

INTRODUCTION

In every known society, women have had primary responsibility for the physical care and emotional well-being of small children. There are individual instances where men have become primary caretakers of children, usually in the absence of mothers, but in no society is it generally the case that men and women are equally responsible for child care. Anthropological studies of preindustrial societies have not uncovered any societies where equal parenthood is practiced (Katz and Konner, 1981). Studies of fathers in various industrial societies—including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the Soviet Union, and the United States—have also documented that women continue to serve as the primary parent (Booth and Edwards, 1980; Bozhkov and Golofast, 1988; Day and Mackey, 1989; Haas, 1982; Horna and Lupri, 1987; Hwang, 1987; Mackey, 1986; Moss and Brannen, 1987; New and Benigni, 1987; Nickel and Kocher, 1987; Parseval and Hurstel, 1987; Russell, 1982, 1987; Russell and Radin, 1983; Sandqvist, 1987a, Ve, 1989).

Women's primary responsibility for child care takes several forms. Mothers have been found to spend more "solo time" with children, which means that they are home alone with the child more often (Katsh, 1981; LaRossa, 1988). Even when both parents are home, mothers have been found to make themselves more available to children and to spend more time in direct interaction (Bronstein, 1984). Gender differences are also evident in *how* time with children is spent. Mothers tend to be more involved in physical caretaking tasks while fathers are generally more actively involved in play and stimulating activities (Bronstein, 1984; Easterbrooks and Goldberg, 1984; Jones, 1985; Katsh, 1981; Sandqvist, 1987a). Not surprisingly, women

are more likely than men to define child care as work, while men tend to regard it as leisure (Shaw, 1988).

There is also evidence that women typically are the ones most *responsible* for the care of small children. This takes several forms. Despite the cliché of “wait till your father gets home,” women have been found to be more involved than fathers in the administration of discipline (Condran and Bode, 1982). When men participate in specific child care tasks, women are usually the ones who have delegated or assigned those tasks to them (Branson, Anderson, and Leslie, 1987; Kotelchuk, 1976; LaRossa, 1988). Women have been found to make more of the decisions in regard to children (Condran and Bode, 1982). Mothers have been described as the “psychic parents” who keep in their minds all the details having to do with children. One person described psychic parenting and the delegation pattern that often occurs in the following way:

Yes, dad will take Mary to the dentist. But it was mom who (1) remembered that Mary needed to go to the dentist, (2) made the appointment, (3) wrote the note to get Mary excused from school and reminded her to take it to school, (4) saw that Mary brushed her teeth and wore one of her least disreputable pair of jeans . . . (5) reminded dad to take Mary the morning of the appointment, (6) paid the bill when it came in the mail, and (7) posted the next six month appointment on the family calendar afterwards. (cited in Benokraitis, 1985:253)

Not surprisingly, given their greater involvement in and responsibility for many aspects of child care, women exhibit greater absorption in the parenting role than men. Ehrensaft (1985) states, “Women *are* parents, while men *do* parenting.” Women limit their outside activities more in order to be able to do child care; this particularly occurs for employment. Women often pick jobs combinable with child care responsibilities, are the ones who take an extended time off after childbirth to care for infants, work fewer hours, and stay home from work when children are sick (Hiller and Philliber, 1986). Recent research studies show that fathers in postindustrial societies are beginning to spend considerable time with their children and often rank the fatherhood role equal to, or greater in importance

than, the employee role (Barnett and Baruch, 1987; Booth and Edwards, 1980; Cohen, 1987; Gilbert, 1985; Haas, 1988; Lamb et al., 1985; Mackey, 1986; Nock and Kingston, 1988; Pleck, 1983). Nevertheless, there is little dispute that couples practicing "equal parenthood" are few.

THE IMPACT OF BIOLOGY

Women's responsibility for young children is a cultural universal. Because women are everywhere more involved in the care of small children than men are, it has often been assumed that the reason must lie in biology. If parenting behavior had strong biological bases, it would presumably be virtually impossible to alter the *status quo*. What does research suggest about the impact of biology on parenting behavior?

A Maternal Instinct?

Scientists generally reject the notion that there is such a thing as a maternal instinct, whereby mothers are uniquely more capable of caring for children because of some hormonal changes occurring at childbirth or some genetic predisposition. Research on primates reveals that the ability to nurture is dependent on prior learning and the experience of having been nurtured oneself (Oakley, 1974). Studies of individuals with hormonal and genetic abnormalities allow an investigation into the particular effects of feminizing hormones or genes. Reviewing this research, Chodorow (1978:29) states:

There is no evidence to show that female hormones or chromosomes make a difference in human maternalness, and there is substantial evidence that nonbiological mothers, children, and men can parent just as adequately as biological mothers and can feel just as nurturant.

Studies on humans as well as animals show that it is infants themselves, rather than any special set of hormones, which activate nurturing behavior in females and males alike (Chodorow, 1978).

In further support of the idea that there is no such thing as a maternal instinct, studies involving newborns and infants in hospital, laboratory, and home settings have uncovered no evidence that men are innately less qualified than women to care for infants. Research shows that fathers can respond as appropriately as mothers to infants' signals for assistance and, when given the opportunity, spend about the same amount of time as mothers talking, teaching, soothing, and showing affection (Belsky, 1979; Field, 1978; Hwang, 1985; Jones, 1985; Lamb, 1981; Lamb et al., 1985; Parke and Tinsley, 1981; Yogman, 1984). Observational studies of parent-child interaction in public places in fifteen different societies also showed that "men responded to children in a basic similar way [as] women" (Mackey, 1986:168).

If biology was an overwhelming determinant of parenting behavior, it would seem likely that we would find worldwide that only mothers performed child care. Evidence from preindustrial societies, however, shows that 40% of the primary care of infants is performed by people other than mothers (usually siblings) (Newland, 1980; Weisner and Gallimore, 1977). Analysis of data on a world sample of 186 societies (provided by Barry and Paxson, 1971) shows that only in 2% of societies are mothers the ones who exclusively or almost exclusively care for infants; in no society was it the case that mothers were the exclusive or almost exclusive caretakers in early childhood.

Children's Need for Mothers

More contemporary arguments concerning the necessity of a gender-based division of labor for parenting rest on the idea that children naturally thrive best when their mothers devote considerable time to care for them. This idea appears to be a fairly recent social invention.

In preindustrial times, little concern was shown for developing children's personalities, intelligence, and individuality. Mothers, like fathers, were too occupied with activities related to economic survival to pay much attention to small children. Writing about preindustrial colonial America, Margolis (1985:18) states:

The mother–child relationship was enmeshed in the myriad of daily tasks women performed for their families' survival. They kept house, tended gardens, raised poultry and cattle, churned milk into butter and cream, butchered livestock, tanned skins, pickled and preserved food, made candles, buttons, soap, beer and cider, gathered and produced medicinal herbs, and spun and wove wool and cotton for family clothes. The wives of farmers, merchants, and artisans . . . often helped in their husbands' businesses as well.

Even if parents had had time to spare from productive activities to spend with small children, cultural ideology (at least in North America and Western Europe) would have discouraged them from being too attentive and nurturant. Mintz and Kellogg (1988:14) maintain that in colonial America "childhood was a much less secure and shorter stage of life than it is today." Infant mortality was high and children were expected to take their place in the world of work soon after they were weaned. Religious doctrines also depicted small children as being born with guilt and sin. In order to break down a child's will, parents were encouraged not to be indulgent (Margolis, 1985; Mintz and Kellogg, 1988).

Since industrialization, however, the status of children has dramatically changed. They are now regarded as being in great need of more than the physical necessities of life. The new market economy which emerged with industrialization, as well as dissemination of findings from research studies on child development, seem responsible for these significant changes in attitudes toward children.

The new economy required a well-educated, self-disciplined, and stable workforce. Childhood came to be viewed as a crucial time period in the formation of adult character; children were regarded as needing protection, education, and special nurturing in order to realize their full potential as individuals—and, consequently, as workers (Frykman and Löfgren, 1987; Glenn, 1986; Margolis, 1985). Women were seen as the ideal ones to do this special nurturing. They had been more involved than fathers in child care previously, and their characters were seen as uniquely qualifying them to do this special nurturing—they were regarded as inherently more moral, pure, and tender (Bosanquet,

1906; Rotundo, 1987). In place of women's former productive activities, women were now admonished to pay increasing attention to the quality of the home environment, the nurturance of the marital relationship, and most particularly children. The joys of motherhood were exalted; motherhood began to represent "the greatest achievement of a woman's life, the sole true means of self-realization" (Oakley, 1974:186).

As mothers took even more control of child care and domestic work, fathers were freed to pursue the new opportunities for paid employment outside the home (Bosanquet, 1906). Masculinity became defined in terms of men's levels of ambition and achievement outside the home, and the economic dependence of mothers and children on fathers became taken for granted. The "father as breadwinner" ideal had emerged (Demos, 1982; Pleck, 1987; Rotundo, 1985).

A new belief system, the "doctrine of separate spheres," had thus taken hold, whereby men were presumed to belong to the public sphere and women to the domestic sphere. This belief system reinforced the familial division of labor which made motherhood women's primary vocation and made child care more women's responsibility, while men's parenting role was defined mainly in economic terms.

In the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, the idea that full-time mothering was essential to children's proper development became more entrenched through the writings of childrearing experts (Margolis, 1985). These experts made false assumptions regarding children's innate needs, according to Oakley (1974). One assumption was that "children need mothers rather than any other kind of caretaker . . . a mystical connection binds child to mother and to mother alone." Another assumption was that "children need to be reared in the context of a one-to-one relationship" (Oakley, 1974: 203–204). Much of the evidence put forth for these assumptions descended from studies of the negative effects of institutionalization on infants (usually war orphans). From these studies, comparisons were made between institutionalized care and maternal care, with maternal care being considered not only better, but the one that all children innately needed (Oakley, 1974).

It was not until fairly recently that such findings were reconsidered. Institutionalized infants often lack adequately stim-

ulating activity, as well as the opportunity to form emotionally secure relationships with caretakers; these do seem to be prerequisites for children's healthy development. On the other hand, these early studies did not test whether mothers were the only ones capable of satisfying these needs for children. Contemporary studies actually show that babies are capable of establishing intimate relationships with more than one primary caretaker, are interested in contact with both parents, and are likely to attach themselves strongly to both parents once attachment behaviors begin at about the age of six months (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Hwang, 1985; Jalmert, 1983; Lamb, 1981; Nettelblatt, 1984).

Breastfeeding

Probably the only real, established biological difference between the sexes which is relevant to the division of labor for child care is women's unique ability to breastfeed. However, it is not at all clear that breastfeeding leads inevitably to a division of labor for child care between men and women, even in preindustrial societies where frequent childbearing and longterm nursing are often inevitable and necessary for group survival. At one time, anthropologists (e.g., Brown, 1970) presumed that constant childbearing and breastfeeding would lead to a strict division of labor in preindustrial societies. Pregnant and breastfeeding women were assumed to be unable to perform work which was far from home, was dangerous, or could not be interrupted. Consequently, men were obligated to take on such work (e.g., hunting large animals), which in turn made them unavailable for child care. More recently, feminist anthropologists (e.g., Friedl, 1975) have disputed this notion, using field data indicating that pregnancy and breastfeeding do not limit women's mobility or engagement in risky activities as much as commonly thought. These findings cast further doubt on the biological necessity for the division of labor for child care.

It seems even less likely that breastfeeding is a major barrier to men's participation in child care in societies where the work men do is not very dangerous or performed very far from home. In industrial societies, there are further reasons why breastfeeding would not be a major obstacle to child care shar-

ing. Family sizes are small, and women prefer to breastfeed a relatively short time (if at all). With the invention of baby bottles and the development of sanitary washing facilities, mothers need not be present for infants to be fed: breast milk can be pumped and refrigerated for later use, or safe nutritional supplements can be used. It may still seem more convenient and simpler for the parent who can provide naturally for the child's nutritional requirements to be the one who stays home with that child. But this seems to be a matter of convenience rather than biological necessity.

A review of the literature suggests, then, that women are not biologically more suited for caring for small children. Nor are small children biologically programmed to respond only to their mothers' care. However, stereotypes and myths about men's and women's nurturing abilities might still operate to depress men's participation in early child care.

GROWING INTEREST IN EQUAL PARENTHOOD

A review of the research literature suggests that the types of activities associated with "mothering" (i.e., nurturing) and "fathering" (i.e., breadwinning) have been socially defined. These definitions may now be changing. In the past ten years, there has been a dramatic increase in expressions of interest in *equal parenthood*, whereby men and women would both be equally engaged in the full range of parenting behaviors which have up to now been the province of one parent or the other. Almost every American magazine and newspaper has featured articles about "the new father"—a man who is emotionally attached to his children and actively responsible for their care and well-being. These articles have not just appeared in feminist or women-oriented media. Even such traditionally male-oriented newspapers and magazines such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Magazine* have featured the new father. Television commercials (such as ones for Kodak) provide visual images of fathers tenderly holding babies and toddlers, and magazine ads for pain relievers (Tylenol) and baby food (Gerber) stress the important role fathers play in choosing what babies need in or-

der to thrive. Popular books about fathering have also appeared (e.g., Kyle Pruett's *The Nurturing Father—Journey Toward the Complete Man*, 1987). Opinion surveys document interest in a new mode of parenting. The majority of American men and women, as well as girls and boys, now believe mothers and fathers should be equally responsible for child care when both work for pay outside the home (Farmer, 1983; Hiller and Philliber, 1986; Huber and Spitze, 1983).

The expanding interest in men's participation in child care is generally attributed to changes in women's roles (Fein, 1974; Pleck, 1987). The rise in mothers' labor force participation has been particularly dramatic and influential. In 1950, only 12% of mothers of preschool-aged children were in the labor force; by 1987, 57% were (Blau and Winkler, 1988; Margolis, 1985). A commonly mentioned potential benefit of equal parenting for women concerns their employment opportunities. If women shared child care equally with men, they would presumably have more energy and interest in seeking self-fulfillment outside the home (Adams and Winston, 1980; Eisenstein, 1984; Hoffman, 1983; Huber, 1976; Levine, 1976; Smith and Reid, 1986; Yogman, Cooley, and Kindlon, 1988). Employers might give women workers more respect and become more willing to invest in their occupational potential if they knew that women were not the only ones who would take time away from work to care for small children (Hoffman, 1983; Newland, 1980).

A concern for the well-being of children also underlies contemporary interest in equal parenting arrangements. As more mothers are employed, some people look to fathers to provide more care for children. A more relaxed home environment for children has been predicted to be the result of an arrangement where either parent can do child care (Shreve, 1987). Some studies suggest that when men participate more in child care, they become more sensitive and able to understand children's needs (Grønseth, 1978; Lamb and Easterbrooks, 1981; Russell, 1982).

Increased interest in child development has also contributed to calls for greater participation of men in children's lives. Having two active parents is seen as providing children with dual role models, a "richer, more complex emotional milieu" (Ehrensaft, 1983), and an extra source of stimulation and

unique experiences from which they can benefit (Ehrensaft, 1983; Ricks, 1985). Some studies suggest that high levels of father involvement are related to optimal toddler development in terms of developing secure attachments, social confidence, and problem-solving abilities (Easterbrooks and Goldberg, 1984; Hodgson, 1979; Pruett, 1987).

The feminist movement is often given partial credit for the rising interest in fatherhood. As women's identities have expanded to include occupational roles, some people have questioned whether or not men's personhood has been compromised by a one-sided focus on occupational achievement (Morgan, 1990; Pleck, 1987). Through increased participation in parenting, men might develop the more "nurturing" or "feminine" sides of their personalities (Ehrensaft, 1983; Russell and Radin, 1983; Yogman, Cooley, and Kindlon, 1988). Exclusive concentration on the breadwinner role often encourages men to develop only one side of their personalities: e.g., unemotionality, individuality, competitiveness, self-absorption, and toughness (Benokraitis, 1985; Giveans and Robinson, 1985). Bernard (1981) maintains that a one-sided focus on the "good provider role" has potentially high "psychic costs" for men. Men can depend too heavily on success in the breadwinner role to validate their sense of masculinity and bolster their self-esteem. When men let the role of father count as a "validating source," they are expanding the opportunities for succeeding at something and feeling good about themselves. Sharing more in child care might give men greater opportunities to enjoy the development of the child (Ehrensaft, 1983). When a sample of fathers in a large city was asked why they would like to spend more time with their children, the most common response was exemplified by this comment: "Time spent with my child is unique. There is nothing else that can make you that high or offer as much fulfillment" (Haas, 1988:26). Greater participation in child care seems to be a promising way for men to develop closer relations with children; there are some empirical studies that suggest a relationship exists between level of fathers' participation and closeness of the father-child bond (Grønseth, 1978; Hood and Golden, 1979; Radin, 1982; Russell, 1982; Smith and Reid, 1986).

While fathers are often regarded as obtaining important benefits through greater involvement in child care, it should be

noted that not all observers agree that men have much to gain from equal parenthood. Polatnick (1983) maintains that men enjoy substantial advantages from avoiding childrearing responsibility; because they can concentrate on the breadwinner role, they can earn more money, prestige, and power than women can by being the primary parent. She also suggests that men will not want to share child care because of the disadvantages inherent in the role, including low status, drudgery, monotony, a long work week, being constantly on call, social isolation, and selflessness. An early proponent of equal parenthood admitted "the rewards of caring for a child are . . . hard to measure or hang on to. This is not the kind of experience men are taught to value. It does not lead to power, wealth, or high status" (Fasteau, 1976:63). While these factors may serve as important barriers to fathers actually sharing the parenting role, it is important to note that studies indicate that a large proportion of fathers—between one-third and one-half—are interested in a more nurturing role (Bradley, 1985; Haas, 1988; Jump and Haas, 1987).

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL POLICY

Advocates of equal parenthood would like to see this topic approached as a public issue and not merely as one resolvable within the context of individual families (Bernard, 1974; LaRossa, 1988; Zigler and Frank, 1988). Up to now, policymakers in most postindustrial societies have wanted families to conform to traditional gender stereotypes, with fathers viewed as breadwinners and mothers as the primary nurturers (Adams and Winston, 1980; Kamerman, 1983; Newland, 1980; Scanzoni, 1983). According to Lamb and Sagi (1983:247–8):

[C]ontemporary legal and social policies in most Western societies do not facilitate paternal participation; indeed, existing practices more commonly restrict and limit the opportunities for male involvement in the family.

Consequently, fathers' rights to employment have been emphasized over mothers' rights, and programs which would support working mothers and fathers in combining parent and employment roles have been lacking.

A progressive approach to social policy "assumes the obligation of both men and women to support themselves, as well as to share jointly in the responsibilities of parenthood" (Lapidus, 1978:343). The changes most likely to promote equal parenthood involve employment practices (Lamb, 1983; Moss and Brannen, 1987). Progressives view working men and women as being in need of programs which would allow them to arrange child care without this negatively affecting family income. This calls for restructuring of work time and parental leaves with jobs guaranteed upon return. Policies that improve women's economic opportunities are also crucial; when women are economically independent, they can be more interested in an equitable sharing of child care responsibilities and better able to relieve men from the pressure of the breadwinner role (Levine, 1976; Roos, 1985). This progressive approach is increasingly being adopted by policymakers in Western Europe, because of a recognition of the importance of women's labor power and the effects of maternal employment on family life (Kamerman, 1983; Kamerman and Kahn, 1978; Nickel and Köcher, 1987).

SWEDEN'S INTEREST IN EQUAL PARENTHOOD

While some international bodies (e.g., the United Nations, the International Labor Organization, Council of Europe) have recently adopted resolutions that call for men and women to share economic and child care responsibilities in the family (Moss and Brannen, 1987), there is only one society whose policymakers have long advocated equal participation of fathers in child care—Sweden (Kamerman, 1983; Lamb and Levine, 1983; Qvarfort, McCrae, and Kolunda, 1988). Following Sweden's lead, other Nordic countries, particularly Norway and Finland, have become interested in changing men's roles, especially in promoting fathers' participation in child care through social policy; but this is a new development (Brandth and Kvande, 1990; Haavio-Mannila and Kaupinnen, 1990; Nordic Council of Ministers, 1988). While some communist societies (e.g., the U.S.S.R., China, Cuba) and some Israeli kibbutzim have long expressed a commitment to the goal of gender equality, none has

consistently given even lip service to the ideal of shared parenthood (Agassi, 1989; Ho, 1987; Jancar, 1978; Lapidus, 1978; Newland, 1980).

Calls for equal parenthood in Sweden began in the early 1960s, long before interest in "the new father" surfaced in other countries such as the United States. This position quickly gained ascendancy in the Social Democratic government, becoming represented in an official policy statement to the United Nations in 1968 and in amendments to family law in 1979 (Baude, 1979; Statens Offentliga Utredningar, 1982a). Equal parenthood is part of the Swedish ideology of equality (*jämställdhet*). According to the Swedish government,

Equality means that women and men have the same rights, obligations and opportunities to have a job which gives them economic independence, to care for home and children, and to participate in political, union and other activities in society. (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 1990, my translation)

The goal of equal parenthood has led to various reforms in Swedish society. Maternal care practices have changed to encourage participation of fathers in prenatal care, parental education, and delivery. The national school curriculum mandates that *jämställdhet* be taught. Employment practices also illustrate the important regard in which men are held in the childrearing process. Fathers get two weeks off with pay at the time of childbirth, sixty days off per year per child with pay (shared with mothers) to care for sick children, two days off with pay per year per child (shared with mothers) to visit day-care centers and schools, and the right to reduce the workday to six hours for child care purposes.

However, the most significant of all Swedish reforms designed to bring about equal parenthood is parental leave. With return to his original job guaranteed, a Swedish father (married or unmarried) currently has fifteen months of paid leave to share with his partner so that one parent can stay at home for a newborn or adopted child. (An additional six months is available for twins.) As of 1990, the first twelve months of the leave are paid at the level of 90–100% of regular pay (higher if the employee works in the public sector). The last three months are

paid at a minimum level, now equivalent to about \$10 a day. Benefits are paid out directly from social insurance offices rather than from employers (which is the same procedure used to pay for sick days and short-term disability). The program, however, is paid for mainly by employers, through payroll taxes on all employees.

Sweden was the first country to institute paid parental leave for both mothers and fathers in 1974 (Sidel, 1986). The Swedish parental leave program remains the most financially generous and flexible in the world, and the one most directly tied to a commitment to the principle of equal parenthood (Kammerman, 1985, 1989; Moss and Brannen, 1987). At least five other societies allow fathers to take paid parental leave. These include all the other Nordic nations (Finland, Norway, Iceland, and Denmark) and Yugoslavia (Morgan, 1984; Nordic Council of Ministers, 1988). But none of these other countries' programs predate or are more remunerative or longer lasting than the Swedish program.

Policymakers have shown somewhat greater interest in *unpaid* parental leave for fathers, which is still regarded as a rather radical concept. At least twelve societies have government policies which allow fathers to take unpaid leave: the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, New Zealand, Spain, and Portugal (Bureau of National Affairs, 1986; Mathews, 1989; Moss and Brannen, 1987). While popular interest in equal parenthood in the United States is high, a proposal to provide a modest amount of unpaid leave (12 weeks) to mothers and fathers had not yet been made into law as of 1990.

In contrast to what other countries offer, the generous Swedish parental leave program, based as it is on a commitment to equal parenthood, is a radical attempt to break the centuries-old tradition of women being responsible for children. Fathers' intense involvement with an infant in the first year of life during parental leave might set the stage for men's continued involvement in child care and the eventual realization of the goal of equal parenthood. If men were to be more intensely involved in infant care, through taking parental leave, perhaps children would come to be regarded as the equal responsibility of both

parents, and children would come to know both parents as equally capable and nurturing.

A study of Sweden's unique parental leave program allows an exploration into many interesting questions related to fathers' and mothers' sharing responsibility for the care of babies. In this book, the following questions will be addressed:

1. Under what circumstances will a society elect to promote fathers' and mothers' being equally responsible for child care, through legislation and other means?
2. Given the opportunity, will fathers elect to stay home from work to care for their babies?
3. What are the barriers to men's electing to stay home to care for their babies?
4. What are the benefits and problems associated with men's taking parental leave? How do men's experiences with parental leave compare to those of women who have taken parental leave?
5. If fathers stay home and care for their babies, will this lead to greater gender equality in the family? In particular, will men continue to share responsibility for child care when they go back to work, and will men and women become more equal in terms of their interest and opportunities for self-fulfillment in occupational pursuits outside the home?
6. Can social policy be effectively used as an instrument for bringing about the end of such a cultural universal as women's primary responsibility for child care?
7. What are the prospects that men and women in industrial societies will eventually have an equal share in the caring and nurturing of small children?

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book presents findings of an intensive study of the Swedish parental leave program, a study specifically designed to address the above questions.

Chapter 2 discusses the history and development of parental leave in Sweden. In particular, it covers the social, political, and economic circumstances which contributed to Sweden's having such a revolutionary stance on the issue of shared parenthood.

Chapter 3 describes the levels of participation of Swedish fathers in the parental leave program, and assesses these over time. Comparisons with mothers' rates of participation and patterns of leavetaking will be made. Men's participation in parental leave will be contrasted to their participation in other Swedish social insurance programs designed to encourage fathers' involvement in child care. Also described are Swedish parents' attitudes toward parental leave and potential reforms in the policy that would likely lead to more equal participation of fathers.

Chapter 4 reports on survey findings to test theories regarding the barriers to men's electing to stay home with their babies, even when there is an official policy allowing them to do so. Social psychological and social structural barriers are considered. Particular attention is paid to the role mothers play in the likelihood that fathers will take parental leave. These findings allow us to pinpoint the factors that are likely to prevent men and women from equally sharing the parental role in other societies as well.

Chapter 5 covers the extent to which fathers reported enjoying taking leave and the specific problems and benefits they encountered while on leave. Factors associated with fathers' having more satisfactory leaves will be explored. Fathers' experiences with parental leave will be compared to those of mothers who had taken leave.

Chapter 6 considers whether parental leave is an effective way of eliminating the traditional gender-based division of labor in the family. Survey findings are used to investigate if fathers' participation in infant care has the effect of increasing gender equality in the family. Specifically, the effects on equalizing mothers' and fathers' interest and involvement in child care activities inside the home and occupational pursuits outside the home are measured.

Chapter 7 discusses implications of the findings from Sweden for the United States. It analyzes the possibility that the U.S. will develop a policy like the Swedish parental leave program in the near future. It also uses knowledge gained about the actual operation of the policy in Sweden to predict what the consequences might be if the U.S. instituted a parental leave program.

The final chapter uses findings from previous chapters to discuss whether social policy can be effectively used as an instrument for bringing about the end of such a cultural universal as women's responsibility for baby care. The prospects for men and women in the future equally sharing in the caring and nurturing of small children are also examined.

This book is based on fifteen years of research, including two and one-half years of fieldwork and a major survey conducted in 1986. (Appendix A describes the study's methodology in detail.) Insight into the development, rationale, and administration of the Swedish program, as well as statistics concerning rates of participation of fathers in parental leave, were obtained through the reading of reports of investigations by Swedish government agencies and academic researchers, through discussions with agency personnel and researchers, and through three months of participant-observation conducted in two Swedish social insurance offices.

The findings on parental behavior and attitudes come from a 1986 mail survey of a representative sample of 319 sets of parents who had children in 1984 in Gothenburg. Gothenburg is a city of half a million inhabitants, contains many of the major industries of Sweden, and is the largest port in the Nordic countries. Mail questionnaires were sent to 721 couples who received parental leave benefits from two local social insurance offices for a child born in 1984. In all, 319 couples returned questionnaires—a response rate of 44%. Standard survey procedure of sending out several reminders could not be followed because official permission for follow-ups could not be obtained. Using census data, attempts were made to assess what biases might exist because of the low response rate. The responding group was found to be quite similar to the general population of Swedish parents in many important respects, in-

cluding the percentage of fathers who took leave, social class, family structure, and family size.

Finally, intensive interviews were conducted with a small group of nine couples where the parents had shared parental leave fairly equally. These interviews were used to gain additional insight into fathers' motivations for taking parental leave and into their experiences while on leave.

Little research has been done up to now to examine government policies in terms of their effectiveness for bringing about gender equality (Ve, 1989). The purpose of this book is to critically analyze one such attempt, the Swedish parental leave program. This effort, then, is designed to fill a substantial gap in our knowledge about this topic. The questions this book seeks to address are of relevance to many other societies struggling with the issues of helping workers combine employment and family responsibilities and of enhancing gender equality. However, it must be emphasized that the results of this analysis cannot readily be generalized to other postindustrial societies. We must keep in mind that every society represents a peculiar configuration of historical, economic, political, and social forces. Programs that exist in one society cannot be readily adapted to another social setting, and a program which is successful or unsuccessful in one society might not yield the same results in another. Still, a study of Swedish society can help us gain new insight into the social forces likely to be associated with greater interest in fathers' participation in child care, as well as the likelihood of bringing about equality between the sexes through social policy.