

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

**D**espite a steady increase in the quantity and quality of studies of infants in non-Western populations (Munroe and Munroe 1971; Konner 1977; Chisholm 1983; Super and Harkness 1982), there are few detailed ethnographic studies of the father-infant relationship in these populations. Theoretical orientations, field methodologies and the nature of father-infant interaction have resulted in an emphasis on mother's role and a lack of data and understanding of father's role. Mother-oriented theories of infant and child development have guided cross-cultural research. The theories of child development of Ainsworth (1967), Bowlby (1969), Freud (1938), and Harlow (1961), which have generated much of the cross-cultural research, all view the mother-infant relationship as the prototype for subsequent attachments and relationships. According to Freud and Bowlby, for instance, one had to have a trusting, unconditional relationship with his or her mother in order to become a mentally healthy adult. These influential theorists generally believed that the father's role was not a factor in the child's development until the Oedipal stage (three to five years old). The field methods to study infancy cross-culturally reflected this theoretical emphasis on mother. Behavioral observations were either infant or mother-focused and conducted only during daylight hours; father-focused and evening observations were not made. The mother or infant-focused daylight observations thus neglected the father's care of other children and the father's activities with his

own infant in the early evening hours before bed or during the night. Also, standardized questionnaires and psychological tests were generally administered only to mothers. One consistent result from the cross-cultural studies was that fathers provide substantially less direct care to infants than mothers. In fact, all cross-cultural studies to date indicate that a number of other female caretakers (older female siblings, aunts, grandmothers) provide more direct care to infants than do fathers. Since fathers are not as conspicuous as mothers and other females during daylight hours, researchers tend to emphasize a "deficit" model of fathers (Cole and Bruner 1974). The researchers do not know much about the father's role and therefore simply claim that it is minimal. These factors have contributed to the complete absence of systematic studies in non-Western societies of the father's role in infant and child development.

Given the paucity of systematic research in non-Western societies on father-infant interaction and on the father's role in the stages of child development, it is ironic that this variable (i.e., the degree of father vs. mother involvement with children) should be so consistently invoked as an explanatory factor in the literature. It is hypothesized to be related, for example, to universal sexual asymmetry (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974); variations in sexual dimorphism (Wilson 1975); the origins of the human family (Lancaster and Lancaster 1987); male and female reproductive strategies (Draper and Harpending 1982); contemporary patterns of gender-activity differentiation (Brown 1970; Burton, Brudner, and White 1977); the association of males with culture and females with nature (Ortner 1974); smooth functioning of the family (Zelditch 1955); and proper moral development (Hoffman 1981).

Active father involvement with offspring is also implicated in gender-differentiated personality, cognitive and other social-behavioral traits in U.S. studies. The father's role in child-rearing, for example, is linked to high achievement in females (Block, van der Lippe and Block 1973) and higher performance on cognitive tasks, particularly spatial tasks (Radin 1981), and the presence of an analytical cognitive style in both girls and boys (Witkin and Berry

1975). Father absence, in contrast, is associated with aggressive and violent behavior among adolescent males, particularly in the United States (Anderson 1968; Bacon, Child, and Barry 1963; Siegman 1966; Whiting 1965). This is generally attributed to male sexual identity problems arising from the lack of a suitable masculine role model during the formative stages. Father absence has also been suggested to produce authoritarian, dominant, egotistic behavior in boys in other cultural settings, with the warning that one must control for the effects of family task assignments (Ember 1973). Finally, the father's degree and style of child-rearing involvement is thought to be related to self-esteem (Sears 1970) and social confidence (Fish and Biller 1973).

Other purportedly universal gender-differentiated personality traits are attributed to female predominance and male absence in child-rearing. Chodorow (1973), for example, focuses on a young boy's relative lack of exposure to his father. This produces, she argues, a perception of manhood that necessitates the rejection of women and of things symbolizing femininity, such as infant care. Women, in contrast, acquire their sexual identity more easily and directly, by observing their mothers. As a result, women are less individuated than men, have more flexible ego boundaries, and are more dependent and relational. Rosaldo (1974), building on Chodorow, postulates additional orientations in women that arise from the female reproductive role: particularistic versus universalistic orientation; vertical rather than horizontal interpersonal ties; and an experientially generated affinity toward ascribed rather than achieved status.

Anthropologists and psychologists have theorized extensively on how the father's role influences behavior without the benefit of systematic studies of the father's role in non-Western populations. This study was stimulated, in part, by the general lack of data on the father's role in non-Western settings and the resulting "deficit" model of the father's role, but also by the results of psychologists' studies of fathers in the United States. Extensive psychological research on the American father-infant relationship has consistently

demonstrated that fathers are more likely than mothers to engage in vigorous play with the infant (Arco 1983; Belsky 1980; Clarke-Stewart 1978; Crawley and Sherrod 1984; Field 1978; Lamb 1976, 1977a, 1985; Parke and O'Leary 1976; Yogman 1982; but see Pederson, Anderson, and Cain 1980, for an exception). An American father's vigorous play with the infant is evident three days after birth and continues throughout infancy. The American data have been so consistent that some researchers have indicated a biological origin (Clarke-Stewart 1980). The function of the father's physically stimulating play with the infant is suggested to be the critical means by which father-infant attachment is established and the initial means by which the infant learns social competence (Lamb 1981). Mother-infant attachment develops as a consequence of the frequency and intensity of the relationship, while the infant's attachment to the father occurs as a result of the highly stimulating interaction. Since mothers and fathers represent different styles of interaction, infants are likely to develop differential expectations of them, which in turn increases the infants' awareness of different social styles. Later in childhood, it is suggested, it is primarily the father who introduces the child into the public sphere. These functional differences in parenting style are suggested as support of the expressive/instrumental role theory first introduced by Durkheim (1933) and elaborated by Parsons and Bales (1955). According to this theory, the male role is primarily "instrumental": oriented to the external world and responsible for helping the child establish ties with individuals outside the family (i.e., social competence). In contrast, the female role is "expressive": responsible for the emotional and affective climate of the home, the nurturance of the young, and domestic tasks.

The few observational studies conducted in industrialized nations outside the United States have questioned the universality of the American data. Swedish fathers play slightly more with their infants than do Swedish mothers, yet the distinctive physical style of American fathers does not exist (Lamb et al. 1982). Swedish infants demonstrate significantly more attachment toward mothers than to-

ward fathers (Lamb et al. 1983), whereas American infants exhibit no such preference (Lamb 1976, 1977b). This fits the theoretical model mentioned above—if Swedish fathers do not provide distinctive playfulness, they will not become as affectively salient as the primary caretaking mothers. German fathers observed with their newborns in the mothers' hospital rooms also do not exhibit this stimulating playfulness (Parke, Grossman, and Tinsley 1981). Although the American studies of fathers are remarkably consistent, the few European studies suggest that more extensive cross-cultural research is essential to understanding the father's role in infant development.

This study extends our understanding of the father's role by examining father-infant interaction among the Aka Pygmy hunter-gatherers of Central Africa. The Aka are exceptional in comparison to other societies in that fathers are actively involved with infants and are second only to mothers in the amount of direct care to their infants. My ethnographic work with the Aka began in 1973, but I did not start to systematically study fathers' roles until 1984. After living with the Aka on and off for ten years, I recognized that Aka fathers were exceptionally close to their infants, but this did not seem remarkable as they were exceptionally close to everyone in camp (see pl. 1). I never considered a study of fathers' roles until I read some of the Western psychological literature on fathers' roles while working as a health coordinator for a child development agency. My subjective observations of Aka fathers were inconsistent with the broad characterizations of fathers' roles described in the psychological literature. I had no idea that Aka fathers would turn out to be unique by cross-cultural standards.

My overall aim was to describe in quantitative and qualitative detail the nature of Aka father-infant interaction, and to relate this interaction to biological, ecological, demographic, social, and ideological constraints. I was interested in identifying factors that might explain the nature of and intracultural variability in the Aka father-infant relationship. Numerous types of data could have been collected on Aka fathers, however, I emphasized the father's level of

involvement and style of interaction (as compared to the mother's and others'). Primary questions investigated within each of these areas are listed below:

1. Degree of paternal involvement
  - a) How often do fathers actually interact with their infants?
  - b) How often are fathers available to their infants?
  - c) If fathers are not involved with infants, what other activities are they involved in?
  - d) How do children characterize the nature of their involvement with their fathers?
2. Paternal versus maternal parenting style
  - a) Are there distinctions between the mother's and the father's play behavior with their infants?
  - b) Do mothers and fathers hold their infants for different purposes?
  - c) What do mothers and fathers do while they hold the infant?
  - d) Do infants show different types of attachment behavior to mothers and fathers?
  - e) How do children view their mother's and father's parenting styles?

## TERMINOLOGY

Before detailing the nature of the father's role among the Aka, it would be useful to define some basic terms.

The terms *involvement* and *investment* are often used interchangeably, but in this study father *involvement* is emphasized and is considered only one type of father's *investment*. Father involvement is any active or passive care of the infant. Holding, feeding, grooming, cleaning, and playing are types of active involvement while touching and being within one meter or within view of the infant are considered passive types of involvement. These passive forms of involvement are sometimes called proximity maintenance behaviors. The father is available to the infant and can provide help

if the infant is hurt, can keep the infant out of danger (e.g., keep from crawling into the fire or touching hot items), and can provide a model for the infant to learn particular tasks. Investment refers to a much broader range of the father's activities and is considered any kind of action or behavior that will increase the fitness of offspring. Generally, two types of investment are recognized—direct and indirect (Kleiman and Malcolm 1981). Direct investment refers to male activities and behaviors that have an immediate physical influence on infants' survival. Direct investment could include direct caregiving, providing food, actively transmitting subsistence skills and other cultural knowledge, keeping close to watch, protect and train the infant, and giving land or other goods at the time of the child's marriage or time of the father's death (i.e., inheritance). Indirect forms of investment are father's activities that benefit the child but that the father would do regardless of the child's presence. Types of indirect investment would include defending and maintaining access to important food resources, providing mother with economic or emotional support, and providing the child with an extensive kin network (i.e., the size of the father's kin group influences the child's survival).

The term *involvement* is used primarily by psychologists because they are interested in the emotional, cognitive, and social outcomes of father presence or absence. For instance, psychologists are interested in how father involvement influences male and female sexual identity, personality, moral and cognitive development. Evolutionary biologists, on the other hand, use the term *investment* to determine how fathers or males (they are interested in cross-species applications of their theories), contribute to the physical survival of their offspring. Unlike the psychologists, they are interested in all types of male investment, not only the direct care of the child. While this study emphasizes father involvement, it is important to recognize that fathers can and do contribute to their children in many different ways. Paternal investment in humans will be discussed at length in chapter 8.

Social scientists often distinguish biological and social father-

hood. Social fatherhood implies that fathers' relationships with their children are learned and socially rather than biologically determined. Social and cultural anthropologists who have worked with Australian aborigines and polyandrous societies have been especially influential in establishing the importance of social fatherhood. Australian aborigine groups do not emphasize the sexual act as the cause of pregnancy; spirit children in the natural environment enter the woman and are the primary cause of pregnancy, not the man's semen. In polyandrous societies two or more men, usually brothers, have a wife in common and all of the husbands are called father by the children. The importance of biological fatherhood in these societies is minimized in their cultural ideologies. Also, anthropologists have pointed out that in many, if not most, societies around the world, the biological father as well as the father's brother and possibly other males are called "father" in the kinship terminology. I agree that humans are exceptional in their abilities to learn and move in and out of social roles, that is, expected behavior patterns, obligations, and privileges, but this does not mean that biology does not influence those roles. Social and legal institutions in many societies suggest an interest in biological paternity. This book does not distinguish between biological and social fatherhood because it is so difficult to separate the two. Both biological and cultural factors are considered in an attempt to understand Aka father-infant relations. I am reasonably certain that the Aka males in this study are the biological fathers of the infants in the study. Genetic studies indicate that over 90 percent of the time there is agreement between Aka biological and social paternity (Cavalli-Sforza 1986). It is important to remember that humans do have a few exceptional, although probably not exclusive, characteristics—social fatherhood is one of them. Social fatherhood has contributed to the pronounced cross-cultural diversity in the father's role.

Finally, there are a number of anthropological terms that are used to describe different subsistence patterns. The Aka subsist primarily on wild foods and are called hunter-gatherers, foragers (i.e., mobile rather than sedentary hunter-gatherers) or a band level society. The



Ngandu are the neighbors of the Aka and subsist primarily on a variety of domestic plants and animals and are called farmers, villagers, or a tribal level society.

## **THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK**

This book is a traditional anthropological approach to understanding human behavior. The preceding paragraphs have introduced the problem—potential Western bias in research on father's role. The next chapter provides a holistic description of a non-Western culture, the Aka, that will be used to test the validity of the Western psychological notions about father's role. Chapters 3 through 6 detail the methods and results of the specific field study of father's role among the Aka. Once the nature and context of father's role among the Aka has been established, Aka fathers are then compared to fathers in cultures around the world in chapter 7. Anthropologists have a strong conviction that before making a statement about human behavior, in this case father's role, one must examine that behavior in comparative perspective. Anthropologists also have a long-standing interest in understanding human behavior through time—not just the last few hundred years, but back millions of years, to the time of the earliest humans. Chapter 8, therefore, examines father's role over the course of human evolution. Finally, anthropologists tend to think that their studies of remote, so-called exotic populations can be useful for developing public policy in the West. Chapter 9 considers the implications of the Aka study of father's role for fathers in the United States.

Before examining one specific segment of Aka society in detail—the father-infant relationship—it is essential to have some sense of the environmental and social setting of Aka life. The father-infant relationship cannot be understood in isolation; environmental, cultural, and historical forces have all influenced the nature and context of the relationship. The next chapter is a brief sketch of the Aka natural and social environment, culture history, and basic aspects of Aka economic and social life.