

# family



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FATHERS DIARY

## This dad pioneered paternity leave

I was the first father in the United States who was legally granted time off from work specifically because of the birth of a child into the family — a legal paternity leave.

In securing that leave I guess I have demonstrated my belief in the importance of the role a father plays as co-participant in his children's development.

Thousands of other fathers are taking similar leaves now, and the effect they are having by doing so makes it clear that the father's contribution to his children's upbringing is at least as significant as the mother's.

The Office of University Communications of the University of Rochester has provided me with an

official press release — which I quote with their permission — discussing the creative part a father plays in the family structure.

The release covers the work of University of Rochester psychologist Ann Frodi, who is researching parent-child interaction in an ongoing study of 51 Swedish families in which some fathers spend significant time as the primary caretakers of their firstborn children.

The quoted press release follows.

### Psychologist credits dads

Frodi, an assistant professor of psychology at Rochester, and colleagues at the University of Utah and Goteborg University in Sweden, are examining the effects of a

1974 Swedish law that permits mothers and fathers to take, or divide between them, a nine-month paid parental leave of absence. (The leave was extended to 12 months in 1980.) The law was enacted to let fathers take an active role in infant care without making major professional and financial sacrifices.

Of the families included in the study, half (26) are considered non-traditional in that the fathers plan to take at least one month of paid leave to serve as primary caretakers. (In 1979, 15 percent of new fathers in Sweden took a month or more of paid paternity leave.) Of particular interest to Frodi is the effect of paternal involvement on children's social and emotional development.

Frodi's earlier research had shown that, contrary to a widely accepted view that only mothers possess so-called maternal instinct, men, women, boys and girls display the same psychophysiological responses — changes in blood pressure, heart rate, and skin conductance — when exposed to crying and smiling infants. Although women admitted to

stronger emotional reactions than men and were more willing to interact with the infants, this may be a function of society's expectations rather than biological inclination, Frodi argues.

Even when fathers seek active involvement in childrearing, such cultural patterns persist, Frodi has found. Extensive home observations of the traditional and non-traditional Swedish families and their 3-month-old infants showed that although nontraditional fathers changed diapers, tended, tickled, touched and kissed their infants more than traditional fathers did, mothers in both types of families engaged in far more of these interactions, and responded more quickly to infant cues, than did their husbands. Also, babies cried much more when they were with their fathers, regardless of family type.

At this stage, although the non-traditional fathers had spent a great deal of time caring for their infants, they had not taken their planned paternal leave since the infants were still being breast-fed, Frodi explained. She anticipates that paternal responses will

change when the nontraditional fathers stay home and their wives return to work.

Nontraditional families seem more aware of sex-stereotyped behavior toward their children and may be trying to overcome it, Frodi says. "A really surprising result of this research is that the sex of the baby made a big difference in how parents behaved," she said. "In traditional families, as one might expect, fathers favored their sons. But in nontraditional families, both mothers and fathers played and interacted more with their daughters than with their sons." The greater attention paid to girls "may be one way that non-traditional parents are bending over backward to raise their daughters differently," Frodi says.

She believes it is significant that sons of traditional parents smiled and vocalized more with both parents than daughters did, while in nontraditional families, the daughters smiled and vocalized more often. This difference may be related to the amount of parental attention sons and daughters received, Frodi speculates.

After further observations,

Frodi and her colleagues plan to assess the effects of parental caretaking on the attachment infants develop with each parent, and the differences in sex-typing pressures that parents — particularly fathers — display toward their children, especially their sons. "Previous studies have consistently shown that fathers enforce sex-appropriate behavior more for sons than for daughters, who are often allowed to be tomboys," Frodi says. "We believe that this may not be as true in nontraditional families, although we suspect it will be a long, long time before we see many fathers refrain from sex-typing altogether."

The families included in the Swedish study range from moderate-income households in which parents have high school educations to middle- and upper-income professional couples. According to Frodi, the sample is more representative of the general population than of typical non-traditional Swedish families, in which the husband generally earns at least \$20,000 a year and the wife has four or more years of college education.