

# Book Reviews

## **Parenting Together: Men and Women Sharing the Care of Their Children**

Ehrensaft, Dianne.  
Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

### **Reviewed by Elise Pflum**

Although almost 15 years have passed since *Parenting Together* was first published, Dianne Ehrensaft's study remains relevant today. Ehrensaft focuses on men and women who share parenting. In order to qualify for the sample, the husband and wife both needed to identify themselves as a primary caregiver in their family. Ehrensaft describes the co-parents in her study as men and women who have been influenced by the idea of gender egalitarianism promoted by the feminist movement in the late '60s and early '70s. The desire to share parenting is based upon the assumption that two fully involved parents will offer children a view of the world that is as free as possible from gender bias.

The first hurdle experienced by co-parents upon the birth of a child is the fixed biological barrier of breast feeding. Ehrensaft explains that fathers often experience jealousy since they are unable to participate in the feeding of the child. On the other hand, mothers often feel resentful about having to bear the entire burden of feeding. As a result, significant numbers of shared parenting families discontinue breast feeding within the first three months of a child's life.

A key variable in shared parenting is the sense of comradery and mutual

respect displayed by the co-parents for each other. Failure of the shared parenting experience is most often cited as a result of financial considerations, however. This occurs when the couple abandons their practice of shared parenting, particularly when one parent (often the male) is able to earn more money as the sole breadwinner than if both parents work part-time. In addition, Ehrensaft found that men in shared parenting households are more likely to entertain fantasies about adopting the traditional model of parenting. Ehrensaft discovered that since a woman's desire for shared parenting appears to be the prime impetus in adopting this parenting style, failure of co-parenting often results in divorce.

Interestingly, even in households where shared parenting is successful, gender inequalities between the behaviours of mothers and fathers are apparent. A core difference between men and women's approaches to parenting is the issue of engagement. The mothering self of a woman is intermingled with all of her parts. This contrasts with fathers for whom parenting is something "to be done." As a result, men who seek to balance work, parenting, and time for themselves tend to be more successful than women, since it is easier for them to *do* all three compared to women who attempt to *be* all three. Hence, guilty feelings associated with separation from a child are far more common among women than men. When a woman leaves her child, she leaves behind an integral part of herself. When a man leaves his child he simply stops what he is doing—the loss of the child's presence does not pose a threat to his core being.

## **Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy**

Michel, Sonya.  
New Haven: Yale University Press 1999.

### **Reviewed by Merryl Hammond**

Although dense and dry, *Children's Interests/Mother's Rights* is a meticulous, historical account of the child care system (or rather the lack thereof) in the United States, from its roots in the colonial era, through the early nineteenth century, the Victorian era, the Depression and World War II years, through to the present. Author Sonya Michel poses a central question: Why has the United States failed to develop a comprehensive system of public day care, when all the other democratic, market societies (Sweden, France, Japan, Australia, and Canada are mentioned briefly) have done so?

Readers learn about various child care options that working mothers in the United States have used over the centuries: "baby farms," boarding institutions