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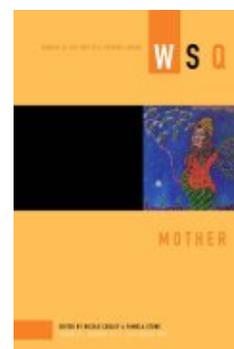
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Taking Custody of Motherhood: Fathers' Rights Activists and the Politics of Parenting

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TAKING CUSTODY OF MOTHERHOOD: FATHERS' RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND THE POLITICS OF PARENTING

JOCELYN ELISE CROWLEY

What makes a good father in contemporary American society? And more important, can good fathers effectively “mother” their children? Without a doubt, over the past several decades, the cultural imagery surrounding what it means to be a fully participatory father has shifted dramatically (Burgess 1997; Coltrane 1989; Hobson and Morgan 2002; Ranson 2001). Instead of the ideal father being simply the breadwinner of the family, this “new father”—with commentators primarily spotlighting the desired behavior of the white male—combines both earning a living with the day-to-day care of his children (Pleck 1987). In other words, not only does he work full time, but he also is present at his children’s birth, goes to school conferences, does their laundry, and prepares their meals. He is fully connected and essential to his children’s well-being (Farrell 2001). This “new father” is, in fact, just like any other modern mother.

While this recent paternal imagery has been extremely powerful, scholars have also noted that fathers’ actions have yet to meet this emerging ideal.¹ While their contributions to child care have been increasing over time, particularly since the 1980s, fathers still lag behind mothers in the amount of parental work they perform on a regular basis (Ahmeduzzaman and Roonarine 1992; Aldous, Mulligan, and Bjarnason 1998; Sandberg and Hofferth 2001; Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson 2004). In fact, in one of the most recent and comprehensive studies that explored this division of responsibility issue, in 2000, Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie (2006, 116) found enormous gaps in paid and unpaid work between the sexes, with women allocating 12.9 hours a week to child care, and men only completing 6.5 hours on this task.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that real world practices have yet to catch up to the new cultural ideal of fatherhood, fathers’ rights groups have seized upon this compelling imagery in making their political claims. More specifically, these fathers’ rights organizations, composed primarily of white,

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middle-class men, have grown in number in recent years in order to challenge the legal system that they must confront when their families dissolve. One of their most prominent assertions is that the family law system, specifically through its child custody procedures that tend to physically place children with their mothers, denies them the opportunity to effectively personify their “new father” roles. In this essay I explore precisely how fathers’ rights groups have tapped into the cultural symbolism of the “new father” in order to buttress their claims.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The fathers’ rights movement began to grow quite rapidly in the United States during the 1980s. With some estimates placing them at ten thousand members in total (Crowley 2008, 37), fathers’ rights activists across the board charge that once their families break up, they lack certain parental rights (Clatterbaugh 2000; Coltrane and Hickman 1992; Fineman 1991; Williams and Williams 1995). Their grievances revolve around two critical areas: child support and child custody policy (Crowley 2003). For fathers’ rights groups, these two issues are highly interlinked. Activists complain that policy makers force them to pay exorbitant amounts of child support to the mothers of their children, who typically receive primary physical custody. However, these payments would not be necessary at all, argue these men, if the child custody system were reformed in a way to automatically give fathers equal time with their children.

Across the United States, judges make custody determinations for dissolving families. There are two types of joint custody at stake. *Joint legal custody* refers to a partnership between parents over the major decisions that they must make regarding their children’s well-being; *joint physical custody* refers to equally shared living arrangements for the involved children. Although joint legal custody is fairly common in the United States, joint physical custody is not and therefore is the focus of fathers’ rights groups’ concerns. According to the Current Population Survey, in 2005, approximately 84 percent of all custodial parents were mothers, while only 16 percent were fathers (Grall 2007, 3). When probed about their more formal custody arrangements, only about 28 percent of these custodial parents reported having some type of joint legal or joint physical custody order in place.²

Given these statistics that overwhelmingly favor the mother in terms of child placement, fathers’ rights groups have begun a concerted effort to publicize what in their view are the faulty methods utilized by judges in

conducting custody proceedings. Judges currently use the “best interest of the child” standard (May 2001), which was designed to give them latitude in considering a variety of factors in making their placement decisions, including each child’s physical, emotional, mental, religious, and social needs. However, *exactly because of* this extremely nebulous framework, fathers’ rights activists contend, judges have become rogue public servants who routinely ignore the value that fathers bring into their children’s lives with impunity.

METHODOLOGY

In order to most effectively map out the complaints of fathers’ rights groups against the current custody system, I turned to the words of the members themselves through in-depth interviewing, as other scholars studying families have done in the past (Arendell 1995; Lareau 2000; Waller 2002). As part of a larger project on the fathers’ rights movement in the United States, I first attempted to map out the population of groups in existence. As a result of searching the Internet and print directories, I secured a potential pool of fifty groups located across the country. After I contacted each group leader to ask for permission to study the group, twenty-six organizations agreed to participate, including seven from the Northeast, eight from the Midwest, nine from the South, and two from the West.³

After I interviewed each group leader, I notified potential member respondents via e-mail lists, postings on websites, sign-up sheets, and referrals about the possibility of participating in the study. In terms of collecting their views on custody, I asked each respondent the following question: “Some people have said that child custody and visitation laws are unfair. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?” Out of the total 158 interviews conducted, 103 respondents spoke about child custody (with the remainder primarily focusing on visitation law in their answers); these 103 interviews served as the data for the analysis conducted here. Previous research suggested possible thematic categories that could emerge from the interviews (Crowley 2008); I then used standard content analysis methods with the software program Atlas.ti to code each response as falling either into one of three categories of custody complaints (described below), or into an “other” category if the member offered a different type of custody complaint.

RESULTS

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics on the sample of 103 fathers’ rights activists included in this analysis. The mean age of the sample was forty-

six, and activists had, on average, two children. As these individuals were older with a relatively manageable number of children, they tended to have a strong sense of competency regarding their parenting capabilities. The majority were divorced/separated (52) rather than married (42) or widowed/single (9). Men dominated these groups, at 90 in total, although some women, 13 here, joined as new wives, girlfriends, and relatives of men experiencing child support and child custody issues. A handful of women also affiliated as child advocates or as noncustodial parents (Crowley 2009). In terms of race, most were white, at 90 members, and in terms of education, 64 members had at least a bachelor's degree or more. With respect to occupation, 86 members were employed in white-collar jobs, and the sample as a whole divided about equally in terms of partisan identification (40 Republicans, 25 Democrats, 37 independents, and 1 other). Finally, 29 came from the Northeast, 48 from the Midwest, 22 from the South, and 4 from the West.

In their critique of the child custody system, fathers' rights activists maintain that the processes that are presently in operation in terms of determining child placement work against them in several fundamental ways. More specifically, they lodge three unique critiques of custody adjudication procedures as they currently exist in the United States. These criticisms include their belief that custody processes are (1) antichild, cited by 17 percent of all respondents; (2) excessively interventionist, described by 23 percent of all respondents; and (3) excessively biased toward women's interests, mentioned by 37 percent of all respondents.⁴

CUSTODY PROCESSES ARE ANTI-CHILD

One of the most stinging complaints that fathers' rights activists press against current custody determination processes is that they are decidedly antichild in outlook. Even though judges are supposed to use the "best interest of the child" standard when making their decisions, fathers' rights activists charge that they neglect to consider several important needs of children, who, in their personal opinion, must have a paternal figure in their lives in order to fully flourish.

The first need of all children, according to fathers' rights activists, relates to parent-child bonding time. The research on children in joint custody situations does show that children in these particular arrangements spend more time with both parents and move more frequently between houses than do children in sole custody situations (Amato and Gilbreth 1999; Ferreiro

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC
CHARACTERISTICS

FATHERS' RIGHTS
MEMBERS

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Current marital status</i> | |
| Married | 42 |
| Divorced/separated | 52 |
| Widowed/single | 9 |
| <i>Gender</i> | |
| Male | 90 |
| Female | 13 |
| <i>Race</i> | |
| Caucasian | 89 |
| Black | 8 |
| Hispanic | 1 |
| Asian | 1 |
| Multiple/unspecified | 2 |
| Refuse | 2 |
| <i>Education</i> | |
| High school diploma/GED | 9 |
| Associate's degree/some college/vocational training | 30 |
| Bachelor's degree | 34 |
| Graduate degree (master's, doctorate, or professional) | 30 |
| <i>Employment</i> | |
| White collar | 86 |
| Blue collar | 11 |
| Retired | 4 |
| Unemployed/student/volunteer | 2 |
| <i>Political Party Identification</i> | |
| Republican | 40 |
| Democrat | 25 |
| Independent | 37 |
| Other/no response | 1 |
| <i>Region</i> | |
| Northeast | 29 |
| Midwest | 48 |
| South | 22 |
| West | 4 |
| <i>Mean Age</i> | 46 |
| <i>Mean number of biological children</i> | 2 |
| <i>Sample size</i> | 103 |

1990; Kline et al. 1989; Lee 2002). However, the scholarship on the quality of these relationships is much more mixed. Donnelly and Finkelhor (1992), for example, examined how various custody arrangements affect affection and support transmitted from parents to children; they found no relationship between joint physical custody and higher absolute levels of these measures of emotional communication. In contrast, other scholars have argued that bonds do become strengthened in circumstances of joint physical custody, especially between fathers and children (Shapiro and Lambert 1999). However, it is difficult to know whether these results are the product of improved access and contact or due to the joint custody arrangement itself. In addition, these benefits are likely to be erased in cases of high-conflict families (Kline, Johnston, and Tschann 1991; Maccoby et al. 1993).

Despite these somewhat mixed research findings, fathers' rights activists argue that judges do not consider the special bond that the activists assert children must form with their fathers from the day that they are born in order to fully thrive. Edmund, a forty-nine-year-old divorced father of a six-year-old daughter, considered himself to be very lucky. He had a joint physical custody arrangement with his ex-wife. However, he committed himself to working with his local fathers' rights group because he wanted all men to be as fortunate as he was in his case. In this instance, Edmund appealed to judges to consider the precious months that he thought were critical for fathers and babies to interact.

You miss so much [when you don't have joint custody], especially when a child is real young. You miss that and that bond is not there. You almost have to be with that child. Like me, since I get her 50 percent of the time, you know, I see that growth. I see those changes. I see her losing her teeth. I see the different things that she is going through. To me, not being able to [see her] . . . [I would] miss so much about that child and that child doesn't get attached to you. It is like when a baby is born, if you don't bond with that child, you are never going to bond with that child and that child is never going to bond with you. I think that happens throughout the child's life. (Edmund)

Other fathers' rights activists were not as convinced of the importance of an early father-child bond as they were to the centrality of a father-figure in a child's life as that child ages. In either case, fathers' rights groups maintained

that mothers and fathers bond with their children at different points during their development. In their view, fathers need to interweave themselves into their children's lives as they get older, but unfortunately, the courts tend to ignore this important relationship when they overwhelmingly place children with their mothers.

The second need fathers' rights activists maintain that the courts ignore relates to positive developmental outcomes for children; to these men, fathers play critical roles in their children's maturation processes. Here again, however, the research is mixed about the benefits of joint physical custody in producing this beneficial result. On the one hand, scholars have noted that children in joint living arrangements have higher self-esteem and a better outlook on their families' dissolution than do children in sole-custody situations (Bauserman 2002; Bender 1994). They also do not report feeling "torn" between their parents, as some joint custody opponents fear, and they tend to look back at their childhood experiences as adults with a sense of closure (Fabricius and Hull 2000). On the other hand, if there is a high degree of tension between the separating parents, then joint custody can be disastrous for children, harming them emotionally and behaviorally over the long run (Johnston, Kline, and Tschann 1989).

Again, though, despite these mixed research findings, fathers' rights groups tend to argue that joint physical custody is always best for all children's developmental progress. For example, Brent expressed his concern over the custody system's dismissal of paternal involvement in every child's emotional development. Brent was a twice-divorced and currently remarried forty-five-year-old father of two adult children—one young man and one young woman—in their early twenties. While he was able to have a lot of contact with his son growing up, for a variety of reasons, he remained estranged from his daughter. In his view, this lack of contact with his daughter hindered her emotional maturation.

Well, it takes two people to make [a child], [and] it takes two people to raise one; that's why we come in pairs. My, it's interesting. My son, who had a lot of contact with me and his mother—and I was very careful not to run his mom down— . . . my son's emotional development in many ways is much better than my daughter's in spite of the fact that she is the older of the two. He has a more balanced view of the world whereas my daughter, I call her "the little general." There are . . . very great differences in the basic functioning

of their emotional lives. Having a lot of contact with both parents is extremely important to these kids. (Brent)

Overall, Brent expressed remorse over the fact that his daughter did not receive the proper “balance” from both parents that she needed in order to develop a more well-rounded view of the world. Instead, in Brent’s view, she approached her life with much more rigidity than he preferred and, as a result, would continue to suffer from this developmental stunting throughout her adult life.

CUSTODY PROCESSES ARE EXCESSIVELY INTERVENTIONIST

The second area of concern for fathers’ rights activists in the area of child custody relates to what they view as the excessive intervention of the courts in their lives. This type of intervention manifests itself in a variety of ways, but all result in fathers feeling as if they are at the whim of a very capricious, judicially based process.

For some fathers, their objection to excessive intervention centers on their sense that any type of custody action by the courts is simply unconstitutional. Sean, fifty-six years old, compared the fatherly relationship that he had with the son produced by his first marriage with his current situation, where he barely sees his six-year-old son and his four-year-old daughter because of a bitter breakup with their mother, his third wife.

My oldest son, the one who is [now] twenty-five, when his mother and I split, we had equal joint custody. She moved about four blocks away; I had my son a week, then she had him a week. We lived in the same school district; he could ride his bike between us. I would pick him up from school on Wednesday and I would keep him until the following Wednesday morning when I dropped him off at school. This way there was none of this waiting-on-the-doorstep kind of stuff. No confrontation between parents. . . . I could remain active in his education and monitor his homework and his tests and his health, all phases of his life. Under the current situation [with my two youngest children], I am no longer a parent. I have relinquished my constitutional right to be a parent. . . . I have no constitutional rights. (Sean)

Like many other activists in fathers' rights groups, Sean took his rights to be a full parent as inherent in the Constitution. He, in essence, felt no civil rights protections from the document that was supposed to protect his freedom as a United States citizen.

On a more practical but no less spirited level, fathers' rights activists also critique what they view as excessive intervention in the form of judges' belief in their own omnipotence in resolving custody disputes. Kip, a forty-nine-year-old twice-divorced father of three daughters, aged twenty-two, fifteen, and thirteen, had exactly this complaint when he argued that it was impossible for judges to make any type of serious custody decision within the short period of time in which they meet a family.

I know of people who have custody of their kids who should never be allowed near a child again. I also know people who get to see their kids once every two weeks who should have been given custody. Again, each case has to be taken individually and that's a shortcoming of our judicial system. You have a judge who in thirty minutes is supposed to decide who's going to be a parent and who is not. I would not want that job. I could not sleep at night having that job and knowing the effect it would have on kids' lives. Granted, someone has to do it, but to me, it's kind of ludicrous to ask someone to make that decision in thirty minutes with very little knowledge. (Kip)

Kip recognized that judges face an uphill battle when they are asked to make decisions in these types of cases. However, he also maintained that the court system could do a better job than permitting one person, a judge, to evaluate what might be the best living arrangements for children whom they do not know.

In response to criticisms like these, over the past several decades, the custody system has opened up the decision-making process to many types of experts who can help judges make their final placement rulings. For example, in some cases, courts might rely on mental health evaluators to generate recommendations regarding the best interest of the children. These mental health evaluators, also known as custody or forensic evaluators, undertake intensive studies of a family in order to produce a formal report to the court. They can conduct interviews with all those individuals who are responsible

for the well-being of the involved children, including but not limited to doctors, teachers, babysitters, and others (Gould 1998; Stahl 1994). In addition to these types of evaluators, the courts can appoint guardians *ad litem* or attorneys for the child (Mason 1999). Guardians *ad litem* are not necessarily attorneys; instead, their job is to protect the interests of the children in all custody proceedings, and they might be social workers or psychologists. Attorneys for the child, in contrast, are lawyers involved in these proceedings as agents for the children; they directly articulate the children's wishes to the court.

Yet, while designed to be helpful players in presenting information to the courts, these experts do not necessarily command the deference of judges. In fact, in numerous cases, fathers' rights activists such as Jorge, a forty-five-year-old father of a ten-year-old daughter, maintained that the judges viewed these expert statements as only somewhat relevant to their decision-making process.

We brought in a custody expert [to help decide our case]. . . . The gentleman in his testimony indicated that he had done three hundred to five hundred custody evaluations. In spite of this, the judge did not go along with what his recommendation was. . . . The judge said that he'd been sitting on the bench for seventeen years, but the judge saw us for three days of testimony (total number of hours, let's see two, five, and maybe a total of seven hours). The custody evaluator followed us for close to two years and probably interacted with us for tens of hours. Who do you think is going to have a better idea of what went on with the case? . . . The judge in his testimony even admitted that he didn't read the custody evaluator's recommendations, although they were provided for him well in advance. (Jorge)

As is evident in his words, Jorge felt disappointed that the court system, which was designed to help him, actually ended up causing him more desperation.

In addition to their complaints that the Constitution was not being followed, as well as that individual judges acted as if they were omnipotent, other fathers' rights activists pointed to the greed of lawyers as the main motivation for excessive state intervention in their lives. The more conflict that is generated by attorneys, according to fathers' rights activists, the more

hours lawyers can bill for their services. Joanna, a divorced mother of four, argued that the entire adversarial custody system was established so that lawyers could make more money off of family dissolution.

The attorneys try to make it a win/lose [situation], [like] somebody is going to win the children; they are like an award. I think [that this is] because attorneys, by nature, are adversarial and greedy. The American society is greedy. The more money attorneys can bill through conflict, the more heartache they create and the more really everyone suffers. . . . The more a system can be matter of fact without the competition and tug of war, the more rational it will be. I think that would eliminate parents [fighting]. . . . I've totally depleted my retirement. It has just been hemorrhaging because of attorney fees. (Joanna)

According to Joanna and other fathers' rights activists, profit making off custody disputes has become so commonplace that any new initiatives that attempt to create the best situation for all family members will be met with massive resistance. In this pessimistic view, the custody system will never suspend those activities from which it profits.

CUSTODY PROCESSES ARE TOO BIASED TOWARD WOMEN

The third barrier preventing fathers from assuming joint physical custody of their children, according to fathers' rights activists, is that the current processes in place are too biased in favor of women. These activists maintain that these biases can assume many forms, but all result in fathers receiving far less custody than they deserve.

One of the ways this bias emerges is when judges, in the view of fathers' rights activists, penalize men for the division of household labor that they assumed when the family was still together. Burt, a twice-divorced forty-seven-year-old father of three daughters who later remarried, argued that decisions made in the context of a unified family about who would do more child care have no relevance to decisions that need to be made now that the family is split apart.

Many judges say, "I'm going to try to preserve the relationships that [the family] had before [it broke up]." What you had before [however], was maybe dad working and mom staying home; that

is not going to happen after divorce. [Custody decisions] need to reflect the new relationship. The trade-offs that parents make when they are married are different after they are divorced. A man may be more inclined to work more hours to provide for his family when he's married but if he does that after he's divorced, when does he get to see his children? (Burt)

Like others in fathers' rights groups, Burt voiced his frustration over the courts' inability to understand that a family breakup is an opportunity to divide child care responsibilities in new ways.

Other men in fathers' rights groups pointed to pro-female bias in what they viewed as a court system overly sympathetic to women's allegations of domestic violence. Many fathers' rights activists vigorously campaign against what they see as the rise in false allegations of abuse, which they maintain are simply weapons used against them in order to strip their custody rights away (Crowley forthcoming). Artie, a forty-two-year-old father of two sons and one daughter, focused his attack on the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), originally passed in 1994 and later reauthorized in 2000 and 2005. At the time of its initial passage, VAWA embodied a broad-ranging federal stance against violence and included funding for shelters, training for policy officers and judges related to violence, reporting requirements for schools and police, and the establishment of violence-awareness programs across the United States (Dragiewicz 2008). While VAWA has earned widespread support among women's advocates, fathers' rights activists have argued that the law systematically oppresses men by transforming all fathers into potential criminal abusers.

There is a federal law . . . called the Violence Against Women Act. . . . In layman's terms, as translated as I understand it, is if a woman feels threatened in a domestic situation, she can call the police and have a man arrested based on that allegation without investigation and the police have a duty to act. There is no such law for men. That was written for the National Organization for Women who campaigned for Bill Clinton. . . . I have been personally affected by that federal law, here locally. Any time my ex-wife gets mad at me, which is all the time, she can just call 911 and say, I feel threatened, I'm a woman, I demand protection under the Violence Against Women Act. . . . I've been arrested. . . .

She demands [to know] where I'm going to be, what I'm doing with the kids. . . . For people who haven't been through it, [they] don't know what the heck I'm talking about. (Artie)

For fathers' rights activists like Artie, the custody system has been captured in a very detrimental way by domestic violence interest groups. These organizations have wrongly, in their view, persuaded judges that women are almost always blameless when there are allegations of violence, leaving fathers to carry the burden of unjustified guilt simply by accident of their sex. Inevitably, then, when judges ultimately consider the question of which parent should get custody, they almost always select the mother.

Criticizing another form of pro-female bias, fathers' rights activists also complain that the system creates a power imbalance between the sexes after a family breakup and that judges intentionally give more power to women because they see them as more stable parents. Others argue that the system is so biased against them that a mother has to have a horrible character flaw or be engaged in an illegal activity not to obtain custody. On this point, Lukas, a forty-three-year-old divorced father of three daughters, made the case that even if mothers behave in a negative fashion, judges consistently view them as the more capable parent.

The mother is automatically looked at as the one who is the nurturer and primary caregiver and therefore the courts automatically . . . nine times out of ten, I would say, award custody to her. The man has to fight like hell to get any type of visitation. You go through all kinds of mental . . . evaluation programs where you actually see a psychiatrist and you are evaluated as to whether or not you are going to be a good parent and be able to see your child. It is a tough fight for a man, it really is, to get any type of custody unless the mother was arrested for drug possession and was under the influence or maybe caught prostituting herself. It would have to be something devastating for the father to get custody. (Lukas)

In either case, according to fathers like Lukas, judges' decisions almost uniformly place the mother in the dominant position when it comes to caregiving rights. This bias, according to fathers' rights activists, means men have to beg, plead, and cajole their way into their own children's lives.

Finally, fathers' rights activists charge that custody procedures favor

women because the system is intended to channel the most money to them in the postdissolution family context. Devin, thirty-five years old, was the father of two sons under the age of three. One of these sons was a nonmarital child whom he had when he was briefly separated from his wife. Of course, since he ultimately reconciled with his wife, the courts required that he pay child support to the nonmarital child's mother. With this decree, Devin complained that the courts were compelling him into participating in an income-redistribution scheme with which he did not agree.

Right now custody is the ticket to the free paycheck. The more custody time someone gets . . . the more she makes. . . . The problem is this. . . . I'm not a woman-hater . . . don't get me wrong . . . [but] why is it that women are going to make money off of that? If they both have the child the same amount of time and they both make the same amount of money, how can you tell me that she should get money for this? . . . It's asinine is the only way to describe it.
(Devin)

For Devin, the easy way out of this predicament would be to award both parents more equal physical custody. However, according to Devin and fathers' rights activists like him, because of the court's favoritism toward women in terms of protecting them financially, mothers almost always receive primary physical custody.

CONCLUSIONS

As this essay has clearly demonstrated, fathers' rights groups take great umbrage at the treatment of men as parents in cases of familial dissolution. Through their own words, these activists have criticized a multilayered child custody-determination system that, in their view, does not take their role as competent parents seriously enough. Because of these deficiencies in the system, fathers' rights activists maintain, once their families break apart, they no longer have the ability to effectively parent their children. They, in other words, no longer have the opportunity to either "father" or "mother."

One potential solution to these fathers' concerns might be the replacement of the best-interest-of-the-child standard with a new set of guidelines that could help rectify these inequities over the long run, and a key contender that suits this purpose is the primary-caregiver model. Simply put, the primary-caregiver model gives priority custodial preference to those

parents who have played the most significant role in their children's lives prior to the family's dissolution (Boyd 2003). The primary-caregiver standard on its face is gender neutral, although undoubtedly, given the current division of child care labor within the majority of American homes, women would still be granted physical custody more often than men. However, if this standard were uniformly adopted across all the states, it would have the power to dramatically influence behavior toward a more egalitarian set of parental responsibilities as both men and women internalize the potential consequences of their current caretaking arrangements. In this world, both parents would then have the opportunity to "mother" both before and after a dissolution, undoubtedly to the developmental and emotional benefit of children living all across the country.

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NOTES

1. While much of this research has focused on the activities of white fathers, there is a significant body of scholarship that is currently emerging on the behavior and expectations of African American fathers as well (Coles 2002; Hamer 2001; Hamer and Marchioro 2002; Waller 2002).

2. See Table 9 at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/chlds05.pdf>.

3. These twenty-six groups constitute the total of each respondent's primary affiliation. Some were members of multiple groups at one point in time—belonging to other groups in this study or, in most cases, groups that I did not have permission to study. Counting these second and third affiliations would bring the total group involvement by these respondents to thirty-four. In terms of the twenty-four out of the initial fifty groups that did not participate, four simply declined, two had ceased meeting in person when contacted, fourteen did not respond, and four no longer had functioning contact information.

4. Some members cited more than one theme when asked to describe their complaints about the custody system; in addition, 40 percent of all respondents noted other reasons for their objections to the current system.

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