination of biological and sociocultural forces. It no longer makes sense to view these forces as, in the words of sociologist Alice Rossi, "separate domains contesting for election as primary causes."¹²

Across all cultures, the "natural and comfortable" way most males think, feel, and act is fundamentally different from the way most females think, feel, and act. Differences between men and women have been found universally with respect to four behavioral/psychological traits: aggression and general activity level; cognitive skills; sensory sensitivity; and sexual and reproductive behavior.¹³ Perhaps the greatest difference is in aggression and activity level. Almost from the moment of birth, boys tend to be more aggressive and in general to have a somewhat higher activity level than girls. Differences in cognitive skills

are less well understood and perhaps not as great. From early adolescence, females tend to have greater verbal ability than males, and males tend to have greater visual-spatial and mathematical ability than females. (Spatial ability refers to the ability to form a mental picture of the shape, position, geography, and proportion of physical objects.) Also, females tend to be more sensitive to all sensory stimuli. They typically receive a wider array of sensory information, are able to communicate it better, and place primacy on personal relationships within which such information is communicated.

While male proficiency rests with “things and theorems,” female proficiency rests with personal relationships. Almost from birth, girls are more interested than boys in people and faces, whereas boys “just seem as happy with an object dangled in front of them.”¹⁴ The likely origin of sex differences in psychological and behavioral traits, as we shall see, is the differing male and female reproductive and productive roles found in early human evolution.

The stereotyping of such sex differences is easy, of course; we must not overlook the fact that within each sex a substantial range of traits can be found. It is important to realize that males are found at the extreme ends of the continuum with respect to several of these traits. Males, for example, disproportionately make up math geniuses, but also math dysfunctionals. Also, some cultures exaggerate these sex traits; others diminish them. Consider the difference in male and female gender roles between, for example, Sweden and Morocco. In Sweden, male aggression is discouraged, while the activity level of Swedish females is encouraged; in Morocco, just the opposite is the case. Still, the underlying sex-differentiated traits are present in each nation, if in somewhat different proportions.

How do the inherent male-female differences express themselves in dissimilar fathering and mothering behaviors? In dealing with infants, there is an enormous and obvious difference that stems from the woman's having carried the child in utero and from her ability to breast-feed. But beyond that, as Alice Rossi has noted based on an accumulating body of evidence, “In caring for a nonverbal, fragile infant, women have a head start.” They are more able to read an infant's facial expressions, handle with tactile gentleness, and soothe with the use of voice.¹⁵ With toddlers, while women provide comfort and emotional acceptance, men typically are more active and arousing in their nurturing activities, fostering certain physical skills and emphasizing autonomy and independence.

Even with older children the father's mode of parenting is not interchangeable with the mother's. Men typically emphasize play more than