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Patricia Draper
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, pdraper1@unl.edu

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Chapter 6

Why Should Fathers Father?

Patricia Draper
The Pennsylvania State University

The previous chapter, by Kaplan, Lancaster, and Anderson, does an excellent job of joining life-history theory from biology and theories of human capital from family economics. The relevance of both of these to issues of fertility is made compelling.

The findings about the ways in which components of men's human capital is translated into human capital of offspring are intriguing both for what the findings show about secular trends in fertility, consequences for child accomplishment, and for what they show about the importance of the child's mother in linking the father to the child. It is this issue, the mother as link to child and the nature of the father's relationships with the mother that I make the center of my remarks.

There are several things to keep in mind when we try to grasp the evolutionary big picture and to make sense of men in human families as we now find them in postindustrial western society. We humans of today carry with us the effects of selection in past environments. These effects are evident in our physical and behavioral makeup. Although we cannot know in detail the past physical and social environments in which our ancestors evolved, we can make various informed guesses, based on an understanding of how morphological, behavioral, and life-history features act together in other species. The ethnographic and historical literature provide data of another type, allowing us to see men playing various domestic and paternal roles. In these different settings, however, the concrete form of social institutions can vary so widely that a unitary picture of men

in families does not emerge. There are certain regularities of human experience that are worth reviewing for the purpose of thinking about men in families in modern western society.

MORPHOLOGICAL AND LIFE-HISTORY TRACES OF MALE PARENTAL INVESTMENT

I first review a few of the topics concerned with life-history theory, for they are relevant to issues of human mating. Organisms must make decisions about the allocation of energy to self (in the form of maintenance and growth) versus commitment of energy to finding a mate and beginning reproduction (Stearns, 1992). Similar trade-offs are faced with respect to offspring—whether to have many offspring who necessarily are less intensively nurtured or to have fewer offspring, each of whom receives proportionately greater amounts of parental investment. Humans are like other large mammals in showing life-history characteristics that favor long life span, low fertility, slow maturation, long juvenile prereproductive period, and large amounts of parental care (Hill, 1993). In some other ways, humans are unlike other long-lived mammals. For example, humans attach the male to the mother–offspring set; they retain multiple young at different stages of dependence under parental care, and they maintain lifelong links between male and female parents and children.

In the evolutionary past in which our morphological and psychological attributes were selected, we almost certainly lived in multifamily groups of kin. Marriage, some form of sexual regulation between men and women, is presumably some tens of thousands of years old. These multifamily groups or bands lived by hunting and gathering at first, utilizing a sexual division of labor that increased efficiency of food collection and provided a system that was capable of relaxing pressure for productive work on older people, immatures, and women who were pregnant or caring for newborns (Lancaster & Lancaster, 1983; Lancaster & Lancaster, 1987). The provisioning of women and children is apparently an old human trait, one that has, no doubt, made possible the evolution of some of the hallmarks of our species, notably the neotonous state of new borns and their slow progress to economic and social independence.

THE VIROCENTRIC CONTEXT OF MALE PARENTAL INVESTMENT

The fathering behavior, however, took place in the context of an inclusive social group. Looking at ethnographically described populations, either of hunter-gatherers or low-energy food producers, we see that the importance of the father was due to the fact that he not only provided resources

directly to his mate and children, but that he constituted a link for his conjugal family to his kin. Women, in our evolutionary past, who had an attached mate, benefited from his social networks and a wider system of reciprocity, presumably because her husband's kin recognized (consciously or otherwise) the inclusive fitness advantages of favoring kin. Paternal kin are especially important in the ethnographically described traditional societies, the majority of which practice patrilocality or virolocality, a custom that dictates that when women marry they leave their natal kin and go to live at the residence of the husband.

It is interesting that human groups are more likely to elect postmarital residence rules that favor keeping together men who are linked as brother–brother, father–son, than other sets of kin, such as, sister–sister or brother–sister or mother–son. The rule favoring coresidence of *agnates* (men linked to kinship groups through men but not through women) is not universally followed but is preponderant enough in samplings of world societies to have invited scholarly attention. The reasons behind this strategy are reasoned to lie in the dominance of men in the political sphere, in the superiority of men in roles of defensive or offensive force, and in the vulnerability of children that makes it too costly to involve children and their mothers in dangerous occupations or pursuits (Harris, 1993). The preponderance of kinship systems that reckon group membership through links through men, rather than through women, is thought to derive from many of the same principles that lead to coresidence of male kin (Fox, 1967; Keesing, 1975).

The significance of virolocality and other androcentric practices for our present purposes is to remind us that husbands and fathers in past times played different roles vis-à-vis wives and children than they do in westernized society, wherein married men live in urban areas and in nuclear families and, like their wives, are not enmeshed in local support networks of kin. At many times in our past history the significance of men as fathers may have been principally through their political roles in kin and extra kin settings. Today, when we think of men in families, we think of the personal and emotional ties men have to their single wives and children. In past social systems, the nuclear family was not necessarily an important unit with the separate and exclusive functions it carries today. Therefore, the impact of a man's ties to his wife and children were attenuated by the fact that the nuclear family did not have the fundamental significance it carries today.

THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE, DEEMPHASIS OF THE SPOUSAL DYAD

Marriage meant for our ancestors, and still means for many people in the less economically developed areas of the world, an arrangement between the kin of the man and woman. The value of the marriage for cementing

alliance and exchange between kin groups was typically much more important than the personal preference of mutual attraction between bride and groom. In the context of kin-based social institutions, the care of children was spread out among a variety of people, on the basis of their biological connection to the mother and the father.

THE BIOPOLITICAL ASYMMETRY OF GENDER

For most of human history, women have been protected by arrangements we now regard as archaic and repressive. However, women have also been held captive, not only socially but biologically. A consequence of the development of mammalian life-history strategy is to make females the reproductive monopolists. They gestate the conceptus and nurse the offspring, whereas the male role in reproduction is comparatively reduced. This is as true of human females as it is for females of nonhuman mammalian species. The variance in reproductive potential is very low in women, owing to their slow sexual maturation, singleton births, and limited reproductive life span. Furthermore, long gestation, long lactation, and intense involvement in child care for at least 3 or 4 years means that under past environments of adaptation, a woman's reproductive labor far outweighed that of men. In small-scale hunting and gathering societies, an orphaned child is at risk, particularly one who still nurses, or, if weaned, still requires carrying and close supervision. If the size of living groups is small, as is common among hunter-gatherers, an adequate surrogate caretaker cannot necessarily be provided from among other women who are nursing and carrying children of their own. Women, as mothers, in these circumstances are indispensable to their children. Women who lose children to death or who abandon children cannot recoup their losses by starting over with another mate because of their low reproductive capacity and their limited reproductive time span. A woman's past reproductive time cannot be recaptured, whereas a man can recapture lost offspring, at least in fitness terms, by starting over with another woman, necessarily a young one. For these reasons, it can be argued that women's reproductive behaviors and the strategizing that accompanies them have evolved under constraints in which children and mates, as individuals, were more valuable to women than children and mates were to men.

THE CONTROL OF FEMALE SEXUALITY

Different societies make attempts to guarantee to the father, and to the father's kin, certainty of the paternity of children born to the father's assigned mate or mates. This is achieved by controlling women's sexuality by such means as restricting their movements, providing for their super-

vision by interested parties, and by training women in sexual exclusiveness to the mate. Men are also regulated in how they can express sexual interest in women who are not their mates, although the "double standard," token punishment of male philandering versus comparatively severe punishment of female infidelity, is a cultural universal.

The emotionally laden content of female sexuality and cuckoldry is, of course, familiar to all and is the staple of ribaldry and tragedy around the world. That the subject should be so psychologically charged is testimony to the fact that male parental investment has been coaxed along at the level of species-typical behavior by the fact that men who provide care for their biological offspring leave more descendants than men who do not. The complicating factor in the reluctant parade of our kind toward a kind of fatherliness comparable to motherliness is that, given the biology of our reproduction, men cannot be sure their children are their own, unless other men are kept away. Yet, men cannot live alone with their mates, as the monogamous gibbons do, so a series of compromises are reached, none satisfactory, and all of them bearing hard on the control of women by men and by other women who are affected by any doubt men have of the paternity of their children.

In the great majority of ethnographically described societies, women are made tractable by being denied independent access to productive resources. Instead, women gain access to critical resources of land for gardening, water, domestic animals, and water or tools through men who possess ownership rights in these resources. Women have access to productive resources as daughters to fathers, sisters to brothers, wives to husbands, mothers to sons. The custom whereby property and use rights are assigned to men creates the perpetual jural minority of women, a widespread form of social inequity that persists to the present in many parts of the world.

There are societies in which the gender interests of women are not sacrificed in such a draconian manner to the gender interests of alliance groups of men. They are rather rare and share certain attributes. Some, but not all hunter-gatherer groups, have a fathering role for men that is not accompanied by the control of women by men. The !Kung San of Botswana, among whom I conducted research, were such an example (Draper, 1992). When the !Kung lived as hunter-gatherers, they occupied an arid environment of very scattered resources. This type of ecology did not support large settlements of people. The collecting work of women was as important and sometimes more important than the hunting work of men in producing a reliable source of calories (Lee, 1979). The total numbers of people available for mates was small, due to the small absolute size of the population and to the sizable distances between separate bands of !Kung. To raise a family required the close cooperation of a husband

and wife, together with regular coresidence and sharing with the kin of each. Under these particular circumstances, the reproductive interests of men and women were similar. About the best any man could do was to form a contractual relationship (of the sort suggested by Mintz, chap. 1, this volume) and hope that by joint work and the assistance of relatives, he and his wife could feed the small number of children born to the wife. Men played close, attentive, fathering roles and had companionate, egalitarian relations with their wives.

There are contrary examples of hunter-gatherers who do not exhibit gender egalitarianism (Hart & Pilling, 1960; Tonkinson, 1978). This is not a place for the listing of them, but it will suffice to say that sexually inegalitarian practices among hunter-gatherers are associated with environments that support larger congregations of people, in which the availability of foods is relatively rich and constant and also where the primary survivorship of the group is dependent on the skills and work of men. Arctic hunters are one example of these practices and the Tiwi of Northern Australia are another example of a southern latitude hunting and gathering society marked by extreme forms of patriarchal authority, gerontocracy, and polygyny.

THE MEANING OF POLYGYNY AND ITS EFFECTS ON MALE PARENTAL INVESTMENT

Humans show a moderate degree of sexual dimorphism with men on the average having greater height, weight, bone mass, and heavier musculature. Sexual dimorphism indicates past intrasexual competition (Brace, 1973). The ethnographic literature and documents from ancient literate times makes it clear that polygyny was an available option in the majority of human societies, albeit one available to a minority of men, usually older ones who controlled greater resources (White & Burton, 1988). The point about polygyny as it relates to this chapter is that multiple mating, combined with male parental investment, must necessarily mean a dilution of the time men can spend with wives and children. The literature of sub-Saharan Africa is an excellent source to consult for understanding the dynamics of polygyny in this century (Oppong, 1987).

Men, particularly successful men who control resources, can have multiple mates. In the past (and some present societies in which polygyny is approved) some men who added additional wives to their households did not necessarily disadvantage their children, because an extended and enlarged group of kindred were available to absorb their care. Polygyny necessarily reduced the amount of contact between fathers and children, but the access of children to adults was not necessarily restricted in harmful ways. Today, in industrial society, we have a legal requirement of monogamy

but, in reality, a form of de facto polygyny as a result of the dissolution of serial monogamous unions. Because of the legal requirement of monogamy, and because of our cultural value on monogamy and the ideal of companionate marriage, extramarital and subsequent-marital unions create disruptions of the pair bond and of the psychological and economic organization of households.

The temporally deep, evolutionary view and the temporally more shallow, but geographically diverse ethnographic view suggest that pair-bonding in various forms is a long-established pattern for humans in recent tens of thousands of years, if not longer. Changing our focus to the present case of western, post-industrial society requires some readjustments in our thinking if we are to continue to understand how a pattern of mating and parenting, evolved in a past context, can be expected to manifest itself in contemporary times.

The chapters in this volume demonstrate that the quality of fathering in modern, western society can be variable. There is a concern on the part of these authors to understand and to engineer away some of the bad variation when it takes the form of abandonment of family or exploitation and abuse of women and children. "Good" fathering, on the other hand, confers very impressive advantages to children who receive it. Lancaster, Kaplan, and Anderson show that fathers' achievements in human capital, when passed on to offspring, give the offspring measurable advantages that can be calculated concretely, in such ways as in children's lifetime earnings. Also important is the finding that increased time spent by fathers with children in their dependent years promotes the kinds of behaviors and skills that pay off in our society: Good social skills, peer relations, good grades, higher educational achievement, and more successful courtships and marriages.

A question naturally suggests itself: If what we are calling "good fathering" is so crucial now and if good fathering was also important in our evolutionary past, why is fathering so variable? Can we not expect that, over time, the same kind of selective pressures that have made women, on the average, reliable, lifelong advocates and actors on behalf of their children, would have made men tenacious, loyal, and dogged in the same way?

Why is there this variability? An evolutionary perspective suggests several lines of reasoning. In past environments of evolutionary adaptedness, the requirements of survival in certain environments may have been such that regular, stable inputs from investing fathers were not necessary and therefore the psychological properties of attention to, and interest in, children, which are routine in women, were not genetically encoded in men to the same degree. Another argument, is that given the different reproductive potential of the sexes, parental investment in men and women may never have been subject to the same selective pressures, regardless of the be-

nignness or severity of the environment. There may have been few circumstances, over time, in which a mechanism for intense paternal solicitude can have evolved.

GENDER ASYMMETRY AND THE FATHERING ROLE

A point that is embedded in several of the chapters in this volume is that in many of the historically described situations in which men were central in families and their role was respected and economically valuable, the autonomy of women was severely restricted. What can we make of this association? Are male–female reproductive negotiations a zero sum game? Can we expect responsible fathering only in those societies or in those strata in society in which women are firmly under control and men act in concert with other men to guarantee themselves exclusive access to resources, holding property-less men at arms length and meanwhile monopolizing women of reproductive age who need the resources held by high-status men? A consequence of this arrangement is that large numbers of impoverished men are prevented from forming families due to their inability to gain resources (Dickeman, 1979). Is this the price of male parental investment?

The factors associated with important male familial roles in our own historical past, and in many ethnographically described nonwestern societies, form an interesting pattern. Some conditions favoring male parental roles are:

- No contraception.
- Difficulty of divorce.
- No abortion.
- Restriction of female sexuality.
- Restriction of female spatial mobility.
- Stigmatization of women who form informal unions.
- Stigmatization of children who lack legal fathers' guarantees to paternity certainty.
- Nonviability of mother–child households.
- No independent access of women to productive resources.
- Importance of male labor and male ownership of productive resources.
- Importance of family wage versus individual wage.
- Dependence of women on men and male affines for physical protection from rape and abduction.
- Jural minority of women.

- High cultural valuation of patriarchal principle, as father is seen as owner and symbol of the family.
- Misogyny, and so on.

Another list can be made of practices that go with the weakening of the central male role in the family. Some conditions apparently weakening the male role since the 1900s include:

- Rights to female sexuality no longer controlled by senior kin.
- Contraception is mainly under female control.
- Legalized abortion.
- Sexual revolution in which sex is not stigmatized.
- Nonmarital cohabitation is not stigmatized.
- Increased ease of divorce.
- Women have independent access to productive resources (e.g., entering into the labor market).
- Importance of the individual wage versus family wage.
- Economic viability of mother–child households.
- Political empowerment of women, votes for women, and legislation against gender discrimination.
- Women become the primary parent, gatekeeper through which fathers relate to children.
- Strong centralized government and police institutions that ensure public order, personal safety and private property, and so on.

What are we to make of contemporary life that, in the process of relieving women of severe and crippling restrictions, creates a situation in which it is less attractive to men to form families or to stay with the families they do form? In modern times we maintain that the biparental, fully fathered family is psychologically, economically, and socially superior, yet meanwhile we have removed many of the traditional prerequisites that went to men whose affluence enabled men to play a fathering role. Men who marry in our postmodern times have lost a number of advantages, which are now partially listed:

1. Men no longer get "free" personal and domestic services from women (who can now sell their own labor in the market).
2. Men cannot rely on support from largely female relatives and low-status males to help in the drudge work of domestic settings.
3. Given high demands of wage work facing both men and women, husbands surrender leisure time to spend in all-male "hangouts."

4. As women compete in the labor market, men lose the protected economic role that was previously guaranteed to them by virtue of their status as males and as members in alliance groups with other males.
5. Men surrender the conventional guarantees of paternity certainty because modern wives and mates are not only unsupervised by husbands or kin, but spending time in workplaces with men who are strangers.
6. Men in times past have been able to convert status won in competition with other men into the ability to attract mates and to father children. Once women have independent access to contraception, men do not have the power to father children by women, thereby solidifying the dependence of women on them.
7. Men as a group have no exclusive control over property and, therefore, women place less value on sexual partnerships with men.
8. The economic value of children has been lost. Having children now represents an economic drain.

CONCLUSION

There is every reason to assume that humans will continue to mate and bear children, however the institutional context within which mating and family formation occur has changed dramatically in recent decades. In former times in our own history, and at present in parts of the economically undeveloped world, men have received tangible rewards as a result of making formal marriages with women and fathering children. Their status is enhanced by assuming the role of head of household and the servile nature of women's status ensures them of an unpaid domestic labor force. Children's labor has economic value in agrarian and pre-industrial times. In societies with weak central governments, men can raise the status of their own kinship groups by increasing the number of children through births to multiple wives and by rising to political prominence as elders. Now the orthodox or classic returns to men for marrying, fathering, and supporting children have essentially disappeared. Children are costly to raise, local kinship groups are no longer useful in the political ambitions of men, and polygynous unions are increasingly outlawed.

Many questions can be raised about the future of men in families. In this postmodern era of information based economy, consumer services, and diminishing manufacturing jobs for skilled and unskilled workers, the research reported in this volume indicates that contributions by fathers incontrovertibly lead to enhanced performance and improved lives for

children. Yet, as indicated earlier, the returns to men of investing time and energy in the support of children are not apparent to all. It may be that there is something to be gained by framing research questions around such questions as, "Why should fathers father?" and "How can the returns on fathering be advocated or enhanced in order for men to perceive the advantage to increased frequency and quality of fathering?" Mothering, by and large, can be taken for granted, for reasons explored earlier, although here too, "good" mothering is not inevitable. Fathering is highly variable and problematic.

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Edited by

Alan Booth
Ann C. Crouter
The Pennsylvania State University

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