

CHAPTER

11

Why Don't Men Pay Child Support? Insights From Evolutionary Psychology



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Profound changes have occurred in the structure of the human family over the past several decades in the United States and much of the Western industrialized world. These changes have altered drastically the contexts in which children are raised, and include significant increases in cohabitation, nonmarital fertility, and divorce (Bumpass, 1990; Sweet & Bumpass, 1987; J. Q. Wilson, 2002). About 30% of all children in the United States today—at least 20 million children—do not live with their genetic father, and one in two children born in the United States today will live in a single-parent household for some period of time before adulthood (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001; and see Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; Norton & Miller, 1992; J. Q. Wilson, 2002).

A sizable literature addresses the effects of family structure on children's health and well-being. These studies consistently reveal that not living with both genetic parents negatively impacts children's lives (e.g., Daly & M. Wilson, 1985, 1988, 1998; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Children living with just one genetic parent are more likely to receive less schooling, to have nonmarital births, and to live in poverty as adults than are children living with two genetic parents. Previous work suggests that a key culprit of the pitfalls of living in a single-parent household is lack of income of the single parent, nearly always the mother. Due to low income potential of their mother and the receipt of little or no child support from their father, a majority of these children live in economic poverty (see, e.g., Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986; Holden & Smock, 1991; J. Q. Wilson, 2002).

In the United States in the 1990s, just half of resident parents who had been awarded child support orders received full payments, one fourth received partial payments, and one fourth received no payments (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). Child support payments can have a substantial impact on the health and well-being of children residing with single parents (e.g., Fox & Blanton, 1995; Geary, 2000; Seltzer, Schaeffer, & Charng, 1989). To improve the economic lot of children living with single parents, in the United States and other industrialized countries over the past two decades, national efforts have sought to make more effective and efficient the payment of adequate child support by the noncustodial parent to the custodial parent (for reviews, see Baker, 2000; Garfinkel, McLanahan, & Robins, 1986; Garfinkel, Meyer, & McLanahan, 1998; J. Q. Wilson, 2002). These national efforts have promoted, inspired, and funded research designed to identify the predictors of child support payment—including the identification of which men do not pay and why they do not pay.

Most of the research designed to identify the determinants of child support payments or the failure to make child support payments has been sociological research, focusing on broad, macrolevel predictor variables, such as state-level payment enforcement policies (for reviews, see Fox & Blanton, 1995, and Garfinkel, Meyer, & McLanahan, 1998). A handful of researchers have recognized the need to identify the determinants of child support payments for individual men, focusing on the predictive value of relatively more specific variables at the levels of psychology and interpersonal relationship dynamics, such as the perceived quality of the former spouse relationship (see, e.g., Meyer & Bartfeld, 1998).

This chapter first briefly reviews what is known about child support payments (which men pay or do not pay and why or why not). This review highlights the sociological, macrolevel focus of previous work on the determinants of child support payment. The next section of the chapter highlights the value of addressing these issues from a psychological perspective, focusing on psychological processes that occur at the individual level. It then argues that research and policy will benefit by embracing an explicitly evolutionary psychological perspective (Buss, 1999; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992), in which the modern dilemmas of child

support payment and receipt are investigated with a respect and appreciation for the recurrent adaptive problems confronted by ancestral mothers, fathers, and children. It outlines several evolutionary psychological hypotheses regarding the determinants of child support payment and, where applicable, discusses how previous research informs these hypotheses. Finally, it reviews various proposed solutions for increasing men's compliance with child support orders, and evaluates the likely success of these proposals. It concludes that an evolutionary psychological perspective not only can inform research into the determinants of child support payments, but also the social policies that might increase the reliability with which these payments are made.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS?

Over the past two decades, sociologists and policy analysts have made great progress in identifying several macrolevel predictors of child support payment, as well as a few microlevel psychological or relationship-level predictors of child support payment. This section highlights what is known empirically about who pays child support, who does not, and why some men pay child support whereas others do not. The remainder of this chapter assumes that mothers are the custodial parents and fathers are the noncustodial parents responsible for child support payments. Although there are custodial fathers and noncustodial mothers responsible for child support payments, these family situations are relatively rare (see, e.g., Garfinkel, Meyer, & McLanahan, 1998).

Marital Status of Former Partners

Previous research identifies that the marital status of the former partners is a key predictor of the reliability and amount of child support payments made by the noncustodial father to the custodial mother. Women previously married to the child's father are substantially more likely to receive a greater amount of child support from the child's father and to receive this support more reliably than are women who were not married to the father, in part because previously married women are more likely to request and to be awarded such support (see, e.g., Laakso, 2002; Meyer & Bartfeld, 1996, 1998; Seltzer, 1991). There are many potentially confounding variables that might account for the relation between marital status and receipt of child support, however, including the fact that men who father children outside of marriage, compared to men who father children in marriage, have less education and make less money (see reviews in Garfinkel, McLanahan, Meyer, & Seltzer, 1998; Johnson, Levine, & Doolittle, 1999; Wilson, 2002). In addition, men who father children outside of marriage may be less certain of their paternity and, as a consequence, may be less willing to pay support for children to whom they may not be genetically related (Baker & Bellis, 1995). This possibility is addressed later in the chapter.

Parental Income and Education

Using data at the local, state, and national levels, several studies have documented that men with higher incomes and more education are more likely to fulfill their child support obligations (e.g., Arditti, 1992; Arditti & Keith, 1993; Hill, 1992; Meyer & Bartfeld, 1996; Seltzer et al., 1989; Smock & Manning, 1997; Teachman, 1991). Thus, one unsurprising determinant of making child support payments is the ability to pay them. That men with more education are more compliant with child support orders probably reflects the association between education and income, although there also may be an independent effect of education. Perhaps men with more education appreciate the economic and social value to their children of their child support payments more than do men with less education. There also is at least one study that has documented that the mother's income positively predicts child support payments. Using data collected from 220 couples as part of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, Smock and Manning (1997) found that the incomes of both the nonresident parent (father) and resident parent (mother) are associated with greater child support payments. And at least one study indicates that custodial mothers with more education are more likely to receive child support owed to them (Seltzer, 1991).

Father's Proximity to Children and Visitation Frequency

Another focal point of previous research has documented that men who live closer to and, perhaps as a consequence, more frequently visit their noncustodial children also are more likely to meet their full child support obligations (e.g., Seltzer, 1991; Seltzer et al., 1989; but see Arditti, 1992; Arditti & Keith, 1993). What previous research has not yet determined is the direction of causality. Is the likelihood of child support payment higher as a consequence of living closer to and more frequent visits with children? Or perhaps men who meet their child support obligations feel entitled to visit more frequently in order to monitor the mother's spending of the child support monies. Or perhaps child support payment, living closer to children, and more frequent visitation with children are only spuriously associated, simultaneously caused by another variable, such as certainty of paternity—that is, men's assessment that they are genetically related to the children (e.g., Baker, 2000; Baker & Bellis, 1995).

Quality of Former Spouse Relationship

Using reports from a small sample of 59 divorced parents, Wright and Price (1986) documented that the quality of the relationship between the custodial and noncustodial parent (defined as co-parental communication, honesty, and type of relationship preferred) predicts compliance with child support orders. Arditti (1992, and see Arditti & Keith, 1993) randomly sampled 125 divorced fathers from court records in one Virginia county, and found that men who do not report attempting to

avoid their former spouse also report paying more child support. Using a nationally representative sample of ever-divorced mothers ($N = 644$) from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, Teachman (1991) found that fathers who contribute economically to their noncustodial children also report better relationships with the custodial mother.

In each of these studies, the key variable, "quality of relationship with former spouse," is not well defined, sometimes asking little more than a single question about how much the parents like each other, or how well they get along. Future research will need to clearly define "quality of the former spouse relationship" in a way that might allow for people in the helping professions to work with parents to improve the relationship, with the goal of increasing compliance with child support orders. An intriguing possibility addressed later in the chapter is whether the "quality" of the former spouse relationship, and the associated child support payments, might be predicted by the noncustodial father's continued sexual access to the mother (see, e.g., Weiss, 1975).

Remarriage and New Children

Several studies have investigated whether the remarriage and birth of subsequent children to one or both former spouses affects the reliability and amount of child support received by the custodial parent. Most of these studies have focused on the remarriage and birth of subsequent children to the noncustodial father. Studies focusing on the father's remarriage have produced mixed results, with some studies documenting that the father's remarriage is associated with lower or less reliable child support payments (e.g., Teachman, 1991), other studies documenting that his remarriage is associated with higher or more reliable child support payments (e.g., Seltzer, 1991), and still other studies finding no relation between the father's remarriage and the reliability or amount of child support payments (e.g., Hill, 1992; Meyer & Bartfeld, 1996; Smock & Manning, 1997). Fewer studies have addressed how the mother's remarriage affects the reliability and amount of child support payments made by the noncustodial father. These studies also have produced mixed results (e.g., Hill, 1992; Mandell, 1995; Seltzer, 1991).

Apparently just a single study has tested specifically the hypothesis that the birth of new children to the noncustodial father affects his support payments to children from a previous relationship. Using data from two waves of the National Survey of Families and Households, Manning and Smock (2000) analyzed reports by 133 noncustodial fathers with children under 18 at both waves living with mothers, and to whom the fathers made child support payments. Manning and Smock (2000) provided evidence that fathers "swap" or trade-off economic investment in current and previous children, but only when the trade-off is between new genetic children living in the father's household and existing genetic children living outside the father's household. These findings are consistent with a sizable literature indicating differential investment in stepchildren and genetic children (see, e.g., Daly & M. Wilson, 1988, 1995, 1996; M. Wilson, Daly, & Weghorst, 1980).

Other Correlates of the Reliability and Amount of Child Support Paid by Noncustodial Fathers to Custodial Mothers

A handful of studies conducted using data collected at the local, state, and national levels have identified a few additional correlates of the reliability and amount of child support paid by noncustodial fathers to custodial mothers. Using a sample of 180 divorced, custodial mothers, Seltzer et al. (1989) found that the amount of time since the divorce is associated with decreases in child support payments. Using data from the National Survey of Families and Households, which includes 1,350 cases in which the respondents are mothers in households with children under 18 and in which the father was living in another household, Seltzer (1991) found that mothers with younger children are more likely to receive child support than are mothers with older children (but see Meyer & Bartfeld, 1996). This relation might be confounded with other variables, however, including the time since divorce and the remarriage of one or both parents.

In summary, previous research conducted by sociologists and policy analysts has identified several predictors of the reliability and amount of child support paid by noncustodial fathers. These include the marital status of the former partners, parental income and education, the father's proximity to his children and the frequency with which he visits them, the quality of the former spouse relationship, and the remarriage and subsequent reproduction of one or both parents. Most of this previous research is empirically driven rather than designed to test specific hypotheses derived from integrative, coherent theories about human nature and psychology. The focus of this previous research instead has been on macrolevel sociological variables. One consequence of this broad focus is that there exists a large gap in knowledge about the determinants of child support payments that can be redressed by a focus on psychological processes. The next section of the chapter reviews what could be known about child support payments as a consequence of taking a psychological approach, in general, and an evolutionary psychological approach, in particular.

WHAT COULD WE KNOW ABOUT CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS?

Insights from the Psychological Sciences

Sociologists, political scientists, and policy analysts have made great progress over the past several decades in identifying several predictors of the reliability and amount of child support payments made by noncustodial parents to custodial parents. This progress was reviewed in the first section of this chapter. Yet there is much more that could be discovered about child support payments—who makes them and why, who does not make them and why not—by stepping outside the broad brushstrokes of the disciplines that focus on macrolevel descriptions and explanations. A focus on individual-level psychology and behavior

may provide additional valuable insight into the problems, pitfalls, and challenges of child support.

Given similar educational backgrounds and similar incomes, for example, why might one man reliably provide child support whereas another does not? If two men have both remarried and had children by a new partner, how might we account for the fact that one man consistently provides support to the children by his first wife, whereas the other man does not (and assuming other key variables are controlled statistically, including, e.g., the income and education of the men)? As a final example, why might a noncustodial father reliably pay the child support he owes for a few months, even a few years, and then rescind that support when his former wife remarries? These are questions that are difficult to address, much less answer, by the macrolevel frameworks offered by disciplines such as sociology. Instead, the answers to these questions require a focus on individual-level psychology and behavior of noncustodial parents and custodial parents. The previous research reviewed in the first section of this chapter relies primarily on large samples of parents for which little detailed information is available. Few studies have collected detailed information from parents and children that might help to explain the many exceptions to the macrolevel findings identified by previous work (see Haskins, 1988; Mandell, 1995).

What is known about child support payments, therefore, has been generated by researchers working with existing databases that often include little detailed information about hundreds or thousands of cases. Few of these studies are informed by a coherent theory of human nature and psychology—in part, due to the apparent irreverence for such theory by the standard social scientists that fill the ranks of sociology and other macrolevel social science disciplines (see Tooby & Cosmides, 1992) and, in part, because working with these large archival databases seems to lend itself to number crunching at the expense of rigorous theoretical analyses. If society wishes to improve the flow of investment by noncustodial parents to their children, then other disciplines must be considered that can help add to the knowledge base of who pays child support, who does not pay child support, and why some noncustodial parents pay whereas others do not. The psychological sciences require a focused attention to the underlying information-processing mechanisms that generate the behaviors that sociologists and policy analysts have identified as correlates of child support payment or nonpayment. In order to identify the determinants of child support payment or nonpayment, an effort must be made to understand the mechanisms that generate the observed behaviors, and the environmental inputs that activate those mechanisms.

The psychological sciences and their focus on information-processing mechanisms—including the input into those mechanisms, the decision rules that determine the functioning of those mechanisms, and the output generated by those mechanisms—are always implicitly evolutionary psychological, and sometimes explicitly evolutionary psychological. This is because the only known cause of complex design or adaptation is evolution by natural selection (Buss, Haselton, Shackelford, Bleske, & Wakefield, 1998; Symons, 1987, 1992; Tooby &

Cosmides, 1992; Williams, 1966). The next section briefly addresses child support from an explicitly evolutionary psychological perspective. The intention is to open the door to explicitly evolutionary psychological discussions of child support—who pays, who does not pay, and why some men pay and some men do not pay. Much of the discussion is speculative and theoretical, with little or no relevant empirical work yet conducted. The intention in the following discussion is to suggest that an evolutionary psychological perspective might help add to the knowledge base of the determinants of child support payment and nonpayment.

Insights from Evolutionary Psychology

A modern evolutionary perspective suggests that in order to understand a behavior, a critical avenue of investigation is the underlying evolved psychology that generates that behavior. A careful consideration of the adaptive problems that ancestral humans were likely to have faced recurrently will help to identify the evolved psychological solutions to those adaptive problems. The modern case of a noncustodial father's formalized, state-regulated, and enforced child support payments can be conceptualized as a specific case of a man's continued investment in offspring produced by a woman to whom he was previously mated, but to whom he is no longer mated. The adaptive problem of whether and how much to invest in offspring has been a key focus of the evolutionary sciences over the past several decades, beginning with Trivers' (1972) seminal contribution (and see Dawkins & Carlisle, 1976; Maynard Smith, 1977; McNamara, Houston, Székely, & Webb, 2002).

In his theory of parental investment and sexual selection, Trivers (1972) noted two fundamental features of sexually reproducing species. First, the sex with greater minimum parental investment (i.e., investment necessary for an offspring to reach reproductive maturity) will be the choosier sex, displaying more stringent mate preferences and greater discrimination about with whom to mate. The sex with lesser minimum parental investment, in contrast, will be the less choosy sex, displaying less stringent mate preferences, greater eagerness to mate, and lesser discrimination about with whom to mate. In humans, as in most sexually reproducing species, females are burdened with greater minimum parental investment than are males and, therefore, females are more choosy than are males about with whom to mate (for a review of work on humans, see Buss, 2004). Second, greater intrasexual competition for sexual access to the more choosy sex will characterize the lesser investing sex. Again, as in most sexually reproducing species, human males display more intense intrasexual competition than do human females (for a review of work on humans, see Daly & M. Wilson, 1988).

A key consequence of these mating dynamics is that the sex with lesser minimum parental investment is more likely to abandon the other mate and any offspring produced by the pair. In humans, as in most sexually reproducing species, the sex more likely to abandon the other parent and offspring is the male. Single parenthood in humans is, of course, strikingly likely to be defined by a female attempting to raise offspring without the investment of an adult male. Human males

are far more likely to abandon their offspring than are human females, and this is true both for marital and nonmarital relationships (for recent statistics, see J. Q. Wilson, 2002).

Relationship dissolution is likely to have been a recurrent feature of human evolutionary history, and children produced in the defunct relationship are likely to have resided with one parent and that parent's family, with variable investment by the noncustodial parent. As in modern times, ancestral children are likely to have resided primarily with their mother and to have received variable continued investment from their nonresident father. Whether they received continued investment from their father will have been a function of several key variables. The following paragraphs discuss some of these potential predictors of continued investment by the noncustodial father in his children. The discussion first addresses the continued investment of a man in children produced in a stable, marriage-like relationship. It then addresses the investment of a man in children produced in less formal, sometimes short-term, noncommitted relationships, including brief sexual affairs.

Investment by Noncustodial Fathers in Children Produced in a Stable Mateship

One hypothesis for why noncustodial fathers might decrease or terminate investment in their children is that they may be suspicious as to whether the resources they invest are reaching their children. Resources intended for noncustodial children might instead be used by the custodial mother for a variety of purposes that do not include direct investment in the children. Fathers who are not meeting their court-ordered child support obligations frequently report a concern for how the custodial mother is spending the money, suspecting that it is not being used to raise the children (see, e.g., Haskins, 1988; Mandell, 1995).

From an evolutionary psychological perspective, these concerns of noncustodial fathers might be reframed as concerns that the custodial mother is using the resources provided by the noncustodial father for such activities as increasing her own mate value, channeling resources to a new partner, to children with a new partner, or to the children of a new partner produced in a previous relationship of that new partner. There is at least one study suggesting that a mother's remarriage is followed by a reduction or less reliable payment of child support by the noncustodial father (Hill, 1992). This macrolevel research does not explain why these men reduced or terminated child support payments when the custodial mother remarried. Future work can profitably investigate the evolved psychology that generates decreased investment by the noncustodial father upon the custodial mother's remarriage.

Fathers may decrease or terminate investment in their noncustodial children because they are uncertain of the benefactors of that investment. There are many other reasons why a father might decrease or terminate investment in his noncustodial children. When his relationship with the custodial mother ends, he is faced with the adaptive problem of attracting a new mate, and this often requires re-

sources (see Buss, 2004). It is hypothesized, therefore, that investment that once was channeled to offspring of a previous mate may now be used to attract a new mate, with the result that child support payments are lower or less reliably made.

Once a new mate is attracted and acquired, the noncustodial father now is faced with the adaptive problem of retaining that new mate, and this also often requires investment and resources (see, e.g., Buss, 1988; Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Flinn, 1988). Therefore, the investment that once was channeled to offspring of a previous mate may now be used to retain a new mate, with the result that child support payments are lower or made less reliably by the noncustodial father. No previous work has tested directly this hypothesis. A few studies have investigated whether a father's remarriage is accompanied by a decrease in the reliability or amount of child support payments. These studies have produced mixed results that are difficult to interpret with respect to the mate retention hypothesis, because it is not clear whether and to what extent "father's remarriage" assesses efforts to retain a newly acquired mate (Hill, 1992; Meyer & Bartfeld, 1996; Seltzer, 1991; Teachman, 1991).

If a noncustodial father remarries, then he may produce offspring with his new mate, and these new offspring will require his investment. This investment in new offspring may result in decreased investment in his noncustodial offspring. Most previous macrolevel research on this question has used father's remarriage as a proxy for the production of new offspring, with the conflicting results noted earlier. Manning and Smock (2000) provided the first direct test of the hypothesis that fathers "swap" investment in noncustodial children for investment in new, custodial children (Furstenberg, 1995; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson, & Zill, 1983; Furstenberg & Spanier, 1984). The results generated by Manning and Smock (2000) indicate that fathers do trade-off investment in noncustodial children for investment in new, custodial children, but only when the trade-off is between new genetic children living in the father's household and existing genetic children living outside the father's household. This pattern of findings is consistent with the work of Daly, Wilson, and others that documents a powerful evolved psychology of differential parental investment such that investment in genetic children is greater and more reliable than is investment in stepchildren (see, e.g., Wilson et al., 1980; Daly & Wilson, 1988, 1995, 1996).

Another evolutionarily informed hypothesis about the failure of fathers to invest in their noncustodial children is that, in short, these children may not be their own. In humans, as in all mammals, fertilization occurs internally to females. Males, therefore, can never be certain that the offspring produced by their partner is genetically their own. This is known as the adaptive problem of paternity uncertainty, and it has no parallel in human females, who can always be certain of maternity. Human male ancestors are likely to be those males who, following the dissolution of a relationship, invested preferentially in noncustodial children who were most likely to be their own genetic children. No research has directly tested this hypothesis in the modern case of decreased or terminated investment by fathers in noncustodial children.

Previous research indicates that child support payments are received more reliably when the former spouses have a better relationship (see, e.g., Arditti, 1992; Arditti & Keith, 1993; Teachman, 1991; Wright & Price, 1986). The key variable, quality of relationship with former spouse, is not well defined, however, sometimes asking little more than a single question about how much the parents like each other. It is hypothesized that the "quality" of the former spouse relationship, and the associated child support payments, varies with the noncustodial father's continued sexual access to the mother (see, e.g., Weiss, 1975). Previous research (reviewed in Buss, 2004) provides clear evidence that women sometimes trade sexual access for resources and that men sometimes trade resources for sexual access. It is hypothesized that continued sexual access to the mother of his noncustodial children will predict positively a man's continued investment in those children.

Investment by Noncustodial Fathers in Children Produced Outside of a Stable Mateship

The previous discussion presented several evolutionarily inspired hypotheses about the predictors of continued investment by fathers in noncustodial children produced in a stable, marriage-like relationship. Millions of single mothers in fact never were involved in a long-term committed relationship with the noncustodial father (see, e.g., Baker, 2000; Garfinkel, McLanahan, & Robins, 1986; Garfinkel, Meyer, & McLanahan, 1998; J. Q. Wilson, 2002). It is likely that the same predictors of decreased or terminated investment by fathers in noncustodial children apply to children produced in these nonmarital relationships. However, paternity uncertainty may be particularly relevant for understanding a man's investment in noncustodial children produced in a short-lived or sexually nonexclusive relationship.

In summary, this section has presented the argument that, to complement previous research generated by disciplines such as sociology that focus on macrolevel variables, a psychological approach, in general, and an evolutionary psychological approach, in particular, will produce valuable knowledge about the determinants of child support payments. The next section reviews several proposals for improving the reliability and amount of child support payments made by noncustodial fathers.

ADDRESSING INSUFFICIENT, UNRELIABLE, OR NONEXISTENT RECEIPT OF CHILD SUPPORT BY CUSTODIAL PARENTS

Many different proposals have been offered concerning how to increase the reliability with which noncustodial fathers channel child support to custodial mothers. Few such proposals have been or are ever likely to be successful, in part because the researchers and policymakers that have generated most of these proposals have ignored the evolutionary psychological foundations of child support payments. This section first reviews several standard social science proposals for how to increase the reliability with which child support is paid. If these proposals

have been implemented, then the discussion notes whether research exists that has tested the effectiveness of these implemented proposals. If no such research exists, then the likely effectiveness of such proposals, based on what is known about evolved psychology, is noted.

One proposal for how to solve the problems of child support that is widely respected by standard social scientists is what can be termed the *socialization proposal*. This proposal states that all that must be done to increase the reliability with which noncustodial fathers pay child support is to socialize or train these men to appreciate that paying child support is not a "feminine" behavior, but instead that it is a "masculine" behavior, and that "real" men take care of their noncustodial children. According to the socialization proposal, noncustodial fathers in arrears for court-ordered child support "are not necessarily hard-hearted and narcissistic individuals. They are men faced with issues and tasks that are most difficult for them to handle effectively because of the gender-typed socialization occurring in our culture" (Fox & Blanton, 1995, p. 277).

No such socialization proposal has been implemented formally, so the results of empirical tests of the effectiveness of this proposal cannot be reported. Although it is possible that some noncustodial fathers might benefit from such socialization training, a first step will have to be the provision of specific details about the sort of training envisioned. What exactly is meant by "socialization," and by "masculine" and "feminine" behaviors, for example? How specifically might such training be implemented? By whom? Who will pay for this training? What happens when a man has new children by a new partner? Does a "real" man continue paying the same amount of child support at the expense of and to the detriment of his new children, assuming a limited set of expendable resources? The socialization proposal will have several difficulties with which to contend if it is to be implemented successfully.

Meyer and Bartfeld (1998) argued that payment and compliance with child support orders can be increased by enforcing existing orders via income withholding, but also by helping men get gainful employment. Meyer and Bartfeld (1998) reviewed previous research indicating that many men who do not meet child support obligations do not skirt these duties maliciously, but instead do not have the required income to pay, and often do not have gainful employment. According to Meyer and Bartfeld (1998), therefore, one way to increase the reliability with which child support is paid by noncustodial fathers is to provide training to underemployed or unemployed men so that they might be able to meet these child support obligations.

As with the socialization proposal, no empirical work has addressed the effectiveness of this "employment training" proposal. Job training that leads to better jobs or perhaps to any job should increase the reliability with which child support is paid by noncustodial fathers. What this proposal does not address is what to do about the majority of nonpayers or partial payers that already have the income to make child support payments, but elect not to make these payments (see, e.g., Meyer & Bartfeld, 1996). What is needed is research at the level of psychology to

better understand the decisions of these men: Why do some of them make partial payments, some full payments, and some no payments at all? A complete answer is not likely to be found in the average incomes of these different groups of men. What is necessary are careful, empirical investigations of decision making by these men that include identification of the social and cultural cues to which these men are responding. Evolved psychological mechanisms lie dormant unless triggered by evolutionarily relevant stimuli (see, e.g., Buss, 1999) and, therefore, a comprehensive evolutionary psychological perspective on child support payment must identify these social and cultural stimuli.

A proposal to increase the reliability with which noncustodial fathers pay child support that has been implemented involves punitive measures for failing to pay this support (e.g., revocation of driver's license) and direct withholding from paychecks and income tax returns. These enforcement policies have met with mixed success. Meyer and Bartfeld (1996), for example, provided evidence that paycheck withholding is effective, but that the bulk of benefits that might be achieved (in terms of increased reliability and amount of child support payments) already have been realized for this strategy in Wisconsin, the state from which the researchers collected the relevant information. Lin (2000) provided evidence that paycheck withholding works for those fathers that perceive that their child support obligation is not fair. For men that perceive that their child support obligation is fair, withholding the child support from their paychecks does not improve the reliability or amount of child support payments made by noncustodial fathers. Beller and Graham (1993) presented evidence that immediate withholding, criminal penalties, tax intercepts, and the ability to place liens against property increase the amount of child support paid. Baker (2000) reviewed evidence that all of these punitive and nonvoluntary payment enforcement strategies can be effective, but they clearly are not always effective for all men who owe child support.

Lin (2000; see Arditti, 1992) supplied evidence that compliance with child support obligations is higher if noncustodial fathers perceive the obligation to be financially fair. Lin (2000) suggested, therefore, that one way to increase the reliability and amount of child support payments is to change fathers' perceptions of the fairness of the obligations. One way to increase perceptions of fairness, according to Lin (2000), is to decrease the monetary value of the obligations. An alternative method for increasing perceptions of fairness without lowering child support is "to standardize child support obligations, reduce deviations from child support guidelines, and fully implement routine income withholding. If the child support system employed more uniform guidelines and if fewer exceptions were made, a compliance 'climate' or 'norm' might develop, similar to that in the social security and income tax systems" (p. 396). The proposal recommended (but not yet formally implemented) by Lin (2000) is nevertheless open to social cheating (as are the social security and income tax systems), whereby some noncustodial fathers continue to avoid full or even partial payment of court-ordered child support. A key question for this proposal, therefore, will be how to monitor and punish failures to pay child support obligations in full.

This chapter closes with a brief review of what might be the most controversial proposal for improving the reliability and amount of child support paid by noncustodial fathers. However, it may be the most successful strategy, although it will be challenging to implement. Baker (2000) suggested that the first step to ensuring that every child receives financial support from a mother and a father is compulsory paternity testing of children at birth. The identified genetic mother and father will be charged a "child tax" for each child assigned to them. These taxes will be paid to the government and subsequently distributed to the resident parent or parents. Most of the time, of course, this means that a man and a woman who live together and who have children together will receive their child taxes back from the government, which they will then use to cover the expenses of the genetic children they share and that live with them in the same household. Sometimes, however, the genetic father will not be the man with whom a woman lives (about 1 in 10 such fathers, on average; see Baker & Bellis, 1995, for a review of the relevant research). The genetic father will be assessed the child tax (assuming he is identified), and these monies will be distributed to the genetic mother to help care for her children. This is the crux of Baker's (2000) proposal, without the many complicating details. The interested reader is referred to Baker (2000) for a detailed discussion of this controversial but promising proposal.

According to Baker's (2000) proposal, children will receive financial support from their genetic mother and father, and hugely expensive governmental programs no longer will be needed to support children without investing fathers. As Baker (2000, p. 27) noted, therefore, "For everybody's benefit—mother, father, child, and Treasury—routine and probably compulsory paternity testing at birth seems a future inevitability." At the same time, however, not everyone will be happy with this new system. As Baker (2000) pointed out,

Some people—women who can skillfully confuse paternity, men who can successfully cuckold others, and deadbeat dads—will be worse off. All would have found opportunities better suited to their talents in [ancestral] environments in which their vulnerable prey would have been armed only with their ancient guile. Such exploiters will be curbed, not helped, by future developments, but even they would be hard pressed to argue that the future system is less fair than the past. (p. 29)

CONCLUSIONS

Unreliable, partial, or nonexistent child support payments by noncustodial fathers is a scourge of the modern, industrialized world. Working from a standard social science model, sociologists and policy analysts have identified a few macrolevel predictors of who pays child support, who does not, and why some noncustodial fathers pay whereas others do not. This chapter has argued that a comprehensive understanding of child support payment or lack thereof requires, in addition to analyses at the sociological level, analyses informed by an appreciation of evolved psychological mechanisms and the adaptive problems these mechanisms were designed to

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solve. Several proposals have been reviewed that have been offered for improving the reliability and amount of child support paid by noncustodial fathers. A successful social policy for rectifying the woes of child support will be built upon an appreciation of and respect for human evolved psychology.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank Aaron Goetz, Rick Michalski, and an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments that improved this chapter.

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