

CHAPTER 11



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Experiencing Parenthood: Roles and Relationships of Parents and Children

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What Do YOU Think?

Are the following statements **TRUE** or **FALSE**?

You may be surprised by the answers (see answer key on the bottom of this page).

- T** **F** 1 A maternal instinct has been proved to exist in humans.
- T** **F** 2 Employed mothers earn less than women without children.
- T** **F** 3 Egalitarian marriages usually remain so after the birth of the first child.
- T** **F** 4 Behavior of fathers has changed more than cultural beliefs about fatherhood.
- T** **F** 5 Studies consistently show that regular day care by nonfamily members is detrimental to intellectual and social development.
- T** **F** 6 Children of higher-earning families are less likely to be cared for by parents only or by other relatives and are more likely to be cared for by nonrelatives.
- T** **F** 7 Children raised by authoritarian parents tend to be less cheerful, more moody, and more vulnerable to stress.
- T** **F** 8 Children of gay or lesbian parents are likely to be gay themselves.
- T** **F** 9 In situations such as a parent's serious illness or death or a parental divorce, children may become caregivers for their parents.
- T** **F** 10 Many parents follow the advice of "experts" even though it conflicts with their own opinions, ideas, or beliefs.

You might wonder, "What is it like to be a parent and to raise children?" Journalist and novelist Anna Quindlen (1988) expresses how deep and broad her responsibility for her children is in the following way:

I am aghast to find myself in such a position of power over two other people [her sons]. Their father and I have them in thrall simply by having produced them. We have the power to make them feel good or bad about themselves, which is the greatest power in the world. Ours will not be the only influence, but it is the earliest, the most ubiquitous, and potentially the most pernicious. Lovers and friends may make them blossom and bleed, but they move on to other lovers and friends. We are the only parents they will ever have.

Economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett (1992, 122) adds this:

Responsible parenthood involves the expenditure of a great deal of energy and effort. Done properly it is a noisy, exhausting, joyous business that uses up a chunk of one's best energy and taps into prime time. Well developing children dramatically limit personal freedom and seriously interfere with the pursuit of an ambitious career. When psychiatrist David Guttmann talks about the "routine unexamined heroism of parenting," he is describing the manifold ways dedicated parents "surrender their own claims to personal omnipotentiality" in the wake of childbirth, conceding these instead to the new child.

Being Parents

Over the last four decades or so, major changes in society have profoundly influenced parental roles. Parents today cannot necessarily look to their own parents as models. Most mothers and fathers of today's children have some things in common with mothers and fathers

Answer Key for What Do You Think

1 False, see p. 390; 2 True, see p. 416; 3 False, see p. 406; 4 False, see p. 393; 5 False, see p. 397; 6 True, see p. 397; 7 True, see p. 403; 8 False, see p. 409; 9 True, see p. 415; 10 True, see p. 401.

Understanding Yourself

Ready for Parenthood? The Insider's Test



Unlike marrying—a process that unfolds gradually as two people form, maintain, and intensify a coupled relationship before entering marriage—parenthood is more sudden. There is less opportunity to experience “being a parent” before having a child to care for. Most parents discover the great extent to which they were either unprepared or incorrectly prepared. Here, we present anonymously written, jointly crafted, preparation-for-parenthood “tests,” parts of which have been circulated and posted widely on the Internet. The excerpts from the tests are from the website nokidding.net.

So, are you ready to have children? Take these tests and see.

The mess test. With your hands, smear peanut butter and grape jelly on the sofa and curtains. Now rub your hands in the wet flower bed and smear them on the walls. Cover the stains with crayons. Pee on your carpets and cloth-covered furniture just for fun. . . .

The grocery store test. Borrow one or two small animals (goats are best) and take them with you as you shop at the grocery store. Without the aid of a leash, always keep them in sight and pay

for everything they eat or damage.

The dressing test.

Obtain one large, unhappy octopus. Stuff it into a small net bag with large holes, making sure that all tentacles stay inside.

Time allowed: all morning. . . .

The night test. Fill a cloth bag with 8–12 pounds of sand. Soak it thoroughly in water. At 8 p.m. begin to waltz and hum with the bag until 9 p.m. Lay down your bag and set your alarm for 10 p.m. Get up, pick up your bag, and sing every song you have ever heard. Make up about a dozen more songs and sing these until 4 a.m. Set the alarm for 5 a.m. Get up and make breakfast. Keep this up for 5 years. Look cheerful and alert. . . .

The patience test. Always repeat everything you say at least five times. Always repeat everything you say at least *five times*. Always repeat everything you say at least *five times*. Always repeat everything you say at least *five times*. Always repeat everything you say at least *five times*. Always repeat everything you say at least *five times*. ALWAYS REPEAT EVERYTHING YOU SAY AT LEAST FIVE TIMES. . . .

The finance test. Go to the nearest drugstore. Set your wallet on the counter. Ask the clerk to help him/herself. Now proceed to the nearest food store. Go to the office and arrange for your paycheck to be directly deposited to the store's account. Purchase a newspaper. Go home and read it peacefully for the last time in your life.

The final assignment. Find a couple who already has a small child. Lecture them on how they can improve their discipline, patience, tolerance, toilet training, and child's table manners. Emphasize to them that they should never allow their children to run rampant. Enjoy this experience. It will be the last time you have all the answers.

Obviously, the preceding is meant (and ideally received) with humor. We hope, too, that the logic underlying these “tests” made you think because behind this humor is the reality that we can't necessarily envision the profound changes that accompany parenthood. In fact, as a society we do very little to prepare people for what parenthood entails.

SOURCE: <http://www.nokidding.net>, “Humor Page.”

throughout history, such as the desire for their children's well-being. But in many areas they have had to chart a new course. Here we briefly review motherhood and fatherhood, highlighting some major changes of the last quarter century that have transformed the meaning and experience of each.

Motherhood

To many, a chapter about parenting would be assumed to be about mothers and children, since “parenting” and “nurturing” are treated as though they are syn-

onymous with “mothering.” Furthermore, many women see motherhood as their “destiny.” Given the choice of becoming mothers or not (with “not” made possible and more controllable through birth control and abortion), most women would choose to become mothers at some point in their lives and they would make this choice for positive reasons. Some women make no conscious choice; they become mothers without weighing their decision or considering its effect on their own lives and the lives of their children and partners. The potential negative consequences of a nonreflective decision—bitterness, frustration, anger, or depression—may be great. Yet it

is possible that a woman's nonreflective decision will turn out to be "right" and that she will experience unique personal fulfillment as a result.

Although researchers are unable to find any purely instinctual motives for having children among humans, they recognize many social motives impelling women to become mothers. When a woman becomes a mother, she may feel that her identity as an adult is confirmed. Having a child of her own proves her womanliness because, from her earliest years, she has been trained to assume the role of mother. The stories a girl has heard, the games she has played, the textbooks she has read, the religion she has been taught, the television she has watched—all have socialized her for the mother role. Jessie Bernard (1982), a pioneer in family studies, writes, "The pain and anguish resulting from deprivation of an acquired desire for children are as real as the pain and anguish resulting from an instinctive one." Whatever the reason, most women choose to experience motherhood.

Still, in the face of mixed messages from the wider culture, motherhood leaves many women feeling ambivalent. Author Liz Koch summarized some of that ambivalence:

We fear we will lose ourselves if we stay with our infants. We resist surrendering even to our newborns for fear of being swallowed up. We hear and accept both the conflicting advice that bonding with our babies is vital, and the opposite undermining message that to be a good mother, we must get away as soon and as often as possible. We hear that if we mother our own babies full time, we will have nothing to offer society, our husbands, ourselves, even our children. We fear isolation, lack of self-esteem, feelings of entrapment, of emotional and financial dependency. We fear that we will be left behind—empty arms, empty home, empty women, when our children grow away. . . . The reality is that in many ways contemporary America does not honor mothering.

Also, when sociologists Deirdre Johnston and Debra Swanson (2003) were interviewed for The Mothers Movement Online (<http://www.mothersmovement.org/>), they were asked why they undertook a study of the depictions of mothers and motherhood in popular magazines. Their comments reveal continued cultural ambiguity about motherhood:

As mothers ourselves, we experience the tensions of balancing work and family. We are enmeshed in

the myths of motherhood that create cultural ideals about who is a "good mother" and who is not. On days that we went into the office, we felt guilty, crying as we left our young children at childcare. On other days, we stayed home, watching the clock, waiting for each painful minute to go by, calling a spouse at the office, waiting desperately for an adult to walk through the front door.

Popular culture certainly contributes to these mixed feelings. To uncover some wider cultural messages about motherhood, Johnston and Swanson examined the portrayals of mothers in five magazines targeted to mothers: *Good Housekeeping*, *Family Circle*, *Parent's Magazine*, *Working Mother*, and *Family Fun*. These portrayals put both at-home mothers and employed mothers on the defensive, in difficult, no-win situations—a point we return to shortly.

Koch further observed that the "job" of mother is devalued because it is associated with "menial tasks of housekeeper, cook, laundry maid," and so on. Although seeming to speak specifically about at-home mothers, Koch's plea for greater recognition of the contributions made by mothers is as relevant for mothers employed outside the home as those who work at home "full-time." As Koch (1987) articulates we need to better celebrate the "special state" of motherhood:

Being mothers is truly immersing ourselves in a special state, a moment to moment state of being. It is difficult to look at our day and measure success quantitatively. The day is successful when we have shared moments, built special threads of communication, looked deeply into our children's eyes and felt our hearts open. . . . It is important that we see our job as vitally important to our own growth, to our community, to society, and to world peace. Building family ties, helping healthy, loved children grow to maturity is a worthwhile pursuit. . . . The transmission of values is a significant reason to raise our own children. We are there to answer their questions and to show children, through our example, what is truly important to us.

The idea of a maternal instinct reflects a belief that mothering comes naturally to women. For women who struggle with the new roles and responsibilities that motherhood brings, such an idea can be frustrating and can produce guilt. Add to this the assumption that mothers instinctively or intuitively "know" how to nurture children, the lack of confidence by both parties in a father's ability to parent, and the inherent ability of

women to breastfeed, and we can quickly see the enormous pressures that can face new mothers more than new fathers.

Compounding the situation are those ambiguous cultural expectations alluded to earlier. “Too much” mothering? “Not enough” mothering? What do children really need, and what should mothers give and do? Women receive unclear, often contradictory, messages. Furthermore, the standards against which mothers are judged (and come to judge themselves) are often unrealistic and idealized, putting women in a situation of comparing themselves to a model to which it is difficult to “measure up.” Sociologist Sharon Hays refers to our cultural expectations of mothers as the **ideology of intensive mothering**. This ideology portrays mothers as the essential caregivers, who should be child centered, guided by experts, and emotionally absorbed in the labor-intensive, and financially demanding task of childrearing. As a result, mothers “see the child as innocent, pure, and beyond market pricing. They put the child’s needs first, and they invest much of their time, labor, emotion, intellect, and money in their children” (Hays 1996). In today’s cultural climate, this view of motherhood contrasts with the business market ideology of efficiency, rationality, time saving, and profit.

The “intensive mothering” ideology confronts mothers and women who contemplate motherhood with cultural contradictions. Living up to its standards is difficult even for stay-at-home mothers. For women employed outside the home, the ideology can provoke self-doubt, guilt, and a sense of being judged by others. As Hays notes, there is almost no woman who can resolve this cultural no-win situation. Women who forgo childbearing may be perceived as “cold” and “unfulfilled.” An employed woman with children may be told she is selfishly neglecting her children. If she scales back her workload but stays in a job, she may be “mommy tracked,” put in a less demanding but also less important and less upwardly mobile position. Finally, at-home mothers, in meeting the intensive mothering mandates, will be seen by some as “useless” or “unproductive” (Hays 1996). In Deirdre Johnston and Debra Swanson’s research, popular culture depicts at-home mothers as somewhat incompetent and yet underrepresents employed mothers, rendering them less visible models of motherhood. This occurs despite the fact that more than 60% of mothers are in the paid labor force (Johnston and Swanson 2003). Clearly, neither employed nor at-home mothers are well served by their portrayal in popular culture.

Motherhood affects women’s employment experiences, as shown in Chapter 12. One notable way that women are affected is in their earnings. Estimates differ, but it is clear that women with children earn less than their counterparts without children (Budig and England 2001). Plus, regardless of their employment status, the responsibilities of parenthood continue to fall more heavily upon women than upon men, even as children age and move into their teens (Kurz, 2002).

Fatherhood

Beginning in the mid-1990s, a number of books appeared on fathers and fatherhood (Blankenhorn 1995; Coltrane 1996; Gerson 1993; Popenoe 1996; Hawkins and Dollahite 1997) as the depth and breadth of male involvement or absence in the lives of their children became a source of increasing societal concern (Eggebeen and Knoester 2001). In all the commentary and analysis, however, we are left with something short of a consensus about the state of fatherhood in America. This is even evident in the ambiguity of the idea of fathering. When we speak of mothering a child, everyone knows what we mean: a process that involves nurturing and caring for, the physical and emotional well-being of the child almost daily for at least 18 consecutive years. The popular meaning of *fathering* is quite different—impregnating the child’s mother.

Nurturing behavior by a father toward his child has not typically been referred to as *fathering*. As used today, the term *parenting* is intended to describe the child-tending behaviors of both mothers and fathers (Atkinson and Blackwelder 1993).

As we have seen, the father’s traditional roles of provider and protector are *instrumental*; they satisfy the family’s economic and physical needs. The mother’s role in the traditional model is *expressive*; she gives emotional and psychological support to her family. However, the lines between these roles are becoming increasingly blurred because of economic pressures, women’s expanded involvement in so-called instrumental tasks, and new societal expectations and desires.

From a developmental viewpoint, the father’s importance to the family derives not only from his roles as a breadwinner or as a representative of society, connecting his family and his culture, but also from his role as a developer of self-control and autonomy in his children. Research indicates that although mothers are inclined to view both sons and daughters as “simply children” and to apply similar standards to both sexes,

fathers tend to be more closely involved with their sons than with their daughters (Morgan, Lye, and Condran 1988; Smith and Morgan 1994). This involvement generally involves sharing activities rather than sharing feelings or confidences (Cancian 1989; Starrels 1994). This may place a daughter at a disadvantage because she has less opportunity to develop instrumental attitudes and behaviors. It may also be disadvantageous to a son, because it can limit the development of his expressive patterns and interests (Gilbert et al. 1982; Starrels 1994).

In analyzing today's fathers and today's families, we find a diversity of opinion and a range of experiences of fathering. There is evidence indicating that fathers have become more emotionally connected to and involved in the lives of their children (Eggebeen and Knoester 2001). Some commentators point proudly to our embracement of this "new father" model against which many men now measure themselves (Lamb 1986, 1993). Feminist ideology is credited with being influential in shifting the emphasis to a more expressive model of fathering, but many men pursue more involved versions of fatherhood as part of their own quest for deeper relationships with their children (Griswold 1993; Daly 1993). When pressed, most men today compare themselves favorably with their own fathers in both the quality and the quantity of involvement they have with their children. The new "nurturant father," as Michael Lamb (1997) refers to him, is able to participate in virtually all parenting practices (except, of course, gestation and lactation) and experience all the emotional states that mothers experience. It is clear that fathers can feel a connection to their infants that men were often thought to lack (Doyle 1994). Furthermore, *father involvement* has been reconceptualized to include the many ways fathers are influential participants in their children's development. Fathering activities such as communicating, teaching, caregiving, protecting, and sharing affection, are viewed as beneficial to the development and well-being of both children and adults (Palkovitz 1997; Hawkins and Dollahite 1997).

Although this new standard of fatherhood has been widely hailed, it is unclear how much it reflects actual behavior (LaRossa 1988; Gerson 1993). As described by Ralph LaRossa, the **culture of fatherhood** has clearly changed in the directions described here; it is less clear how much the **conduct of fatherhood** has kept pace. Also, when we look at how *fathers compare to mothers*, fathers are neither as involved with nor as close to their children, including their teenaged



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■ *Fathers are increasingly involved in parenting roles—not just playing with their children but also changing their diapers, bathing, dressing, feeding, and comforting them.*

children, as mothers are (Kurz 2002). This an important reminder that reality may be different from rhetoric when it comes to what people actually do or believe they should do in their families.

Although the subject of much positive commentary today's "new fathers" have also faced criticism from both traditional and less traditional sources. Critics who embrace a more traditional perspective question the efficacy and desirability of a fatherhood that becomes *too much* like motherhood. They advocate more traditional models of men as fathers (Blankenhorn 1995). Still others focus more narrowly on the behaviors of the most irresponsible fathers, especially those who, after divorce, neither provide the expected financial support nor even maintain contact with their children. Instead, as shown in Chapter 14, such fathers simply disappear. Other negative expressions of fathering can be seen in data on child abuse. When we control for mothers' and fathers' different levels of responsibility and time spent in childcare, males are more often physically abusive to their children (Gelles 1998). These negative aspects of fathering tarnish the cultural celebration of the new nurturant father.

One way to resolve the apparent contradiction between positive and negative depictions of today's fathers is to recognize the two sides of contemporary fatherhood. Frank Furstenberg Jr. (1988) differentiates between "good dads" and "bad dads." This **bifurcation of fatherhood** results from the declining division of labor in the family, especially the decline of the male good-provider role. By rejecting this narrower notion of a father's primary role as provider, some men felt "freed" from their sense of duty toward their spouses and children (especially children of ex-spouses); yet other men found that this liberated them to construct expanded, more expressive versions of fathering.

When sociologist Kathleen Gerson (1993) interviewed 138 fathers, she uncovered an interesting diversity in men's perceptions of their family roles. Roughly a third of her sample was *traditional*, identifying themselves largely in terms providing financially for their families. Another near-third conceptualized their role in the family and as fathers in deeply nurturant ways. The final third avoided involvement in childrearing because of how it would impose on their freedom and autonomy. They either had no children or were estranged from their children because they had divorced or separated from their children's mothers.

As the preceding examples show, it is difficult and potentially risky to generalize too widely about today's fathers. Although more of today's fathers may aim to be more broadly involved with their children than what they perceive fathers to have been in the past, and although most may recognize father involvement as beneficial, many are confused. They are unsure of what is expected of them. Because models of highly involved fathers are relatively new, many fathers today "focus on being a model to their children to create for them a new set of standards for *who the father is*" (Daly 1993). The creation of a new role understandably can provoke both doubt and anxiety.

Women often can't identify with and may not understand why men don't automatically "know" what to do with and for children. Such stresses between mothers and fathers are common, according to a study by the Families and Work Institute (Levine 1997; Martin 1993). Although men are often willing to "help out" their wives, this can pose a problem. Women often wish their partners would take on an equal share of the work rather than simply "helping." In assessing fathers, we shouldn't neglect other important aspects of fathering. Fathers still see their roles as breadwinners as making important contributions because doing so provides

financial resources for the family (Cohen 1993). As shown shortly, most fathers are not as involved as most mothers; still, most are emotionally involved with their children.

It is clear, however, that fathers and mothers are not held to the same parenting standards or expectations for involvement with their children. For example, a sample of college students was told of a hypothetical employed parent who showed a lack of involvement in caring for his or her child. They rated fathers and mothers lower for behavior described as "home but uninvolved" compared to "uninvolved because of business trips." However, mothers were rated even more negatively than fathers for the lack of involvement at home (Riggs 2005). The cultural stereotype is that mothers are *supposed to be involved*.

What Fatherhood Means to Men

Over the last 15 years or so, a number of fathers have written books to help guide their peers through the joys and perils of more involved fatherhood. Psychologist and writer Jerrold Shapiro (1993) says, "Whether men have been enticed or cajoled, the fact is that we're around our kids a lot more. And when you're around your kids, you get to like it." More than a matter of liking it or not liking it, we might wonder what the consequences of fatherhood are for men. David Eggebeen and Chris Knoester (2001) raised this question, looking at the experiences of 5,226 men age 19–65, comparing fathers and nonfathers, and examining different "versions" or "settings" of fatherhood: men living with their own (biological or adopted) dependent children, men living apart from their dependent children, men whose children are independent adults, and men who are stepfathers. Interested specifically in psychological and physical health, men's social connections, their intergenerational familial ties, and their work behavior, Eggebeen and Knoester found the following.

Generally, there were not big differences between fathers and nonfathers in psychological and health dimensions. In the other three areas—social, intergenerational/familial, and occupational, there were "clear and compelling differences between fathers and nonfathers," as well as interesting differences across fatherhood settings (390). Men living with dependent children were significantly less likely to participate in social activities with friends or leisure pursuits. Men without children, men who lived away from their children, and men who lived with stepchildren attended

church much less often than men who lived with their own biological or adopted children.

Fathers who lived with their own biological or adopted children were more likely to have regular contact with aging parents and adult siblings than were men without children or men with stepchildren. Even fathers who lived apart from their children had more frequent contact with parents and siblings, suggesting that “fatherhood tightens intergenerational family ties” (389).

Overall, Eggebeen and Knoester believe evidence reveals that fatherhood, clearly and “unequivocally,” has the power to “profoundly shape the lives of men” (Eggebeen and Knoester 2001, 390).

Reflections

How should childrearing tasks be delegated between spouses (or partners)? Are there any particular tasks that you believe either men or women should not do? How are tasks delegated in your household? What was the role of your father in the care and nurturing of you and your siblings?

Who Takes Care of the Children?

Childcare responsibility varies according to the marital status of parents and their employment roles and schedules. In a two-parent family, care for children is more the responsibility of mothers than fathers (Yeung et al. 2001). When we examine data on actual involvement in tasks associated with childcare or time spent with children, mothers are more involved in such tasks than fathers. In making such comparisons, it is helpful to differentiate between **engagement** with children, or time spent in *direct interaction* with a child across any number of different activities, and **accessibility**, or *availability to a child*, when the parent is at the same location but not in direct interaction (Yeung et al. 2001). Even though fathers’ proportional involvement with children has increased, it is estimated that fathers’ engagement with children is less than 45% that of mothers’ and their accessibility to children is less than 66% that of mothers’ (Yeung et al. 2001).

Circumstances affect how much time fathers spend with children. One study, based on analyses of data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (Yeung, et al. 2001), noted that in two-parent homes a child’s

direct engagement with biological fathers ranged from an average of 1 hour and 13 minutes on weekdays to 2 hours and 29 minutes on weekends. The total time (engagement plus accessibility) these fathers have involved with their children 12 years and younger is roughly 2.5 hours a day on weekdays and 6.5 hours a day on weekends.

Some interesting differences can be observed in fathers’ time with children. For children who live with only their mothers (with or without a stepfather), the time spent with their biological fathers averaged 5 minutes a day on weekdays and 21 minutes a day on weekends. For children living with only their biological fathers (with or without a stepmother), the time spent with fathers averaged 64 minutes a day on weekdays and 90 minutes a day on weekends (Yeung et al. 2001).

Active Childcare

Active, hands-on childcare is more “in the hands” of mothers than fathers. Mothers take care of and think about their children more than fathers do (Walzer 1998). In most two-parent households, mothers’ childcare responsibility and involvement greatly exceed fathers’ involvement (Bird 1997; Aldous and Mulligan 2002). For every hour that fathers spend actively involved with their children, mothers spend between 3 and 5 hours (Bird 1997).

What do mothers and fathers do in the time they spend with children? Research from the 1960s through the 1980s suggested that fathers spend more time in interactive activities, such as play or helping with homework, whereas mothers spend time doing custodial childcare, such as feeding and cleaning (Yeung et al. 2001).

Also, fathers are more involved with sons than daughters, with younger children more than older children, and with firstborn more than with later born children (Pleck 1997, cited in Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson 1998). Fathers are engaged with or accessible to their infants and toddlers an average of a little over 3 hours per day during the week. By ages 9–12, the combined (engagement and accessibility) week-day time between fathers and children declined to 2 hours and 15 minutes (Yeung et al. 2001). Fathers spend 18 minutes more per day in play and companionship activities with sons than with daughters during the week.

Research suggests that fathers who work more hours and who have prestigious but time-demanding

Exploring Diversity Beyond the Stereotypes of Young African American Fathers



Among the many familiar stereotypes that persist in the United States is that of the “dysfunctional and deviant young African American male” (Smith et al. 2005). The image of young African American fathers “as sexual predators likely to abandon their children and the child’s mother,” has “seeped into the nation’s conscience . . . influencing public policy on public assistance and related issues” (Smith et al. 2005, 977). Yet there are men like 18-year-old Terrell Pough, named by *People* magazine as an “outstanding father” in a feature story in August 2005. Pough was described as a “rare breed of teenaged dads who are trying to raise children.” A devoted father to his daughter, Diamond, who was not yet 2 years old, Pough juggled finishing high school, working, and caring for Diamond, of whom he had custody, when featured by the magazine. As he told the magazine, “She’s what I work for, what I live for, why I wake up. . . . She’s everything.” Pough asserted his determination that “If something ever happens to me . . . no one can ever tell her that her dad didn’t take care of her.” Tragically, something did happen to Pough. He was shot to death while returning home from work November 17, 2005.

According to research by Carolyn Smith, Marvin Krohn, Rebekah Chu, and Oscar Best, although Pough may have been exceptional in his dedication and sacrifice, his commitment to his daughter may be more representative of young, single African American fathers than the negative stereotypes. Using data from the

Rochester Youth Development Study, a longitudinal study that followed 1,000 seventh- and eighth-grade adolescents over a number of years, Smith and colleagues focused on the experiences of 193 young fathers, 67.4% of whom were African Americans, 20.7% Hispanics, and 11.9% whites. Interested in the extent of a father’s contact and involvement and the matter of financial support of his child or children, Smith and colleagues offered the following findings.

Approximately 33% of the African American fathers reported that they live with their child. Although the ethnic differences are not statistically significant, this percentage is higher than that of Hispanics (25.9%) but less than that of Caucasians (45.5%). Even among the nonresident fathers, 61.8% of the African American men reported “at least weekly” contact, an amount not widely different from that of Caucasians (67.7%) or Hispanics (54.3%). Only 11.4% of African American fathers reported “no contact,” slightly more than the percentage among Caucasians (9.3%) but less than among Hispanics (15.5%).

Looking at the extent to which non-resident nonresident fathers pro-

vide financial support for their children, revealed the following patterns.

Although again not statistically significant (largely because of sample sizes), the data suggest that the levels of support provided by nonresident African American fathers was about the same as that of Hispanic fathers. Combining this finding with the data on contact reveals two important points: (1) African American fathers are more similar to than different from Hispanic fathers and, in terms of contact, not that different from Caucasians. In both the amount of contact with and financial support for their children, these nonresident fathers *do not fit* the racial stereotype.

Based on research findings such as these, we need to reconsider the stereotype of uninvolved and irresponsible young black fathers. Even when the majority of fathers were not living with their oldest child, many had regular contact and two-thirds provided some to all of the financial support as arranged. No doubt, there are still men who make and maintain no commitment to their children. However, they can be found among all races and are not the norm among men of any particular race.

SOURCE: Smith et al. 2005, 975–1,001.

Table 11.1 ■ Financial Support for Children Provided by Nonresident Fathers, by Race

	African American	Hispanic	Caucasian
No support arranged or 0% paid	33.2%	36.4%	17.7%
1% to 99% of arranged support	12.6%	9.5%	—
100% of arranged support	54.2%	54.1%	82.3%

occupations tend to be less engaged in childrearing (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 2000). On weekends, fathers become somewhat more equal caregivers, and their involvement is greater when mothers contribute a “substantial” portion of the family income (Yeung et al. 2001). Although fathers “help” mothers with the caregiving work and supervision involved in raising teenaged children, most fathers do less of such work than most mothers (Kurz 2002).

Mental Childcare

Responsibility for childcare doesn’t only consist of what we *do* with and for our children. In her book *Thinking about the Baby: Gender and Transitions into Parenthood*, sociologist Susan Walzer (1998) examines the division of responsibility for infants in 25 two-parent households. Her focus is less on “who does what” with their children than on “who thinks what, and how often” about their children. Walzer identifies this “invisible” parenting as **mental labor**—the process of worrying about the baby, seeking and processing information about infants and their needs, and managing the division of infant care in the household (that is, seeking the “assistance” of their spouse).

Sociologist Demie Kurz reports similar kinds of mental labor among mothers of teenaged children. Fearful for their adolescents’ safety, and especially fearful about the sexual vulnerability of their teenaged daughters, mothers worry (Kurz 2002). Thus, mothers continue to worry as children grow.

Key to understanding this mental labor at both the earliest and the late adolescent or young adult stages

is that mothers feel responsible for and judged by what happens to their children in ways that most fathers do not.

Nonparental Childcare

Day Care and Supplemental Childcare

Discussions of who cares for children cannot begin and end just with parents. Supplementary childcare is a crucial issue for today’s parents of young children. Given the prevalence of two-earner households (addressed more in Chapter 12) and single-parent households, many parents must look outside their homes for assistance in childrearing. In 2001, 63% of married women with children younger than 6 years were in the labor force. Also in the paid labor force were 70% of never-married mothers of preschool-age children and 76% of divorced widowed or separated women with preschool-age children (U.S. Census Bureau 2002, Table 570). In 2001, 58% of married mothers with husbands present and children under 1 year of age were employed outside the home (U.S. Census Bureau 2002, Table 571). The combination of trends in employment status, marital status, and childbearing has increased the need for outside caregivers.

Despite the clear need for quality childcare, the United States compares poorly to many European countries. Take, for example, France, where childcare is publicly funded as part of early education (Clawson and Gerstel 2002). Nearly all 3- to 5-year-olds are enrolled in full-day programs taught by well-paid teachers.

■ *Mothers do more mental labor, including worrying, involved with raising their young and teenaged children.*



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Based upon sample estimates from the National Center for Education Statistics, 77% of the more than 8 million 3- to 5-year-olds in the United States are in some form of nonparental childcare (U.S. Census Bureau 2002, Table 550). This varies by age of child, as 31% of 3-year-olds, compared with 18% of 4-year-olds, and 13.5% of 5-year-olds are in parental care only. Income also makes a difference, as children of higher-earning families are less likely to be cared for by parents or other relatives only and are more likely to be cared for by nonrelatives.

Most experts agree that the ideal environment for raising a child is in the home with the parents and family. Intimate daily parental care of infants for the first several months to a year is particularly important. Because this ideal is often not possible, the role of day care needs to be considered. Day care homes and centers, nursery schools, and preschools can relieve parents of some of their childrearing tasks and furnish them with some valuable time of their own. Among children in nonrelative care, about 7% are looked after in their own homes. Family day care enrolls about 27%, and centers about 66% (National Household Education Survey 2001, in Wrigley and Dreby 2005).

What is the effect of early outside childcare on children? The results of research are mixed. In evaluating such data, it is important to keep in mind the family's education, the personalities involved, and the family interests—key factors that play a part in which

parents choose to return to work and which must return to work once a child is born (Crouter and McHale 1993). Furthermore, a child's personality, the child's age when the custodial parent reentered the workforce, the involvement of the other parent in the home, the quantity of time spent working or with the child, the nature of the work, and the quality of care all contribute to how childcare affects the child.

When mothers of infants enter the workforce, there is some evidence that these infants are at risk for insecure attachments between the ages of 12 and 18 months (Brooks 1996). They are also at risk for being considered noncompliant and aggressive between 3 and 8 years of age (Howes 1990). Other consequences, such as behavior problems, lowered cognitive performance, distractibility, and inability to focus attention, have been noted. These negative effects are not necessarily the consequence of being cared for by outside caregivers. Rather, they may be the result of *poor-quality* childcare. It has been noted that high-quality care, given by sensitive, responsive, and stimulating caregivers in a safe environment with low teacher-to-student ratio, can actually facilitate the development of positive social qualities, consideration, and independence (Field 1991). In school-age and adolescent children, maternal employment is associated with self-confidence and independence, especially for girls whose mothers become role models of competence (Hoffman 1979).



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■ As more women return to the workforce, a critical issue is the quality of the day care for their children. High-quality day care can facilitate the development of positive social qualities.

National concern periodically is focused on day care by revelations of sexual abuse of children by their caregivers. Although these revelations have brought providers of childcare under close public scrutiny and have alerted parents to potential dangers, they have also produced a backlash within the childcare profession. Some caregivers are now reluctant to have physical contact with the children; male childcare workers feel especially constrained and may find their jobs at risk. However, children have a far greater likelihood of being sexually abused by a father, stepfather, or other relative than by a day care worker.

Parents with children in childcare should take some degree of comfort from the evidence demonstrating that children in outside, especially in organized, childcare facilities are safe. Overall, all types of childcare are safer than care within children's own families (Finkelhor and Ormrod 2001; Wrigley and Dreby 2005).

According to a 2005 study, between 1985 and 2003 more than 1,300 children died while in childcare (Wrigley and Dreby 2005). Of these, only 110 were in center care. The total number of fatalities that occurred in "home-based care" numbered 1,030: 270 in the child's home, 656 in the caregiver's home, and another 104 cases that occurred in private homes that were undesignated as to whose homes they were.

Of those infants who died from violence in home-based care settings, more than 90% of the acts were perpetrated by caregivers; more than 60% of the deaths were the result of shaking. What can parents do to ensure quality care for their young children? In addition to the obvious requirements of cleanliness, comfort, nutritious food, and a safe environment, parents should be familiar with the state licensure regulations for childcare. They should also check references and observe the caregivers with the child. Although the needs of young children differ from those of older ones, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (1992) suggests that parents seek day care services that meet specific standards:

- More adults per child than older children require
- A lot of individual attention provided for each child
- Trained, experienced teachers who understand, praise, and enjoy children
- The same day care staff for a long period
- Opportunity for creative work, imaginative play, and physical activity
- Space to move indoors and out

- Enough teachers and assistants—ideally, at least 1 for every 5 (or fewer) children (studies have shown that 5 children with one caregiver is better than 20 children with four caregivers)
- An ample supply of drawing and coloring materials and toys, as well as equipment such as swings, wagons, and jungle gyms
- Small rather than large groups if possible

Finally, if the child shows persistent fear about leaving home, parents should discuss the problem with the childcare provider and their pediatrician.

As with a number of critical services in our society, those who most need supplementary childcare are those who can least afford it. The United States is one of the few industrialized nations without a comprehensive national day care policy. In fact, beginning in 1981, the federal government dramatically cut federal contributions to day care; many state governments followed suit.

School-Age Childcare and Self-Care

Although there are particularly acute needs when children are young, the need for childcare is not restricted to families of preschoolers. We need to pay attention to the circumstances confronting parents of children in middle school. A number of terms used to refer to caregiving for these older children, including *after-school*, *around school*, *out-of-school*, and *school-age care* (Polatnik 2002).

Many children express strong opposition to after-school programs, seeing them as geared toward "little kids", but they find activities such as sports or other recreational or artistic programs more appealing (Polatnik 2002). Unfortunately, even when the programs and activities are free or when the costs are affordable, they are neither consistent nor continuous enough to cover the whole time children are out of school before parents return from work. Many parents of these children feel pressed to allow them to stay home alone. Research indicates that approximately a third of 11- to 12-year-olds are in **self-care**—that is, care for themselves without supervision by an adult or older adolescent (Hochschild 1997; Polatnik 2002; Casper and Smith 2002).

Self-care increased through the 1980s and 1990s, and some estimates of children in self-care range as high as 7 million, including 0.5 million preschoolers (Hewlett and West 1998). In fact, self-care is rarely used for very young children. Lynn Casper and Kristin Smith (2002) report that 3% of 5- to 7-year-olds are in self-care. The percentage increases to 11% among

8- to 10-year-olds and jumps to 33% among 11- to 13-year-olds.

Self-care exists in families of all socioeconomic classes, although—contrary to stereotypes—higher income parents are more likely to allow their children to remain in self-care than are lower-income parents. After age 7 or 8, Caucasian children are more likely than either African Americans or Hispanics to be in self-care (Casper and Smith 2002).

Parents need to evaluate whether self-care is appropriate for their children. Ideally, parents and educators together would see to it that children develop such self-care skills as basic safety, time management, and other self-reliance skills, before being faced with actually having to care for themselves (Polatnik 2002, 745).

Raising Children: Theories of Socialization, Advice to Parents, and Styles of Parenting

Attitudes and beliefs about parenting flow from attitudes and beliefs about children and their development. Current attitudes about children still reflect the influence of a number of psychological theories concerning child socialization. Ultimately, as we will see, these theories have been influential in shaping some of the parenting advice offered by prominent authors in their childrearing advice books.

Psychological theories of human development give prime importance to the role of the mind, particularly the subconscious mind, which, according to psychoanalytic theory, motivates much of our behavior without our being consciously aware of the process. According to these theories, many aspects of our psychological makeup are inborn; our minds grow and develop with our bodies.

Psychological Theories

Psychoanalytic Theory

The emphasis by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) on the importance of unconscious mental processes and on the stages of psychosexual development has greatly influenced modern psychology. Freud's **psychoanalytic theory** of personality development holds that we are

driven by instinct to seek pleasure, especially sexual pleasure. This part of the personality, called the **id**, is kept in check by the **superego**—what we might call the conscience. The third component of personality, the rational **ego**, mediates between the demands of the id and the constraints of society. Freudian theory views the uninhibited id of the infant as gradually becoming controlled as the individual internalizes societal restraints. Too much restraint, however, leads to repression and the development of **neuroses**—psychological disorders characterized by anxiety, phobias, and so on.

Freud viewed the parents as the primary force responsible for the child's psychological development. He posited that between the ages of 4 and 6 years, the child identifies with the parent who is of the same sex. Not becoming like that parent was seen as a failure to reach maturity. Freud divided **psychosexual development** into five stages spanning the time from birth through adolescence: (1) oral, (2) anal, (3) phallic, (4) latency, and (5) genital (Table 11.2).

Psychosocial Theory

Erik Erikson (1902–1994) based much of his work on psychoanalytic theory, but he emphasized the effects of society on the developing ego, creating a model that has come to be known as **psychosocial theory** (Erikson, 1963). Stressing parental and societal responsibilities in children's development, each of Erikson's life cycle stages (see Table 11.2 and Chapter 9) is centered on a specific emotional concern based on individual biological influences and external sociocultural expectations and actions.

Learning Theories

Learning theorists emphasize the aspects of behavior that are acquired rather than inborn or instinctual. Return to Chapter 4 to review behaviorism, which explains human behaviors entirely on the basis of what can be observed, and social learning theory, which emphasizes the role of cognition, or thinking, in learning.

Cognitive Development Theory

Beginning in the 1930s, Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896–1980) began intensively observing and interviewing children, formulating what has become known as *cognitive development theory* (see Chapter 4). Piaget

suggested that cognitive development occurs in discrete stages for all infants and children. These stages are linked to the development of the brain and the nervous system, and can be seen as building blocks, each of which must be completed before the next one can be put into place. In Piaget's view, children develop their cognitive abilities through interaction with the world and adaptation to their surroundings. Children adapt by **assimilation** (making new information compatible with their world understanding) and **accommodation** (adjusting their cognitive framework to incorporate new experiences) (Dworetsky, 1990). Piaget identified four stages of cognitive development: (1) sensorimotor, (2) preoperational, (3) concrete operational, and (4) formal operational (see Table 11.2).

The Developmental Systems Approach

Parents do not simply give birth to children and then “bring them up.” According to the **developmental systems approach**, the growth and development of children takes place within a complex and changing family system that both influences and is influenced by the child. The family system is part of a number of larger systems (extended family, friends, health care, education, and local and national government, to name a few), all of which mutually interact. Many models or theories that use a developmental systems approach including Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, discussed in Chapter 2.

Parent-Child Interactions

Children also are socializers in their own right. When an infant cries to be picked up and held, to have a diaper changed, or to be burped, or when he or she

smiles when being played with, fed, or cuddled, the parents are being socialized. The child is creating strong bonds with the parents (see the discussion of attachment later in Chapter 5). Although the infant's actions are not at first consciously directed toward reinforcing parental behavior, they nevertheless have that effect. In this sense, even very young children can be viewed as participants in creating their own environment and in contributing to their further development (see Peterson and Rollins, 1987).

In the developmental systems model of family growth, social and psychological development are seen as lifelong processes, with each family member having a role in the development of the others. In terms of the eight developmental stages of the human life cycle described by Erikson, parents are generally at the seventh stage (generativity) during their children's growing years, and the children are probably anywhere from the first stage (trust) to the fifth (identity) or sixth (intimacy). The parents' need to establish their generativity is at least partly met by the child's need to be cared for and taught. The parents' approach to childrearing will inevitably be modified by the child's inherent nature or temperament.

Sibling Interactions

More than 80% of American children have one or more siblings. Siblings influence one another according to their particular needs and personalities. They are also significant agents for socialization. Although rivalry and aggression may appear to be the foundation of such interactions, young siblings at home spend a large percentage of their time actually playing together.

The quality of sibling interaction may have consequences for the child's later behavior (Newcombe,

Table 11.2 ■ Stages of Development: Freud, Piaget, and Erikson Compared

	Freud	Piaget	Erikson
Infancy	Oral	Sensorimotor	Trust versus mistrust
Toddler	Anal		Autonomy versus shame and doubt
Early childhood	Phallic	Preoperational	Initiative versus guilt
Late–middle childhood	Latency	Concrete operational	Industry versus inferiority
Adolescence	Genital	Formal operational	Identity versus confusion
Early adulthood			Intimacy versus isolation
Middle adulthood			Generativity versus stagnation
Late adulthood			Ego Integrity versus despair

1996). Close, affectionate sibling relationships contribute to the development of desirable characteristics such as social sensitivity, communication skills, cooperation, and understanding of social roles. Moreover, sibling relationships continue to be meaningful well into adulthood. As examined by Shelley Eriksen and Naomi Gerste (2002), adult siblings have perhaps the “most egalitarian” of all family relationships, and provide each other with a variety of supportive resources throughout their adult lives. Relationships between sisters or between brothers are often much like friendships, and sisters are especially close with each other.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic interaction theory is the sociological theory that most applies to the process of socialization. The ways in which this theory explains partner relationships was discussed in Chapter 2; here, we focus on how the theory pertains to development.

Symbolic interactionists such as Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead stressed the processes through which we develop a *social self*, the sense of who we are and how we are perceived by those around us. To interactionists, the self is not with us at birth but emerges out of interactions with others. In Cooley’s formulation, three key components comprise the **looking-glass self**, the self-concept that develops from our sense of how others view us. First, we imagine how others perceive us. Second, we draw conclusions about how others judge us. And third, based on these, we develop our ideas about ourselves (Henslin, 2000).

Mead emphasized that the self consists of both an active, spontaneous part (the “I”) and a more passive, acted upon part (the “me”), in which we see ourselves as an object of other people’s actions toward us (Henslin, 2000). This social self develops early in life and can be seen in the developing sophistication of children’s play. Play forces children to see things from someone else’s vantage point, what Mead called **taking the role of the other**. Mead noted that until about age 3 children really don’t “play” but rather engage in imitative behavior. In the **play stage** (3 to 6 years old), children play at being specific individuals, often by dressing up. By the **game stage**, they have developed sufficient self-awareness to be able to simultaneously take into account multiple perspectives and anticipate how other players might act in a given situation.

In symbolic interactionist terms, family members, especially parents, are among the more “significant”

significant others in influencing the opinions we form of ourselves. They are perhaps the purest example of what Cooley called *primary groups*, characterized by intimate, face-to-face interaction, and crucial in the development of our social selves.

From the Theoretical to the Practical: Expert Advice on Childrearing

About 150 years ago, Americans began turning to books rather than one another to learn how to act and live. They began to lose confidence in their abilities to make appropriate judgments about childrearing.

The vacuum that formed when traditional ways broke down under the effect of industrialization was filled by the so-called “experts” who dispensed their wisdom through books, radio, and TV. The old values and ways had been handed down from parents to child in an unending cycle, but with increasing mobility, this continuity between generations ceased and parents increasingly turned to these experts for help.

Contemporary parents, too, are surrounded by expert advice, some of which may conflict with their own beliefs. If an expert’s advice counters their understanding, parents should critically examine that advice, as well as evaluate their own beliefs.

Twentieth-century parenting was shaped by child-rearing advice from such notable authorities as Benjamin Spock, T. Berry Brazelton, and Penelope Leach. These three authors sold well over 40 million copies of their books advising parents, especially mothers, as to the best ways to raise their children. Building on psychological theories of development, they stressed the importance of parents understanding their child’s cognitive and emotional development.

So what do these experts advocate as effective parenting? Sharon Hays (1996) suggests that they all advocate the ideology of intensive mothering, discussed earlier in this chapter. Aside from the belief in the special nurturing capacities of mothers, this ideology contains the following assumptions about what children need from parents:

- Raising children is and should be an emotionally absorbing experience characterized by affectionate nurture. Emotional attachment is essential for healthy development; parental unconditional love

and loving nurture are seen as critical to the child, no less essential, Spock asserts, than “vitamins and calories” (Spock 1985, quoted in Hays 1996).

- It is the mother’s job to respond to the needs and wants of her child. Parents should follow the cues given by their child, submit to the child’s desires, and understand “what every baby knows” it needs from its parent (Brazelton 1987, quoted in Hays 1996). This requires knowledge of children’s needs and developmental phases, as well as great parental sensitivity.
- Parents must develop sensitivity to the particular needs of their child. This includes, for example, recognizing the different meanings of the child’s crying and understanding the unique and individual developmental pattern of the child.
- Physical punishment is frowned upon. Instead, setting limits, providing a good example of what parents expect from their child, and giving the child lots of love are preferred ways to convince the child to internalize and act upon parents’ standards. Punishment consists of “carefully managed temporary withdrawal of loving attention,” a labor-intensive, emotionally absorbing method of discipline. Once a child can question, parents are urged to reason with the child, negotiate, and discuss motives and alternative ways of acting. This strategy obviously involves more time and effort than spanking.

Contemporary Childrearing Strategies

One of the most challenging aspects of childrearing is knowing how to change, stop, encourage, or otherwise influence children’s behavior. We can request, reason, command, cajole, compromise, yell, or threaten with physical punishment or the suspension of privileges; alternatively, we can just get down on our knees and beg. Some of these approaches may be appropriate at certain times; others clearly are never appropriate. The techniques of childrearing currently taught or endorsed by educators, psychologists, and others involved with child development differ somewhat in their emphasis but share most of the tenets that follow:

- *Respect.* Mutual respect between children and parents must be fostered for growth and change to occur. One important way to teach respect is through modeling—treating the child and others respectfully. Counselor Jane Nelsen (1987) writes, “Kindness is important in order to show respect for

the child. Firmness is important in order to show respect for ourselves and the situation.”

- *Consistency and clarity.* Consistency is crucial in childrearing. Without it, children become hopelessly confused and parents become hopelessly frustrated. Patience and teamwork (maintaining a united front when there are two parents) on the parents’ part help ensure consistency. Parents should beware of making promises or threats they won’t be able to keep, and a child needs to know the rules and the consequences for breaking them.
- *Logical consequences.* One of the most effective ways to learn is by experiencing the logical consequences of our actions. Some of these consequences occur naturally—if you forget your umbrella on a rainy day, you are likely to get wet. Sometimes parents need to devise consequences appropriate to their child’s misbehavior. Rudolph Dreikurs and Vicki Soltz (1964) distinguish between logical consequences and punishment. The “three R’s” of logical consequences dictate that the solution must be *related* to the problem behavior, *respectful* (no humiliation), and *reasonable* (designed to teach, not to induce suffering).
- *Open communication.* The lines of communication between parents and children must be kept open. Numerous techniques exist for fostering communication. Among these are active listening and the use of “I” messages. In *active listening*, the parent verbally reflects the child’s communications to confirm they have a mutual understanding. “I” messages are important because they impart facts without placing blame and are less likely to promote rebellion in children than are “you” messages. Also, regular weekly *family meetings* provide an opportunity to be together and air gripes, solve problems, and plan activities.
- *No physical punishment.* Many physicians, psychologists, and sociologists have become harsh and vocal critics of physical punishment. Both the American Psychological Association and the American Medical Association oppose physical punishment of children. Many sociologists, most notably scholars who study family violence, such as Murray Straus, oppose corporal punishment; they note that it is related to later aggressive behavior from children, including later perpetration of spousal violence (Straus and Yodanis 1996). Although such punishment is used widely (Straus and Yodanis estimate more than 90% of parents of toddlers use

corporal punishment) and may “work” in the short run by stopping undesirable behavior, its long-range results—anger, resentment, fear, hatred, aggressiveness, family violence—may be extremely problematic (Dodson 1987; Straus and Yodanis 1996; McLoyd and Smith 2002). Besides, it often makes parents feel confused, miserable, and degraded right along with their children.

- *Behavior modification.* Effective types of discipline use some form of behavior modification. Rewards (hugs, stickers, or special activities) are given for good behavior, and privileges are taken away when misbehavior is involved. Good behavior can be kept track of on a simple chart listing one or several of the desired behaviors. Time-outs—sending the child to his or her room or to a “boring” place for a short time or until the misbehavior stops—are useful for particularly disruptive behaviors. They also give the parent an opportunity to cool off (Dodson 1987; see also Canter and Canter 1985).

Styles of Childrearing

Authoritarian, Permissive, Authoritative, and Uninvolved Parents

A parent’s approach to training, teaching, nurturing, and helping a child will vary according to cultural influences, the parent’s personality, the parent’s basic attitude toward children and childrearing, and the role model that the parent presents to the child.

One popular formulation contrasts four basic styles of childrearing: authoritarian, permissive or indulgent, authoritative, and uninvolved (Baumrind 1971, 1983, 1991). *Style of parenting* refers to variations between parents in their efforts to socialize and control their child (Baumrind 1991). All four styles are part of the normal variation among parents. Thus, although research tends to identify one of the following as more effective than the others, none of them is abusive or deviant (Davis 1999).

Parents who practice **authoritarian childrearing** typically require absolute obedience. The parents’ ability to maintain control is of primary importance. “Because I said so” is a typical response to a child’s questioning of parental authority, and physical force may be used to ensure obedience. Working-class families tend to be more authoritarian than middle-class families. Diana Baumrind (1983) found that children

of authoritarian parents tend to be less cheerful than other children and correspondingly more moody, passively hostile, and vulnerable to stress.

Permissive or indulgent childrearing is a more popular style in middle-class families than in working-class families. The child’s freedom of expression and autonomy are valued. Permissive parents rely on reasoning and explanations. Yet permissive parents may find themselves resorting to manipulation and justification. The child is free from external restraints but not from internal ones. The child is supposedly free because he or she conforms “willingly,” but such freedom is not authentic. Although children of permissive parents are generally cheerful, they exhibit low levels of self-reliance and self-control (Baumrind 1983).

Parents who favor **authoritative childrearing** rely on positive reinforcement and infrequent use of punishment. They direct the child in a manner that shows awareness of his or her feelings and capabilities. Parents encourage the development of the child’s autonomy within reasonable limits and foster an atmosphere of give-and-take in parent–child communication. Parental support is a crucial ingredient in child socialization. It is positively related to cognitive development, self-control, self-esteem, moral behavior, conformity to adult standards, and academic achievement (Gecas and Seff 1991). Control is exercised in conjunction with support by authoritative parents.

Finally, **uninvolved parenting** refers to parents who are neither responsive to their children’s needs nor demanding of them in their behavioral expectations. Children and adolescents of uninvolved parents suffer consequences in each of the following areas or domains: social competence, academic performance, psychosocial development, and problem behavior (Davis 1999).

Much research points to the authoritative style as especially effective. Children raised by authoritative parents tend to approach novel or stressful situations with curiosity and show high levels of self-reliance, self-control, cheerfulness, and friendliness (Baumrind 1983).

Even bigger differences, however, are found between children of more involved parents as opposed to unengaged parents (Davis 1999).

Reflections

In your family, what childrearing attitudes (authoritarian, permissive, or authoritative) predominated? Do you think these attitudes influenced your development? If so, how? Which might (or do) you find useful in raising your child?

What Influences Child Development?

Although the relative effects of physiology and environment on human development are still often much debated by today's experts, it is clear that *both* nature and nurture play important roles in children's development. In addition to biological factors, important factors affecting early development include the formation of attachments (especially maternal) and individual temperamental differences.

Biological Factors

According to biological determinists, much of human behavior is guided by genetic makeup, physiological maturation, and neurological functioning. Psychologist Jerome Kagan (1984) presented a strong case for the role of biology in early development. He asserted that the growth of the central nervous system in infants and young children ensures that motor and cognitive abilities such as walking, talking, using symbols, and becoming self-aware will occur "as long as children are growing in any reasonably varied environment where minimal nutritional needs are met and [they] can exercise emerging abilities." Furthermore, according to Kagan, children are biologically equipped for understanding the meaning of right and wrong by the age of 2 years, but although biology may be responsible for the development of conscience, social factors can encourage its decline.

Individual Temperament

Most parents with more than one child will tell you of the differences between their children that were evident almost from the moment of birth. Even parents of an only child will recount how their child seemed to come with a personality. A child's unique temperament, such as "inhibited/restrained/watchful" or "uninhibited/energetic/spontaneous," influences the way in which he or she develops (Kagan 1984). Temperamental differences may be rooted in the biology of the brain (Kagan and Snidman 1991), but temperament is also developed by interaction with the environment. For example, a baby who is vigorous, strong, and outgoing will probably encourage her parents to reinforce

the lively, extroverted, and spontaneous aspects of her personality. An infant who is shy, fearful, and cries easily, however, may inhibit them from interacting with him, thus causing him to become more shy and fearful. It is important for parents to understand "how they create the meaning of the child's individuality by their own temperaments, and their demands, attitudes, and evaluations," according to psychologists Richard and Jacqueline Lerner (Brooks 1994). Lerner and Lerner stress that if parents are sensitive to a child's unique temperament, they are better able to seek appropriate ways to influence the child's behavior.

What Do Children Need?

Parents often want to know what they can do to raise healthy children. Are there specific parental behaviors or amounts of behaviors (say 12 hugs, three smiles, a kiss, and a half hour of conversation) that all children need to grow up healthy? Of course not. Apart from saying that basic physical needs must be met (adequate food, shelter, clothing, and so on), along with some basic psychological ones, experts cannot give parents such detailed instructions.

Noted physician Melvin Konner (1991) lists the following needs for optimal child development—which, he writes, "parents, teachers, doctors, and child development experts with many different perspectives can fairly well agree on":

- Adequate prenatal nutrition and care
- Appropriate stimulation and care of newborns
- Formation of at least one close attachment during the first 5 years
- Support for the family "under pressure from an uncaring world," including childcare when a parent or parents must work
- Protection from illness
- Freedom from physical and sexual abuse
- Supportive friends, both adults and children
- Respect for the child's individuality and the presentation of appropriate challenges leading to competence
- Safe, nurturing, and challenging schooling
- Adolescence "free of pressure to grow up too fast, yet respectful of natural biological transformations"
- Protection from premature parenthood

In today's society, especially in the absence of adequate health care and schools in so many communities, it is difficult to see how even these minimal needs can all be met. Even when the necessary social supports are present, parents may find themselves confused, discouraged, or guilty because they do not live up to their own expectations of perfection.

Yet children have more resiliency and resourcefulness than we may ordinarily think. They can adapt to and overcome many difficult situations. A mother can lose her temper and scream at her child, and the child will most likely survive, especially if the mother later apologizes and shares her feelings with the child. A father can turn his child away with a grunt because he is too tired to listen, and the child will not necessarily grow up neurotic, especially if the father spends some "special time" with the child later.

Self-Esteem

High self-esteem—what Erik Erikson called "an optimal sense of identity"—is essential for growth in relationships, creativity, and productivity in the world at large. Low self-esteem is a disability that afflicts children (and the adults they grow up to be) with feelings of powerlessness, poor ability to cope, low tolerance for differences and difficulties, inability to accept responsibility, and impaired emotional responsiveness. Self-esteem has been shown to be more significant than intelligence in predicting scholastic performance. A study of 3,000 children found that adolescent girls had lower self-images, lower expectations from life, and less self-confidence than boys (Brown and Gilligan 1992). At age 9, most of the girls felt positive and confident, but by the time they entered high school, only 29% said they felt "happy" the way they were. The boys also lost some sense of self-worth, but not nearly as much as the girls.

Ethnicity was an important factor in this study. African-American girls reported a much higher rate of self-confidence in high school than did Caucasian or Latina girls. Two reasons were suggested for this discrepancy.

First, African-American girls often have strong female role models at home and in their communities; African-American women are more likely than others to have a full-time job and run a household. Second, many African-American parents specifically teach their children that "there is nothing wrong with them, only with the way the world treats them" (Daley 1991). Ac-

ording to researcher Carole Gilligan, their study "makes it impossible to say that what happens to girls is simply a matter of hormones. . . . [It] raises all kinds of issues about cultural contributions, and it raises questions about the role of the schools, both in the drop of self-esteem and in the potential for intervention" (quoted in Daley 1991).

Parents can foster high self-esteem in their children by (1) having high self-esteem themselves, (2) accepting their children as they are, (3) enforcing clearly defined limits, (4) respecting individuality within the limits that have been set, and (5) responding to their child with sincere thoughts and feelings.

It is also important to single out the child's behavior—not the whole child—for criticism (Kutner 1988). Children (and adults) can benefit from specific information about how well they've performed a task. "You did a lousy job" not only makes us feel bad but also gives us no useful information about what would constitute a good job.

Misusing the concept of self-esteem with superficial praise is probably the most common way parents mishandle the issue. Children notice when praise is insincere. If, for instance, Martha refuses to comb her hair, yet we continually tell her how good it looks, Martha quickly realizes that we either have low expectations or do not have a clue about hair care. Instead, parents can accomplish more by giving children timely, honest, specific feedback. For example, "I like the way you discussed Benjamin Franklin's inventions in your essay" is more effective than, "You're wonderful!" Each time parents treat their child like an intelligent, capable person, they increase the child's self-esteem.

Psychosexual Development in the Family Context

It is within the context of our overall growth, and perhaps central to it, that our sexual selves develop.

Within the family we learn how we "should" feel about our bodies—whether we should be ashamed, embarrassed, proud, or indifferent. Some families are comfortable with nudity in a variety of situations: swimming, bathing, sunbathing, dressing, or undressing. Others are comfortable with partial nudity from time to time: when sharing the bathroom, changing clothes, and so on. Still others are more modest and carefully guard their privacy. Most researchers and therapists suggest that all these styles can be compatible

with the development of sexually well-adjusted children as long as some basic needs are met:

- The child's body (and nudity) is accepted and respected.
- The child is not punished or humiliated for seeing the parent naked, going to the toilet, or making love.
- The child's needs for privacy are respected.

Families also vary in the amount and type of physical contact. Some families hug and kiss, give back rubs, sit and lean on each other, and generally maintain a high degree of physical closeness. Some parents extend this closeness into their sleeping habits, allowing their infants and small children in their beds each night. (In many cultures, this is the rule rather than the exception.)

Other families limit their contact to hugs and tickles. Variations of this kind are normal. Concerning children's needs for physical contact, we can make the following generalization. First, all children (and adults) need a certain amount of freely given physical affection from those they love. Although there is no prescription for the right amount or form of such expression, its quantity and quality affect both children's emotional well-being and the emotional and sexual health of the adults they will become.

Second, children should be told, in a nonthreatening way, what kind of touching by adults is "good" and what kind is "bad." They need to feel that they are in charge of their own bodies, that parts of their bodies are private property, and that no adult has the right to touch them with sexual intent.

It is not necessary to frighten a child by going into great detail about the kinds of things that might happen. A better strategy is to instill a sense of self-worth and confidence in children so that they will not allow themselves to be victimized (Pogrebin 1983).

What Do Parents Need?

Although some needs of parents are met by their children, parents have other needs. Important needs of parents during the childrearing years are personal developmental needs (such as social contacts, privacy, and outside interests) and the need to maintain marital satisfaction. Yet so much is expected of parents that they often neglect these needs. Parents may feel varying degrees of guilt if their child is not happy or has some "defect", an unpleasant personality, or even a runny nose.

However, many forces affect a child's development and behavior. Accepting our limitations as parents (and as humans) and accepting our lives as they are (even if they haven't turned out exactly as planned) can help us cope with some of the many stresses of childrearing in an already stressful world. Contemporary parents need to guard against the "burnout syndrome" of emotional and physical overload. Parents' careers and children's school activities, organized sports, Scouts, and music, art, or dance lessons compete for the parents' energy and rob them of the unstructured (and energizing) time that should be spent with others, with their children, or simply alone.

The Effects of Parenthood on Marriage and Mental Health

Early research depicted the transition to parenthood as a crisis leading to a decline in marital quality and satisfaction. We now know, however, that the impact of parenthood is variable. Although marital satisfaction declines for many new parents, it also declines for couples without children during the early years of marriage. Thus, what may have appeared to be an effect of parenthood may just reflect the ebbs and flows of marital satisfaction (Helms-Erikson 2001). That doesn't mean that parenthood has no effect on marriage; indeed, it does, but its effects depend at least somewhat on when couples become parents and on how couples negotiate the new responsibilities. As Heather Helms-Erikson puts it, parenthood leaves "some couples faring better following the birth of their first child, others worse, and still others seemingly unchanged" (2001, 1,100).

New parents show more traditional divisions of duties and lower levels of companionship compared to couples without children, but marital discontent is by no means inevitable. Even these outcomes—traditionalization and declining marital quality—depend upon the circumstances under which they become parents. Couples who become parents "early" (that is, in their late teens or early 20s) are more likely to divide their household tasks on "traditional gender lines, with wives being responsible for the bulk of housework and childcare" and men becoming more involved only when pushed. Couples who become parents in their late 20s and 30s tend to display more "collaborative" divisions of roles, and fathers' involvement tends to be both more self-determined and reflect more liberal gender ideals (Helms-Erikson 2001, 1,101).

Mental health effects of parenthood have also been explored by researchers, but they come to different conclusions. Research suggests either: (1) parents and nonparents are similar to each other in their emotional well-being; (2) parents suffer “significantly more emotional distress” than nonparents.

Ranae Evenson and Robin Simon demonstrate that the picture is more complicated and cannot be summarized by a generalization about mental health outcomes. There are both positive and negative outcomes from parenthood; there is gratification, as well as an added sense of purpose and meaning to life, from being parents. But there are stresses and demands, especially when parents have young children, that may overshadow the benefits and undermine parents’ mental health. Furthermore, the wider social and cultural context has reduced the significance, social value, and esteem attached to the parental role and left parents without the institutional supports that could make parenting less stressful (Evenson and Simon 2005).

Looking specifically at depression, Evenson and Simon compared childless adults with parents in different circumstances. After controlling for the effects of other demographic and social characteristics, compared to non-parents, parents reported *significantly higher* levels of depression. Contrary to their expectations, gender did not affect the relationship between parental status and depression. Among parents, those with minor and dependent children at home report *less, not more*, symptoms of depression than those with older children.

Embattled Parents and Societal Insensitivity to Raising Children

Even under ideal conditions, parenting is bound to be a difficult undertaking. Yet despite our cultural celebration of families and children, contemporary American society does little to ensure that families function effectively or that children are raised by involved and dedicated parents. Sylvia Hewlett and Cornel West (1998) note that in recent decades “public policy and private decision making have tilted heavily against the altruistic nonmarket activities that comprise the essence of parenting. In recent years, big business, government, and the wider culture have waged an undeclared and silent war against parents.” Hewlett and West point to a number of examples of societal indifference to the needs of parents and children:

- *Economic issues.* Matters such as corporate downsizing, declining wages, and longer workweeks have

led to more instability, impoverishment, and uncertainty, as well as less time between parents and children.

- *Popular culture.* Television programs, popular music, and movies undermine the efforts of parents through the parent bashing, violence, and sex to which they expose children.
- *Government insensitivity and neglect.* In such areas as housing and taxes, government policies have failed to support parents’ efforts to raise their children.
- *Diminishment and devaluation of fathers.* Some social programs, especially in policies of poverty and divorce, have contributed to undermining the role of fathers in children’s lives.

Combining these with alterations in household structure and increased economic vulnerability spells disaster for many fathers in their efforts to function effectively.

Diversity in Parent-Child Relationships

The diversity of family forms in our country creates a variety of parenting experiences, needs, and possibilities, as well as a range of parent-child relationships. The problems and strengths of single-parent and step-families are discussed in more detail in Chapter 15 but will be touched upon here, along with the influences of ethnicity, sexuality (that is, lesbian and gay parenthood), and aging.

Effect of Parents’ Marital Status

There is much research indicating that parental marital status affects children’s upbringing and well-being. For example, comparisons of the experiences of children in married, “intact,” two-parent households, where they reside with their biological parents, with those of children in single-parent households, remarried parent or stepparent households, and cohabiting parent households suggest that children living in families with their two married, biological parents fare best (Manning and Lamb 2003; Sun 2003). Reviewing the research literature, Yongmin Sun notes that compared to children in households with two biological

parents, children in stepfamilies and single-parent families are more likely to have behavior and drug problems, show lower rates of graduation from high school, report lower levels of self-esteem, and perform worse on standardized tests (Sun 2003).

On a few measures, such as levels of delinquency and academic achievement, teens in married stepfamilies are somewhat advantaged compared to teens from cohabiting stepfamilies (that is, unmarried couples with one partner functioning as a stepparent) (Manning and Lamb 2003).

In accounting for the differences that surface between married and cohabiting stepfamilies, and among families with two biological parents, single-parent families, and stepfamilies, economic factors (for example, family income and parents' level of education) are especially important. Economic disadvantages faced by single mothers, as well as by stepfamilies, may explain why children in such households do less well (Sun 2003). The research is consistent in demonstrating that—whether because of economic advantage, social resources, amount and kind of parental attention and commitment, or some other factors—children who live with both of their biological parents benefit in a variety of ways when compared to peers in some “non-traditional” household structures (Manning and Lamb 2003; Sun 2003).

What about Nonparental Households?

Yet another way to see the effects of parents on children is to examine the experiences of children in households with *no* biological parents. In 1996, nearly 4% of all American children under 18 years of age—roughly 2.7 million children—lived in households with neither biological parent (Sun 2003). Three-quarters of children in **nonparental households** live with relatives, most with a grandparent.

Table 11.3 ■ Living Arrangements of Children in Households without Parents

Arrangement	Percentage of Children
Grandparents	47.9
Grandparents and other relatives	27.6
Nonrelative guardians	21.9
Other arrangements	2.7

SOURCE: Sun 2003, 894–909 (U.S. Census Bureau. *Detailed Living Arrangements of Children by Race And Hispanic Origin*, Table 1).

Sociologist Yongmin Sun reports that children 15–17 are twice as likely as children under 5 to live in one of these nonparental households. In addition to age, ethnicity makes a difference: 2.1% of Asian, 2.6% of Caucasian, 4.3% of Hispanic, and 7.9% of African American children live in a household without either biological parent (Sun 2003).

Generally, research has documented that children in nonparental households suffer when compared to children who live with at least one parent. Comparisons of children in foster care, albeit only one type of nonparental care, show negative effects in areas ranging from children's mental health, academic achievement, drug use, and behavioral problems (Sun 2003). Likewise, children in nonparental “kinship care” have been found to have poorer health, mental health, and school achievement than children in “parent present” families, whether single- or two-parent families (Sun 2003). Sun suggests that it is likely that the absence of mothers has the greatest impact. In accounting for the observed effects in nonparental households, Sun argues that the differences “are either completely or partially attributable to resource differences between these family structures.” Key resources include income and parents' education, parents' expectations for their children's education, frequency of conversations between parents and children about school, involvement of parents with the schools and with other parents, and children's experiences of various cultural activities. No differences of note existed between kinship care and nonrelative care, and no differences were observed between girls and boys in how they fare in nonparental environments (Sun 2003).

Ethnicity and Parenting

There are other important differences among parents. A person's ethnicity is not necessarily fixed and unchanging. Researchers generally agree that ethnicity has both objective and subjective components. The objective component refers to ancestry, cultural heritage, and, to varying degrees, physical appearance. The subjective component refers to whether someone feels he or she is a member of a certain ethnic group. If a child has parents from different ethnic groups, ethnic identification becomes more complex. In such cases, the child may identify with both groups, only one group, or according to the situation—Latino when with Latino relatives and friends or Anglo when with Anglo friends and relatives, for example. However we

choose to identify ourselves, our families are the key to the transmission of ethnic identification.

A child's ethnic background can affect how he or she is socialized. According to some researchers, minority families socialize their children to more highly value obligation, cooperation, and interdependence (Demo and Cox 2000). It has been suggested that Mexican American parents tend to value cooperation and family unity more than individualism and competition. Asian Americans and Latinos traditionally stress the authority of the father in the family. In both groups, parents command considerable respect from their children, even when the children become adults. Older siblings, especially brothers, have authority over younger siblings and are expected to set a good example (Becerra 1988; Tran 1988; Wong 1988). Many Asian Americans tend to discourage aggression in children and expect them to sacrifice their personal desires or interests out of loyalty to their elders and to family authority more generally (Demo and Cox 2000). In disciplining their children, Asian parents tend to rely on compliance based on the desire for love and respect.

African Americans, too, may have group-specific emphases in the ways they socialize their children. As reported in Chapters 3 and 4, African American parents tend to socialize their children into less rigid, more flexible gender roles. They reinforce certain traits, such as assertiveness and independence, in both their sons and their daughters. They also seek to promote such values as pride, closeness to other African Americans, and racial awareness (Demo and Cox 2000).

Groups with minority status in the United States may be different from one another in some key ways, but they also have much in common. Such groups often emphasize education as the means for the children to achieve success. Studies show that immigrant children tend to excel as students until they become acculturated and discover that it's not "cool." Minority groups are often dual-worker families, which means that the children may have considerable exposure to television while the parents are away from home. This may be viewed as a mixed blessing: on the one hand, television may help children who need to acquire English language skills; on the other, it can promote fear, violence, and negative stereotypes of women and minority-status groups. Some American children are raised with a strong positive sense of ethnic identification, however, that can also result in a sense of separateness imposed by the greater society.

Discrimination and prejudice shape the lives of many American children. Parents of ethnic minority

children may try to prepare their children for the harsh realities of life beyond the family and immediate community (Peterson 1985). According to Mary Kay DeGenova (1997), to reduce an environment of racism, it is important for us to identify the similarities among various cultures. These include people's hopes, aspirations, desire to survive, search for love, and need for family—to name just a few. Although superficially we may be dissimilar, the essence of being human is very much the same for all of us.

Gay and Lesbian Parents and Their Children

Researchers believe that the number of gay families is in the millions. They estimate between 2 million and 14 million children have at least one gay parent (Kantrowitz 1996; Stacey and Biblarz 2001). The high ends of these estimates include parents with adult children no longer in the home and use generous definitions of sexual orientation (including anyone with homoerotic desires). If we restrict the estimates to families with children 19 years or younger, there are anywhere from 1 million to 9 million children of lesbian or gay parents, representing between 1% to 12% of all children in this age group (Stacey and Biblarz 2001).

According to psychologist Charlotte Patterson, a leading authority on gay and lesbian parenting, the current research on the subject has some limitations. It has mostly focused on lesbian mothers, and on young children (pre-adolescent). Plus, it has been rare to have longitudinal studies in which researchers follow a sample of gay and lesbian parents and/or their children over time (Patterson 2005). These limitations aside, existing research fails to support the notion that children of lesbian mothers or gay fathers are negatively affected (Patterson 2000, 2005; Stacey and Biblarz 2001).

In fact, most gay or lesbian parents have been in heterosexual marriages (Patterson and Chan 1999). Concerns about gay and lesbian parents tend to center on questions about parenting abilities, fear of sexual abuse, and worry that the children will become gay or lesbian themselves. Research has failed to support such concerns or identify any significant negative outcomes for children. In fact, much research has failed to identify any meaningful differences between children of gay and heterosexual parents. Sociologists Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz's (2001) and psychologist Charlotte Patterson's (2000, 2005) reviews

■ *Families headed by lesbians or gay men generally experience the same joys and pains as those headed by heterosexuals, but they are also likely to face insensitivity or discrimination from society.*



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of existing research on the effect of parental sexual orientation on children finds that most research supports either a “no effects” or a “beneficial effects” interpretation.

In summarizing the research on children of gay and lesbian parents as they compare with children of heterosexual parents, Patterson notes that there are no significant differences in their gender identities, gender-role behaviors, self-concepts, moral judgment, intelligence, success with peer relations, behavioral problems, or successful relations with adults of both genders (Patterson 2000, 2005). Stacey and Biblarz suggest that there may be some defensiveness on the part of researchers, especially from those sympathetic to gay and lesbian parents. Aware of the social stigma and lack of support gay and lesbian families face, there may be a tendency to minimize differences. In so doing, some differences that might be strengths of gay and lesbian families may go underemphasized.

Fears about Gay and Lesbian Parenting

Heterosexual fears about the parenting abilities of lesbians and gay men are exaggerated and unnecessary. There are minimal differences between lesbians and

heterosexual women in their “approaches to childrearing” or their mental health (Patterson 2005). No studies identify ways in which lesbian mothers or gay fathers are “unfit parents” or less fit than heterosexual parents.

Fears about gay parents’ rejecting children of the other sex also are unfounded. Such fears reflect the popular misconception that being gay or lesbian is a rejection of members of the other sex. Many gay and lesbian parents go out of their way to make sure that their children have role models of both sexes (Kantrowitz 1996). Gay and lesbian parents also tend to say that they hope their children will develop heterosexual identities to be spared the pain of growing up gay in a homophobic society. Research finds children of gay males and lesbians to be well adjusted and no more likely to be gay as adults (Goleman 1992; Flaks et al. 1995; Kantrowitz 1996).

Ultimately, it is the quality of parenting and the harmony within the family—not the sexuality of the parents—that matters most to children. Like children of heterosexual parents, children whose gay or lesbian parents are in “warm and caring relationships,” experiencing less stress and conflict, and receiving more support from partners (as well as from other family members) tend to fare better.

Real Families

Having a Gay Parent



Consider, finally, the following account by Abigail Garner, author of *Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is* (2005) and creator of the website, site FamiliesLikeMine.com:

When I was 5, my father came out as gay to his family and friends and moved in with another man. By the time I entered elementary school, I was learning about the cruelty of homophobia. “Faggot” was the favorite put-down among the boys in my class. I didn’t know what it meant until my parents explained that it was a mean way of saying someone was gay. Since my classmates seemed to be so hostile about gay people, I decided I should keep quiet about my family.

People who knew me then are surprised by my outspokenness. “Can’t you move on?” they ask. But I am driven to speak about my past because the consequences feel less risky now that I’m an adult. I no longer worry about people who might try to “protect” me from my father by taking me away from him. I don’t have to wonder every time we go out: is this the time he gets “caught”? I remem-

ber when I was about 8, I was walking down the street between my father and his partner and holding both of their hands. It felt dangerous, because by standing as a link between them I was “outing” them. What would happen if others realized my dad was gay? Would he lose his job? Get beaten up? Be declared an unfit parent?

While the threat of being separated from him was never real, I spent plenty of time worrying about it. Fortunately, my mother (who is heterosexual) made no attempt to limit my father’s custody rights. If she had, she probably would have gained full custody. Our courts have a history of favoring straight parents over gay ones in custody battles.

My parents did their best to make me feel good about where I came from. They told me that even though they were divorced and my dad was gay, we were no less valid than any other family. But they could do nothing about the abundance of negative messages about homosexuality that I interpreted as direct attacks on my family.

Why did so many people—including TV evangelists and talk-show guests—think that my dad was such a terrible person? They didn’t even know him. While my

friends had monsters keeping them awake at night, I lost sleep over the anti-gay rhetoric spouted by right-wing politicians.

College marked a significant change in my life. The 1,500 miles between home and school gave me the distance I needed to figure out who I was, separate from my parents. I thought I had outgrown the label of “daughter from a gay family.” Soon after I graduated, however, I connected with a group of teens with gay and lesbian parents while volunteering for a youth organization. When I realized how similar their stories were to mine, I was inspired to start talking openly about my own experiences.

When I do speak, many people assume I’m a lesbian. And for those who don’t respect homosexuals, it’s the only reason they need to dismiss my arguments for gay rights. Once I identify myself as straight, however, I’ll watch their rigid, angry faces soften to ask me questions. I’ll see the handful of college students in the audience who were rolling their eyes sit up and listen. It gives me hope that they’ll hear my message: it wasn’t having a gay father that made growing up a challenge, it was navigating a society that did not accept him and, by extension, me.

Summarizing the research on parenting by, and children of, gays and lesbians in a report for the American Psychological Association, Charlotte Patterson makes the following strong assertion:

“(T)here is no evidence to suggest that lesbian women or gay men are unfit to be parents. . . . Not a single study has found children of lesbian or gay

parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents. Indeed, the evidence to date suggests that home environments provided by lesbian and gay parents are as likely as those provided by heterosexual parents to support and enable children’s psychosocial growth” (Patterson, 2005:15)

Parenting and Caregiving in Later Life

Parenting Adult Children

Many years ago, a Miami Beach couple reported their son missing (Treas and Bengtson 1987). Joseph Horowitz still doesn't understand why his mother became so upset. He wasn't "missing" from their home in Miami Beach: he had just decided to go north for the winter. Etta Horowitz, however, called authorities. Social worker Mike Weston finally located Joseph in Monticello, New York, where he was visiting friends. Etta, 102, and her husband, Solomon, 96, had feared harm had befallen their son Joseph, 75. As the Horowitz story reminds us, parenting does not end when children grow up.

By some measures, children are "growing up" later than at any time in the past. They lack the means to be financially independent and delaying entry into marriage, parenthood, and independent living, away from their families. In one study that compares 1960 census data to 2000 census data, researchers noted that there has been a significant decrease in the percentage of young adults who, by age 20 or 30, have completed all of the following five traditionally defined major adult transitions: leaving the parental home, completing their schooling, achieving financial independence (being in the labor force and/or—for women—being married and a mother), marrying, and becoming a parent. In 1960, more than three-fourths of women and two-thirds of men had reached all five of these markers by age 30, yet in 2000, less than half of women and less than a third of men had achieved all five of these (Furstenberg et al. 2004).

More than at any time in recent history, parents are being called on to provide financial assistance (either college tuition, living expenses or other assistance) to their young adult children. Robert Schoeni and Karen Ross conservatively estimate that nearly one-quarter of the entire cost of raising children is incurred after they reach 17. Nearly two-thirds of young adults in their early 20s receive economic support from parents, while about 40 percent still receive some assistance in their late 20s (Furstenberg, et al, 2004).

Most parents with adult children still feel themselves to be parents even when their "children" are middle-

aged. However, their parental role is considerably less important in their daily lives. They generally have some kind of regular contact with their adult children, usually by letters, phone calls, or e-mails; parents and adult children also visit each other fairly frequently and often celebrate holidays and birthdays together. Financially, they may make loans, give gifts, or pay bills for their children. Further assistance may come in the form of shopping, house care, and transportation and help in times of illness.

Parents tend to assist those whom they perceive to be in need, especially children who are single or divorced. Parents perceive their single children as being "needy" when they have not yet established themselves in occupational and family roles. These children may need financial assistance and may lack intimate ties; parents may provide both until the children are more firmly established. Parents often assist divorced children, especially if grandchildren are involved, by providing financial and emotional support. They may also provide childcare and housekeeping services.

Parents tend to be deeply affected by the circumstances in which their adult children find themselves. Adult children who seem well adjusted and who have fulfilled the expected life stages (becoming independent, starting a family, and so on) provide their aging parents with a vicarious gratification. On the other hand, adult children who have stress-related or chronic problems (for example, with alcohol) cause higher levels of parental depression (Allen, Blieszner, and Roberto 2000).

Some elderly parents never cease being parents because they provide home care for children who are severely limited either physically or mentally. Many elderly parents, like middle-aged parents, are taking on parental roles again as children return home for financial or emotional reasons. Although we don't know how elderly parents "parent," presumably they are less involved in traditional parenting roles.

Reflections

Think about your grandparents. How many are alive? What kind of relationship do you (or did you) have with them? What role do they (or did they) play in your life and your family's life?

Grandparenting

The image of the lonely, frail grandmother in a rocking chair needs to be discarded. Grandparents are often not old, nor are they lonely, and they are certainly not

absent in contemporary American family life. Grandparents are “a very present aspect of family life, not only for young children but young adults as well,” writes Gregory Kennedy (1990).

Grandparenting is expanding tremendously these days, creating new roles that relatively few Americans played a few generations back. Three-quarters of people aged 65 and older are grandparents (Aldous 1995). Grandparents play important emotional roles in American families; the majority appear to establish strong bonds with their grandchildren (Kennedy 1990; Strom et al. 1992–1993).

They help achieve family cohesiveness by conveying family history, stories, and customs. Grandparents influence grandchildren directly when they act as caretakers, playmates, and mentors. They influence indirectly when they provide psychological and material support to parents, who may consequently have more resources for parenting (Brooks 1996).

Grandparents seem to take on greater importance in single-parent and stepparent families and among certain ethnic groups (see Figures 11.1 and 11.2). They often act as a stabilizing force for their children and grandchildren when the families are divorcing and reforming as single-parent families or stepfamilies. The significance of grandparents appears to vary by family form (Kennedy and Kennedy 1993). When compared with children from intact families, children in single-parent families report greater closeness and active involvement with their grandparents; children in stepfamilies are even closer.

According to the 2000 Census, 5.8 million grandparents live in the same home as one of their grandchildren. In 42% of these 4.1 million households (some households have more than one grandparent), grandparents had primary caregiving responsibility for their



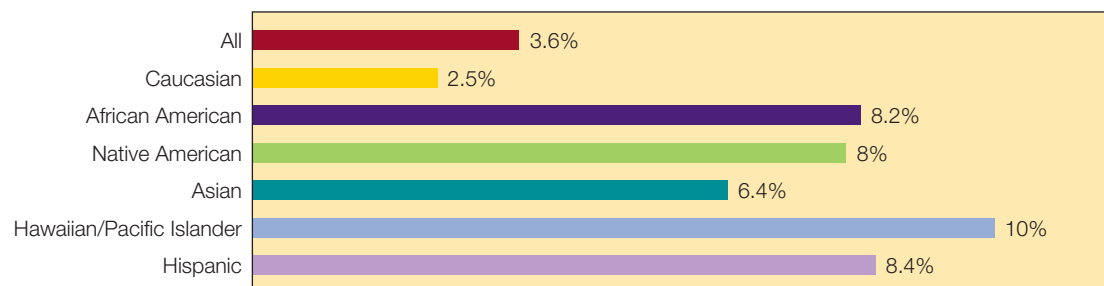
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■ Grandparents are important to their grandchildren as caregivers, playmates, and mentors.

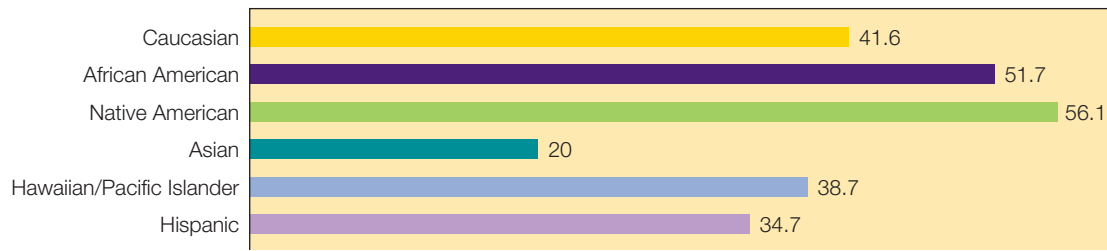
grandchildren, age 18 or younger. Of these “grandparent caregivers,” 39% had cared for their grandchildren for at least 5 years (Simmons and Dye 2003).

Grandparents, especially grandmothers, are often involved in the daily care of their grandchildren (see Figure 11.2). A recent study found that African Americans had twice the odds of becoming caregiving grandparents, partly reflecting the long tradition of caregiving that goes back to West African cultures. In

Figure 11.1 ■ Percentage of Population, Age 30 Years or Older, Living with and Responsible for Grandchildren, 2000



SOURCE: Simmons and Dye 2003.

Figure 11.2 ■ Percentage of Residential Grandparents Who Are Responsible for Grandchildren

SOURCE: Simmons and Dye 2003.

the crack cocaine epidemic, grandmothers and great-grandmothers play critical roles in rearing the children of addicted parents (Minkler and Roe 1993).

Andrew Cherlin and Frank Furstenberg (1986) identified three distinct styles of grandparenting:

- *Companionate.* Most grandparents perceive their relationships with their grandchildren as companionate. The relationships are marked by affection, companionship, and play. Because these grandparents tend to live relatively close to their grandchildren, they can have regular interaction with them. Companionate grandparents do not perceive themselves as rule makers or enforcers; they rarely assume parent-like authority.
- *Remote.* Remote grandparents are not intimately involved in their grandchildren's lives. Their remoteness, however, is geographic rather than emotional. Geographic distance prevents the regular visits or interaction with their grandchildren that would bind the generations together more closely.
- *Involved.* Involved grandparents are actively involved in what have come to be regarded as parenting activities: making and enforcing rules and disciplining children. Involved grandparents (most often grandmothers) tend to emerge in times of crisis—for example, when the mother is an unmarried adolescent or enters the workforce following divorce. Some involved grandparents may become overinvolved, however. They may cause confusion as the family tries to determine who is the real head of the family.

Single parenting and remarriage have made grandparenthood more painful and problematic for many grandparents. Stepfamilies have created step-grandparents, who are often confused about their grandparenting role. Are they really grandparents?

The grandparents whose sons or daughters do not have custody often express concern about their future grandparenting roles (Goetting 1990). Although research indicates that children in stepfamilies tend to do better if they continue to have contact with both sets of grandparents, it is not uncommon for the parents of the noncustodial parent to lose contact with their grandchildren (Bray and Berger 1990).

A variety of circumstances may lead to situations in which the grandparent role and the relationships with grandchildren are strained if not disrupted. Divorce and single parenthood may be the most prominent of such circumstances, but death of a spouse, distance, or estrangement between parents and children can all impede grandparent–grandchild relationships (Keith and Wacker 2002). Over the past 40 years, grandparent visitation statutes have been enacted in all 50 states and grandparents' visitation rights have been increased.

Generally, courts have not wanted to expand grandparents' rights at the expense of parents' rights, especially parents' rights to control the custody of their children (Keith and Wacker 2002).

Children Caring for Parents

Parent–child relationships do not flow in one direction. A common experience faced by many American families is the need to provide care for aging or ill parents. The idea of the *sandwich generation* (see Chapter 9) captures the experience of many adults, sandwiched between raising their own children and caring for their parents. However, there are circumstances that create **parentified children**—children forced to become caregivers for their parents well before adulthood (Boszormenyi and Spark 1973, quoted in Winton 2003). In situations of “parentification,” children may be pressed into taking

care of parents who have become chronically ill, chemically dependent, mentally ill, incapacitated after a divorce or widowhood, or socially isolated or incapacitated (Winton 2003).

Much of the psychological and sociological literature depicts parentified children as pathological or deviant. Psychologists may focus on how taking on caregiving responsibilities for a parent or parents while still a child or adolescent disrupts normal developmental processes. Sociologists tend to focus on the nonnormative nature of children being responsible for their parents. However, definitions of normative and nonnormative vary by culture. Among many populations other than white, middle-class, European Americans, parentification is expected and obligatory. Similarly, rather than pathological, parentification under certain circumstances may be beneficial for the development of certain personality traits, the maintenance of certain family relationships, and the acquisition of particular skills. Chester Winton (2003) suggests that parentification may be a normative part of childhood in many contemporary American families, where children *temporarily* take care of a parent (for example, after surgery or during an illness). This fits Gregory Jurkovic's continuum of caretaking roles, where parentification is normal and adaptive under certain conditions. *Destructive parentification* occurs when the circumstances become extreme and long-term and the responsibilities children carry are age-inappropriate (Jurkovic 1997, cited in Winton 2003).

Winton suggests the following as possible consequences of parentification:

- *Delayed entry into marriage.* If children have had to care for parents (or siblings) over a number of years, they may decide to delay taking on the caretaking that comes with marriage and choose, instead, to take time for themselves where they can concentrate on their own needs more than or instead of the needs of others.
- *Acquisition of certain personality characteristics.* Having played a parentified role over time might lead to the development of such traits or tendencies as the following:
 - Masochistic or self-defeating behavior because of having had to meet others' needs and suppress their own compulsive behavior, such as perfectionism
 - Feelings of excessive responsibility for others that make it difficult to say "no" to people, to set limits, or to concentrate on their own needs

- *Relationship and intimacy problems.* Parentified children may seek as adult partners people who they can be caretakers for—in other words, "dependent, needy people" who have emotional or physical disabilities or have been emotionally "wounded" by past experiences.
- *Career choices.* The "caretaker syndrome" associated with parentification may lead people to jobs where they can physically or emotionally take care of people, such as jobs in social work, medicine, nursing, teaching, or preschool childcare.

Caring for Aging Parents

Most elder care is provided by women, generally daughters or daughters-in-law (Mancini and Blieszner 1991). Psychologist Rita Ghatak estimates that "eighty percent of the time it's the female sibling who is taking most of the responsibility" (quoted in Rubin 1994). Elder caregiving seems to affect husbands and wives differently. Women report greater distress, greater decline in happiness, more hostility, less autonomy, and more depression from caregiving than do men (Fitting et al. 1986; Marks, Lambert, and Choi 2002). This may partly be because men approach their daily caregiving activities in a more detached, instrumental way. Another factor may be that women often are not only mothers but also workers; an infirm parent can sometimes be an overwhelming responsibility to an already burdened woman (Rubin 1994). Interestingly, when caring for a parent out of the household, women feel a *caregiver gain*, a greater sense of purpose in life than that felt by noncaregiving women (Marks, Lambert, and Choi 2002). Fortunately, most adult children participate in parental caregiving in some fashion when needed, whether it involves doing routine caregiving, providing backup, or giving limited or occasional care (Mancini and Blieszner 1991).

A study of 539 older participants found that although there are psychological benefits associated with intergenerational support, excessive support received from adult children may be harmful, eroding competence and imposing excessive demands (Silverstein, Chen, and Heller 1996). In balancing personal needs with those of families, it is important to define the level of care that is both appropriate and necessary.

Caregiver Conflicts

Even though elder care is often done with love, it can be the source of profound stress. Caregivers often experience conflicting feelings about caring for an elderly relative. The conflicts experienced by primary caregivers include the following (Springer and Brubaker 1984):

- Earlier unresolved antagonisms and conflicts
- The caregiver's inability to accept the relative's increasing dependence
- Conflicting loyalties between spousal or child-rearing responsibilities and caring for the elderly relative
- Resentment toward the older relative for disrupting family routines and patterns

- Resentment by the primary caregiver for lack of involvement by other family members
- Anger or hostility toward an elderly relative who tries to manipulate others
- Conflicts over money or inheritance

Coping Strategies

Caregiver education and training programs, self-help groups, caregiver services, and family therapy can provide assistance in dealing with the problems encountered by caregivers. In addition, elders receiving Medicaid may be eligible for respite care and homemaker or housework assistance. Because elder care involves complex emotions raised by issues of dependency, adult children and their parents often postpone discussions until a crisis occurs.

Summary

- Although today's mothers and fathers have many things in common with mothers and fathers throughout history, in many ways they have to chart a new course because both motherhood and fatherhood have changed.
- Many women find considerable satisfaction and fulfillment in motherhood. Although there is no concrete evidence of a biological maternal drive, it is clear that socialization for motherhood does exist.
- Whether employed outside the home or not, women who become mothers face high expectations and cultural contradictions. The *ideology of intensive mothering* portrays mothers but not fathers as essential caregivers and depicts childrearing as child centered, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive. At the same time, however, at-home mothers are often perceived negatively, as though they were unproductive. Such contradictions surface in popular culture, as well as in wider societal attitudes and beliefs.
- Employed mothers earn less than employed women without children. Married mothers pay a steeper wage price than never-married mothers.
- The role of the father in his children's development has been reexamined, and expectations of fathers have been redefined. The traditional instrumental roles are being supplemented, and perhaps supplanted, by expressive ones. This may be truer of our beliefs about fathers (the *culture of fatherhood*) than of fathers' real behavior (the *conduct of fathers*).
- There appear to be two extremes among contemporary fathers: Many men aspire for active, meaningful involvement with their children; others, especially divorced or never-married fathers, often maintain little contact with their children.
- Fatherhood affects many areas of men's lives. Fathers differ from nonfathers in their social activities, intergenerational family ties, and their occupational behavior.
- Most hands-on childcare is done by mothers. Fathers are less engaged with and accessible to their children than are mothers. When directly engaged with children, fathers more often play or assist in personal care activities. Age and gender of children, age and gender attitudes of fathers, and fathers' occupations and earnings all affect father involvement.

- Mothers also do more of the *mental labor* of childcare, including worrying about, gathering information, and managing fathers' involvement. Even as children enter adolescence, mothers do more of the mental labor, including monitoring where their children go, who they are with, and what they do.
- Supplementary childcare outside the home is a necessity for many families. Most children who receive outside care are in childcare centers. Overall, childcare is safe, and center-based care is safer than "family day care" or paid care by others in the child's home.
- The effect of childcare on children depends on the quality of care. The development and maintenance of quality day care programs should be a national priority.
- Increasing attention has been paid to school-age childcare. Many communities provide after-school care through the schools. A common alternative to such care is *self-care*.
- Children have a number of basic physical and psychological needs, including adequate prenatal care; formation of close attachments; protection from illness and abuse; and respect, education, and support from family, friends, and community. High self-esteem is essential for growth in relationships, creativity, and productivity. Parents can foster high self-esteem in their children by encouraging the development of a sense of connectedness, uniqueness, and power, and by providing models.
- *Psychosexual development* begins in infancy. Infants and children learn from their parents how they should feel about themselves as sexual beings.
- Parents differ in terms of their styles of parenting. Four styles are: *authoritarian*, *permissive* (or *indulgent*), *authoritative*, and *uninvolved*. Of these, most research portrays the authoritative as most effective.
- Today's parents often rely on expert advice. It needs to be tempered by confidence in their parenting abilities and in their children's strength and resourcefulness. Contemporary strategies for childrearing include the elements of mutual respect, consistency and clarity, logical consequences, open communication, and behavior modification in place of physical punishment.
- Parenthood has effects on marital relations and on mental health, especially depression rates, of parents. New parents tend to display more traditional role relationships, although this depends partly on the age at which they become parents. Across all parental statuses (married, single, step, custodial, and empty nest), parents appear to suffer more emotional distress than nonparents.
- Children's needs include adequate prenatal nutrition and care, appropriate stimulation and care of as newborns and infants, formation of at least one close attachment during the first 5 years of life, quality childcare when a parent or parents must work, protection from illness, freedom from physical and sexual abuse, supportive friends, safe and nurturing schools, and protection from premature parenthood.
- Overall, American society is not particularly supportive of the needs of parents and children. Economic, cultural, and political institutions have neglected to adopt policies that would allow parents and children deeper and more frequent contact with each other.
- Parents' marital status, ethnicity, and sexuality all influence parenting and child socialization.
- Children who live in households without any parents (either foster care or "kinship care" from other relatives) have lower academic performance, educational aspirations, and psychological well-being (self-esteem and locus of control) and greater likelihood of behavioral problems (for example, truancy and fighting) and cigarette smoking.
- Parents of ethnic minority status may try to give their children special skills for dealing with prejudice and discrimination.
- Most gay and lesbian parents are, or have been, married. Studies indicate that children of both lesbians and gay men fare best when the parents are secure in their sexual orientation.
- Parenting roles continue through old age. Older parents provide financial and emotional support to their children; they often take active roles in childcare and housekeeping for their daughters who are single parents. Divorced children and those with physical or mental limitations may continue living at home.
- Grandparenting is an important role for the middle-aged and aged; it provides them and their grandchildren with a sense of continuity. Grandparents often provide extensive childcare for grand-

children. Grandparenting can be divided into three styles: companionate, remote, and involved.

- In some instances, such as when parents are chronically ill, chemically dependent, mentally ill, or incapacitated after a divorce or widowhood, children become caregivers to their parents. Such *parentified children* may develop unique personality characteristics, experience problems in their intimate relationships, or develop and make career choices that are the results of having had to care for their parents.
- Family caregiving activities often begin when an aged parent becomes infirm or dependent. Conflicts that may arise involve previous unresolved problems, the caregiver's inability to accept the parent's dependence, conflicting loyalties, resentment, anger, and money or inheritance conflicts.

Key Terms

accessibility 394	culture of
assimilation	fatherhood 392
accommodation 400	developmental systems
authoritarian	approach 400
childrearing 403	ego 399
authoritative	engagement 394
childrearing 403	game stage 401
bifurcation of	id 399
fatherhood 393	ideology of intensive
conduct of	mothering 391
fatherhood 392	

indulgent	psychoanalytic
childrearing 403	theory 399
looking-glass self 401	psychosexual
mental labor 396	development 399
neuroses 399	psychosocial theory 399
nonparental	self-care 398
households 408	superego 399
parentified children 414	taking the role of the
permissive	other 401
childrearing 403	uninvolved
play stage 401	parenting 403

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