Chapter 4

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Introduction

Women's roles are not specialized to child minding only in most cultures. "It takes a village" to raise a child has become "national folk wisdom" and is often diverse in practice. Those who can be spared are most likely to care for children, often relieving the mother of child minding tasks.

Who's your mommy?

Children often spend more time with grandmothers or aunts than with their mothers and in the majority of cultures, a father's role is non-existent.

The "whole village" notion is supported by early infant care shared among extended family and neighbors. Infant care is often shared with entire villages, individual sponsors designated at birth (Inuit), and wet-nurses.

Infant care

Energy costs greatly increase for mothers when breastfeeding. Taboos are often associated with breastfeeding and strict weaning is encouraged in many societies. Undernutrition is a problem in less-developed countries where parents often invest the minimum to keep a child alive in contrast to developed societies or neontocracies that view children as “cherubs.”

Peek-a-boo

Euro-American adults engage face-to-face and talk to their infants, which is rare in other societies. Many societies believe children develop and learn best without adult intervention (!Kung, Kpelle).

Playing with dolls

Primatologists refer to juvenile females' eagerness to care for children as "baby lust." Many primates assign infant care responsibilities to daughters which increases their reproductive success. Allomothering daughters learn how to care for their own infants, a benefit largely unknown to our own society where sibling-care is absent.

Toddler rejection

In societies with long-birth intervals (IBI) toddlers are indulged, but the IBI is short in most sedentary societies and toddlers are weaned and “rejected” by their mothers, sent off to play with peers.. Not only do mothers “lose interest,” but other adults as well; older siblings are often involved in toddler care.

Her brother's keeper

Older siblings, especially female, are expected to care for and are often more tolerant with toddlers than adults. Toddlers learn expectations and responsibilities through interaction with older peers who can usually discipline them.

Playing on the mother ground

Many societies have an area, or *mother ground*, for mixed-age playgroups where adults can casually oversee activity, which is also common among many primates. This *mother ground* can be a designated area in a village, or a general idea that adults will discreetly supervise children and inform parents if their child misbehaves. Modern societies most likely do not have a *mother ground* where adults would be reluctant to inform parent of misbehavior.

Going to grandma's place

The presence of grandparents increases the likelihood of more offspring. Grandmothers are often seen as wise and help with childcare. The "taking-in" of children by relatives is very common in many societies, especially between poorer and wealthier relations. In more contemporary societies, grandparents providing childcare may fade, contemporary Japanese grandmothers now express resentment if asked to be their grandchildren's caretaker.

Life with(out) father

What we view as normal, a nuclear family with a father as the head of household, is actually rare. Males are often absent for long periods herding livestock, military service, etc., and uncertain paternity is common. Fathers are rarely expected to assist in childcare, if they do care for children, maternal behavior is seldom exhibited.

Minding' is practiced in the Caribbean when a child could potentially be a man's offspring and he provides indirect rather than direct care of the child. Similar practices are seen among many cultures in relation to paternity where fathers often invest more in a biological child than a step-child or where the paternity is uncertain.

Also, negative impacts may be lessened in societies where divorce is common if there is less paternal involvement.

A consistent role of fathers is that of a disciplinarian. Those without fathers are often stigmatized as maladjusted because of a lack of disciplinary action.

Professional child-minders

Wealth often promotes a hiring-out of childcare responsibilities. In ancient Greek and Roman society, many professions were dedicated to the upbringing of children. During the Middle Ages, many hired wet-nurses or sent their child to be apprenticed at an early age.

New metaphors for childrearing

The Reformation introduced new ideas on the upbringing of children. Puritans argued that it was the parents' responsibility, not professionals, to effectively raise righteous individuals. Industrialization also shrunk the childcare available, resulting in a more modern view of parenthood.

The "Great" transition

The "Great" or "demographic" transition refers to successful adults' decision to have few children. In modern society, the burdens of childcare are not dispersed among kin and entire villages, but belong solely to the parents.

Earning income from child labor has been outlawed which has resulted in decreased fertility. Women's work has moved to the public sphere but domestic responsibilities have not decreased, which can explain the "great" transition along with greater expenses to provide for children.

Raising children in the 21st century

A village model does not translate to modern society and parents are now solely responsible for their children.

Contrasting views on child indulgence has little merit, but family income and mother's education seem to impact children a great deal. Higher income results in the ability to provide labor-saving resources and a wider variety of childhood activities. Educated mothers generally post-pone childbearing until they are emotionally and financially stable.

Modern parents use various modes of teaching which is rarely found in non-mainstream modern parenting. Teaching parents develop relationships with their children which insures success for both themselves and their children in modern society.