
Gender Biases in Child Welfare

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Gender biases are pervasive in child welfare research and practice. Although these biases have been addressed to some extent in the literature, there continues to be a lack of information on fathers and an overrepresentation of information on mothers, and thus the biases continue. This article explores how these biases are currently manifested in both research and practice and makes recommends changes in research, policy, and practice.

Keywords: *child abuse; child welfare; gender bias*

In the past 20 years, fathers have been increasingly involved in raising their children, and their role in normative child development has received greater attention (Phares & Compas, 1992). Despite these changes, “late 20th-century fatherhood ideology continues to reflect the belief that active participation by mothers in the daily care of children is obligatory, whereas nurturing and caretaking by fathers is discretionary” (Silverstein, 1996, p. 11). Women continue to be blamed for the majority of problems in families, whereas men remain largely invisible, especially in the field of child welfare.

A review of the child welfare literature revealed three things. First, little attention has been given to the quality of fathering as a factor in children’s well-being. Second, mother blaming is as viable as ever, both in clinical journals and in practice. Third, there has been little focus on gender biases in the child welfare literature since *Child Welfare* published a special issue on a feminist approach to child welfare in 1985. This dearth of current literature and the continuation of gender bias indicate the need for renewed attention to this issue.

EXAMPLES OF GENDER BIAS

Blaming mothers when children have problems is systemic and has been sustained through past and current institutional socialization. According to

Davies and Krane (1996), in theory, child welfare work is based on the needs and interests of children, but in actuality, the system usually evaluates children's needs via mothers' caretaking or "mothering" ability. Fathers, whether perpetrators of abuse or not, are often invisible in the records of child protective services (CPS) (Edelson, 1998). Traditionally, the person who is held responsible for a child's injury, even if she was not the actual perpetrator, is the child's mother (Fowler & Stockford, 1979). When present, fathers are just as likely to abuse their children physically as are mothers, yet most researchers have paid little or no attention to fathers in their research (Cooley, 2000; Scott & Crooks, in press; Trotter, 1997).

For example, DePanfilis and Zuravin (1999) conducted a study on predicting the recurrences of child maltreatment. The sample included only families who had substantiated CPS reports in which the maltreated children's biological mothers (not the biological fathers) were the primary or secondary caretakers when the confirmed incident occurred. The dependent variable, recurrence, was defined "as any confirmed report of physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect on any child in the family" (DePanfilis & Zuravin, 1999, p. 730). It appears that in neither the definition of maltreatment nor in the definition of the dependent variable was the identity of the perpetrator considered. Thus, in this study, the term *families* was used, but the focus was really on the mothers, regardless of whether they were the perpetrators. In short, the responsibility for the recurrence of maltreatment was again laid at the mothers' feet. Moreover, this issue was not addressed or explained in the report.

At least two reasons for this type of research bias can be found in child welfare practice: (a) All CPS cases are put in the mothers' names and (b) there is a lack of information on fathers in case records. In many states, case records are put in the mothers' names, regardless of where the children were living at the time of their entry into the system or whether the mothers were the perpetrators of the maltreatment. The lack of information on fathers in case records reflects, in part, the failure to include fathers in the provision of services (National Child Welfare Resource Center, 2002). For example, in a study of fathers of children in kinship foster care, O'Donnell (2001) found that most fathers had no contact with caseworkers and had not participated in permanency planning during the 12 months under study. In a related study, O'Donnell (1999) reported that few workers attempted to involve fathers or even noted the fathers' lack of participation in the case records, supervisory meetings, or discussions with the fathers' families. Even when there is information on a father, it is not uncommon to accept the mother's account of the father's behavior, whereabouts, and level of interest and involvement. Although the practice of putting case records in mothers' names may have a logistical basis, it implies culpability and, coupled with the lack of information on fathers, leads to research and reporting biases.

Failure to Protect

An ominous phenomenon in child welfare practice is the application of statutory definitions of child maltreatment to cases of domestic violence. For example, the Texas Family Code defines abuse as including the lack of efforts to prevent physical injury. Thus “the wife has a duty to protect her children even in the face of potential danger to herself, and failure to do so violates the family code” (Hosch, Chanez, Botwell, & Munoz, 1991, p. 1685). In fact, 38 states have laws that criminalize omissions as acts of harm, and agencies and courts have interpreted a battered parent’s “failure to protect” a child from exposure to harm from an abusive parent to be a punishable omission (Kopels & Sheridan, 2002; Matthews, 1999). Because most battered parents are women, the application of “failure to protect” unfairly penalizes mothers who may have tried unsuccessfully to protect themselves and their children—sometimes at the risk of their own lives. It requires mothers to protect their children from fathers who are equally responsible for their children. It ignores the dynamics of domestic violence and assumes that a “good” mother will always manage to protect her children from harm without considering that many battered parents lack the resources to escape violent situations and that trying to escape may actually increase the violence and risk of harm to both the mother and children (Matthews, 1999; Silverstein, 1996). In cases in which the batterer is not the father or guardian (e.g., a boyfriend), the mother is charged with failure to protect, whereas the batterer escapes CPS sanctions (Magen, 1999).

Charging battered women with “failure to protect” also makes them, the victims, indistinguishable from the perpetrators in a court of law (Kopels & Sheridan, 2002; Magen, 1999). Battered mothers have had their parental rights terminated for their failure to protect their children from exposure to domestic violence, even when their children were not physically abused (Lemon, 1999). The problem is defined in relation to what the mother *failed to do*, rather than in terms of what the father *did* (Kopels & Sheridan, 2002). Whether they stay or leave, battered women risk losing their children to CPS (Matthews, 1999).

Although the application of failure to protect to cases of domestic violence is relatively new, this is not the case with child sexual abuse. Gender bias has long permeated the treatment and prevention of child sexual abuse. Historically, the dominant explanation for incest was that girls seduced their fathers. Since the 1960s, however, incest has been described in relation to the dysfunctional family in which all members, but especially the mother, contribute to the incest. For example, Lustig, Dresser, Spellman, and Murray (1966) concluded that despite the overt culpability of the father in incest, the mother appeared to be the “cornerstone in the pathological family system” (p. 39). A decade later, Gutheil and Avery (1977) implied, in their assessment of one family, that the mother encouraged the incest by her emotional and

sexual withdrawal from her husband and reported that “the mother is pivotal in the establishment of the father-daughter incestuous bond” (p. 113). Swanson and Biaggio (1985) described mothers in such families as being passive, withdrawn, extremely dependent, and often ill or disabled, which caused them to be absent from the home or restricted their ability to fulfill the requirements of their role. They also stated that such mothers often used denial as a defense mechanism to resist recognizing the incest. Thus, mothers are characterized as disordered and as silent colluders who are, at least partially, responsible for the incest (Gavey, Florence, Pezaro, & Tan, 1990). Mothers’ failure to protect and nurture children has been regarded with what seems, at times, to be more disapproval than are the violation of trust and sexual abuse perpetrated by fathers (Gavey et al., 1990).

Finally, the failure-to-protect concept appears to be applied almost solely to mothers. Consider, for example, the recent case of Andrea Yates, the mother in Texas who killed her five children. Her husband knew of her disturbed mental condition (e.g., postpartum depression), yet he continued to leave the children alone with her with no support or supervision. Where was the failure-to-protect application in this case?

Covert Ways of Blaming

Although overt negative characterizations of mothers in the literature are less common today, other subtle and insidious forms of blame continue. For instance, Corcoran (1998) found that although studies of the protectiveness of female nonabusers proliferate, there have been no such studies of nonabusive fathers. Women are also usually held responsible for the nurturing of all family relationships, not just the mother-child relationship. A major risk factor in mothers’ maltreatment of children is paternal deprivation—neglectful, absent, and uninvolved fathers (Biller & Solomon, 1986), yet mothers, not fathers, are blamed for this maltreatment (see, e.g., Stevens-Simon, Nelligan, & Kelly, 2001). In addition, Seery and Crowley’s (2000) exploration of the “relationship management work” of building and maintaining father-child relationships highlighted the multifaceted process of this work, but the entire focus of managing the father-child relationship was on actions “taken” or “not taken” by the women in the study. Although the women were not outwardly portrayed as good or bad gatekeepers, the underlying assumption appears to have been that it was the mothers’ responsibility to facilitate the father-child relationship; fathers were not even interviewed for the study. A similar phenomenon occurs in explanations of child sexual abuse in which the father, as the perpetrator, is viewed as normatively responding to the mother’s failure to assume traditional family roles (Wattenberg, 1985). “Current fatherhood ideology continues to define a father’s relationship with his children primarily in the context of a bond with the mother” (Silverstein, 1996, p. 6).

Absence of Fathers in Practice

Fathers have also been largely overlooked in the area of prevention. Programs to prevent sexual abuse, for example, have been in existence since the early 1970s, but most of these programs have focused on educating and training children to protect themselves, and few have tried to prevent men, especially fathers and stepfathers, from sexually abusing their children (Phares, 1996). Of the 87 programs explored by Plummer (2001), only 16.9% included prevention components for offenders. Thus, responsibility for preventing abuse is placed not on the perpetrator, who is generally male, but on the child victim, who is typically female. If abuse occurs, the responsibility shifts to the mother, who is blamed for her failure to protect the child.

Other examples of gender bias in prevention practice include Healthy Families, a child abuse prevention program, and Healthy Start, a prenatal care program designed to improve the health and welfare of children. Both are excellent programs. However, Healthy Start focuses exclusively on mothers (McCormick et al., 2001), and Healthy Families focuses mainly on women (Galano et al., 2001). In fact, most early home-visitation programs that are designed to prevent child maltreatment have largely overlooked fathers as the recipients of services (Guterman, 2001). Research has suggested that the involvement of responsible, nonabusive fathers can have a positive effect on families and reduce the stress of mothers (Silverstein, 1996). Barth, Claycomb, and Loomis (1988) found that participation in services for teenage fathers was associated with babies with higher birth weights, a goal of the Healthy Start program. Both programs miss the opportunity to include fathers (or other men) in the therapeutic process of intervention. This failure helps perpetuate the sole focus on women as life givers and caregivers.

Gender-Biased Laws

In addition, practice and research are supported by gender-biased laws. For example, the law does not automatically give unmarried fathers rights regarding their children. These rights must often be established by written agreement with the mothers or through the courts (Cull, 2001), as in the case of a mother relinquishing a child for adoption. The unmarried father usually has to contest the adoption in court or prove that placement with him is in the best interests of the child (Craig, 1998). In contrast, an unmarried mother has automatic custody of her child, regardless of her ability to be a good parent.

Biased Language

Blaming mothers. Some instances of blaming mothers are so covertly intertwined in the literature that they appear almost imperceptible. For instance,

even when the focus is on fathers, as it was in Greif and Zuravin's (1989) study, it may be implied that mothers are at fault for the abuse their children. In this study, the sample of fathers came from a larger sample of 518 mothers who were "purposely selected to differ relative to how adequately they were known to care for their children: 119 were known . . . for personally neglecting their children, 118 were known . . . for having one or more physically abused children" (p. 481). The change in wording was necessary because it was not always the mother who was the perpetrator of abuse, yet two paragraphs later, the 118 mothers were referred to collectively as "maltreating mothers" (p. 481). Similarly, in Dubowitz, Black, Kerr, Starr, and Harrington's (2000) study of the association between the involvement of fathers and child neglect, the sample consisted of children and their mothers. Child neglect was measured by observations in the homes, videotapes of mother-child interactions, and CPS reports. Once again, it was implied that only mothers neglect their children.

A similar phenomenon occurs with the pervasive, interchangeable use of the terms *parents*, *family*, and *mothers* (Tanner & Turney, 2000), especially in relation to maltreatment. In Galano et al.'s (2001) report on the Hampton Healthy Families Program, the term *families* was used until one paragraph on outcomes revealed that the "families" were "614 women [who were] determined to be at risk for abuse and neglect" (p. 503). Similarly, in an article on the effectiveness of a project to prevent adolescent "parents" from maltreating their children (Stevens-Simon et al., 2001), the sample consisted of adolescent mothers who were "deemed to be at high risk for child abuse and neglect" (p. 753); the babies' fathers were treated as adjuncts and supports, rather than as participants in the services. The study found a substantial occurrence of "abandonment" by the mothers but did not mention abandonment by the fathers. Instead, it clearly implied that if a mother's boyfriend and her own family were not supportive, it was because the mother lacked the "intrinsic ability to establish supportive interpersonal relationships" (Stevens-Simon et al., 2001, p. 764).

There are other examples of the ways in which language can imply culpability. In discussing the disclosure of sexual abuse, Swanson and Biaggio (1985) stated that "the victim may have shared her secret with another adult who either did not believe her or (as is the case with some mothers) who refused to act on the information" (p. 670). This statement identifies mothers as the adults who have not acted on a disclosure. The same is true of the research questions suggested by Daro and McCurdy (1994) regarding the targeting of clients. One question, "Can prevention programs that focus on the primary caregiver and/or child apart from other influential caregivers (i.e., fathers, grandmother) . . . achieve long-term success?" (p. 421) assigns, by clear implication, the role of primary caretaker exclusively to women. Another common occurrence is to refer to employed mothers as absent or working mothers but to refer to employed fathers simply as fathers or men (Silverstein, 1996).

Language omission. Finally, bias is perpetuated by language omission, such as the dearth of discussions in the literature of innocent mothers in incestuous families, of the needs of mothers in the face of violence and incest, and of the absence of gender and gender biases as issues in the proposed 1990s research agenda for child welfare (Curtis, 1994). For instance, the discovery that her chosen partner has sexually abused her child must be one of the most difficult situations a woman can face. Yet most of the literature is silent on what such mothers need and how to help them during this time.

REASONS FOR GENDER BIAS

The lack of attention to fathers and the overrepresentation of negative portrayals of mothers in the literature results in mother blaming in child welfare practice and in the neglect of fathers in therapeutic programs that are directed toward preventing or ameliorating emotional and behavioral problems in children. Although there has been an increase in publications about fathers, the absolute number is small compared to those on mothers. A search of the database of the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information produced 831 documents using the keyword "father", compared to 2,907 using the keyword "mother". At the August 2002 conference on Victimization of Children and Youth in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, only 2 presentations clearly focused on fathers or other men who abuse children (excluding sexual abuse), whereas at least 14 presentations focused on mothers, including 3 on mothers who kill their children. In addition, much of the literature that does address fathering is matricentric in that mothers' behaviors are considered the standard against which fathers' behaviors are measured (Silverstein & Phares, 1996).

Child welfare research and practice do not take place in a vacuum; they reflect the ways in which societies construct mothering, mothers, fathering, fathers, and families. The theory permeating much of Western societal beliefs is that the mother's behavior directly, and exclusively, affects the child's behavior (Corcoran, 1998). If a child is having problems, it must mean that his or her mother is not functioning adequately. This belief is widespread and continues to be "substantiated" via professional practice and publications in the social services.

Much of the knowledge about child development and families that child welfare service researchers and providers draw on is from the psychological literature. Fathers, however, are underrepresented in research on child development and developmental psychology, especially in relation to psychopathology (Silverstein & Phares, 1996). In contrast, incidents of mother blaming abound in major clinical journals. Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale's (1985a) investigation of incidences of mother blaming in major clinical journals in 1970, 1976, and 1982 found that mothers' activity in

their children's lives was highly likely to be blamed for children's problems, whereas fathers' inactivity was less likely than chance to be blamed. Moreover, female clinicians were as likely as male clinicians to blame mothers for their children's problems. Caplan & Hall-McCorquodale (1985b) also found that even in articles in which mothers were not blamed, the fathers' possible contributions to the problem were omitted. They concluded that there is a tradition of blaming mothers for children's "psychopathology" and family dysfunction. This deficit-focused tradition can also be seen in the blaming of mothers for children's sexual abuse (Corcoran, 1998) as well as in the failure of the literature to acknowledge mothers' contributions to children's accomplishments (Phares, 1996). This literature is then presented by trainers and educators and absorbed by caseworkers, thereby affecting their assessments of clients. Mothers are seen as problems to themselves and everyone else, and the lack of attention to fathers is perpetuated.

The relationship between the cause and effect of gender bias in child welfare is complex and nonlinear. Research that relies on information from caseworkers and case records is limited by the lack of knowledge of fathers that caseworkers have and can put in their records. The dissemination of such research subsequently presents a one-sided approach to child welfare with families that focuses, by necessity, on mothers. In a review of the literature on custodial fathers, Greif and Zuravin (1989) found no studies of low-income, custodial fathers and limited research on noncustodial, low-income fathers. In addition, although knowledge of the foster care system is substantive, the knowledge derived from foster parents in that literature has been usually gained from foster mothers (Inch, 1999). A review of research on fathering in normative child development found that much of the information on fathers was obtained secondhand from mothers' reports of fathers' behavior (Boyd, 1985). Similarly, in the limited child welfare research on birth fathers, the data are often obtained secondhand from mothers, caseworkers, or demographic databases (Franck, 2001).

The biases that researchers bring to their work have also skewed how the data on parenting have been collected. For example, mother-oriented theories have led researchers to design studies in which families are rarely observed or seen at night when more fathers may be present (Greif & Bailey, 1990; Silverstein, 1996). Many researchers have argued that the majority of the families who are referred to CPS are headed by single mothers and hence have claimed that it is the mothers who are available for study and subsequently for blame (see, e.g., Caplan & Hall-McCorquodale, 1985b; Leashore, 1997).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although some progress has been made in addressing some of the facets of gender biases in child welfare, there is obviously much that still needs to be done.

Research

Fathers can no longer be ignored in studies of child welfare. Regardless of whether they live with their children or not, it is important for researchers to examine how father-child relationships, as well as mother-child relationships, influence children's and parents' functioning. "Although it is important not to overvalue the importance of fathers, it is equally important not to dismiss their significance" (Silverstein, 1996, p. 10). Research on fathers is also needed to inform practitioners of effective techniques for working with fathers; of factors that assist fathers in assuming responsibility for their children; and of fathers' problems, needs, and strengths.

Concerted outreach efforts must be made to include fathers in research designs. Researchers must consciously design nonsexist research that, by definition, includes both genders unless there is a legitimate reason not to do so (Phares, 1996). To accomplish this goal, researchers may need to evaluate their own sex-role stereotypes and develop methods to minimize the impact of such biases on their research. They also need to explore how best to recruit both men and women for research. Although previous studies suggested that fathers are no more difficult to recruit for research on their children than are mothers (Phares, 1995), noncustodial fathers may be more difficult to locate and contact. Nonetheless, the fact that noncustodial fathers have been included in a number of studies indicates that their inclusion is possible (Phares, 1996). Thus, the onus is on researchers to design studies that ensure that both mothers and fathers participate.

In addition, researchers need to focus on how to recruit a more varied sample population. Many studies lack variance in demographic areas, such as socioeconomic class and education (Greif & Zuravin, 1989; Phares, 1995)—an especially important omission in regard to working-class and racial/ethnic minority fathers. It is also important for researchers to move away from stereotypes like the "irresponsible African American father" to be able to think in terms of equity and inclusion in family research (Silverstein, 1996). Furthermore, researchers need to learn how to conduct more "family-friendly" research in general (Phares, 1995) by, for example, collecting data at the family's convenience and/or arranging multiple appointments within one family to accommodate the family members' needs and schedules.

The Professional Media

The professional media, through their editorial review boards and conference committees, also have a role to play by holding researchers accountable for their work. Besides encouraging parallel investigations regarding mothers and fathers and gender analysis in any research on family issues, research reviewers need to require researchers to clarify such terms as *parents* or *families*, to identify and defend their focus on one gender or the other, to explain the implications of their choices, and to clarify culpability. Journal

editors and conference developers can also encourage special attention to research that increases knowledge of fathers and their children.

Policy and Practice

Laws. At the state level, changes in laws are needed on several fronts, including providing battered women with protection and services, rather than punishing them and ensuring due process and facilitating parental responsibility for unwed fathers. A law in California (the California Welfare and Institutions Code 33291998), for example, requires courts in child maltreatment cases to consider ordering the removal of the violent parent, instead of the child, from the home. Child welfare agencies are required to help battered parents obtain restraining orders as well as other services and supports (Matthews, 1999).

Parenting programs for fathers. State and local policy makers can also take steps to promote father-child relationships by supporting the development of programs that teach fathers to be good parents, help fathers improve their relationships with the mothers of their children, enhance the child support system (Sylvester & Reich, 2000), and help prevent fathers from abusing their children. Even before fatherhood occurs, however, it is important to promote sex education and responsible sexuality for boys.

Increasing gender competence in state agencies. To move toward a non-gender-biased approach to protecting children and working with their families, state child welfare agencies must make a greater commitment to address their own gender biases and improve the inclusion of fathers in their programs. They can start by finding a different way to label case records. They also need to teach and model the value of involving both parents in assessment and treatment. To begin, they should develop a clear picture of their existing services, including whom they are providing the services to. Then they must find ways to improve services to *both* parents. The failure to do so may actually mean that they are missing the boat in relation to the causes of and solutions to a family's problems.

Such a commitment may first mean honestly discussing the desirability of improving casework with fathers. Unless such discussions occur, any new efforts to achieve this goal may be sabotaged. In a study of outreach to the fathers of children in out-of-home care, Franck (2001) found that there was greater caseload activity (defined as outreach and planning activities) for mothers than for fathers. In exploring this outcome, Franck found that the better a parent's response, the more caseload activity. However, the relationship was a "two-way street" (p. 391): Greater outreach led to a better response from parents, which led to greater outreach. Although this situation occurred for both parents, there were greater outreach to and responses

from mothers. Franck also found that caseworkers identified more problems for mothers than for fathers. She concluded that caseworkers expected more of a “return” from their “investment” in working with mothers than they did from working with fathers, that caseworkers considered fathers’ problems to be less relevant to case planning than mothers’ problems, and that fathers had to demonstrate their connection to their children, whereas that connection was assumed for mothers. Unless such perceptions are changed, any efforts to improve practice with fathers may be doomed.

Education, hiring, and training. Discussions in agencies can be held in staff training programs for intervening with children and families. These discussions need to include the role of fathers in their children’s lives, caseworkers’ biases against fathers, and caseworkers’ fears of approaching fathers. Other issues that should be addressed are the difficulty communicating with fathers and practice principles for working with fathers that include a broad definition of fathers’ involvement, respect for fathers’ parental role and identity, culturally sensitive interventions, and multiple services within a holistic and strengths perspective (Dudley & Stone, 2001). At the same time, it is important to address explicitly the issue of mother blaming, to debunk many of the myths of the problem mother (see, e.g., Corcoran, 1998), and to provide information on mothers’ needs in situations of domestic violence and sexual abuse and how caseworkers can support such mothers, rather than blame them.

Although we (social work educators and child welfare trainers) wait for improved research, we need to cull what currently exists for information on how to work better with fathers. For example, Franck (2001) found that caseworkers got better responses from fathers when they used written documents expressing the fathers’ rights, responsibilities, and case plans (i.e., when they offered something concrete) and when outreach was balanced, in that both the agency and parents were held accountable for outcomes.

In conjunction with changing their worldview, agencies need to hire workers who are willing to go the extra mile in reaching out to fathers, including working nights and/or on weekends when many fathers may be more readily available. Home-based casework and talking directly to fathers, rather than relying on mothers to include fathers in meetings, are also recommended for engaging fathers in intervention and as resources (LeCroy, 1987; Sachs, 1986). Fathers should be included as early as possible in assessments and interventions. Their reluctance to participate can be reframed in a positive way or normalized by acknowledging that many fathers are initially hesitant (Phares, 1996). Most important, mothers should not be blamed for the fathers’ behaviors.

Finally, social work educators have a critical role to play in moving the child welfare field toward a nonsexist approach to children and families. Many schools of social work provide on-the-job training to child welfare workers, and all educate students who will go into the child welfare field.

Yet Franck (2001) suggested that there is "little in graduate social work education to counter prevailing societal views about gender roles" (p. 394). Social work educators must review their reading materials to ensure that gender-biased literature is either not included or is addressed in class discussions. Textbooks that present theories of human behavior should include challenges to heavily relied-on traditional theories. Given that much of the research literature in child welfare has been (and still is) biased, course materials in such areas as sexual abuse and child welfare may need to be even more heavily scrutinized. In addition, social work educators can be proactive by seeking research that is balanced in its approach to families and their issues.

CONCLUSION

The issues presented in this article are not new, but they are persistent. Like many of the social problems that continue to challenge child welfare researchers, mother blaming and the omission of fathers in practice, policy, and research need to be revisited.

Some progress has been made in the past few decades. This society no longer accepts the once highly perceived notion that mothers are the cause of autism, schizophrenia, and homosexuality or the 19th-century idea that only mothers can raise children properly. In addition, there are efforts afoot to address some of the practices in child welfare that reflect gender biases. One such effort is the publication of Schechter and Edleson's (1999) book, popularly known as the Green Book, which identifies principles and recommendations for improving the policies and practices of child protection services, domestic violence services, and juvenile courts and has been adopted as official policy of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Among the recommendations is the clear call for children to remain with their nonabusing parents unless CPS can clearly show that it would be harmful to the children to do so. CPS agencies are also strongly advised to avoid strategies that blame a nonabusive parent for violence committed by others, to remove the batterer before the child is removed from the battered mother, and to hold the perpetrators accountable. The courts are advised to issue orders that keep nonabusing parents and children together when there is domestic violence in CPS cases.

The Green Book has received national attention. It was extensively cited by the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of New York in a supplemental memorandum and order upholding an injunction filed in the case of *Nicholson v. Williams et al.* (Case No. 00-cv-2229) (Weinstein, 2002). This case brought suit against New York State, New York City and its police department, the commissioner of the Office of Children and Family, and other officials. It alleged that the defendants routinely harassed victims of domestic violence and their children, violating their fundamental rights (Theisen,

2001). The U.S. District Court found that the evidence revealed “widespread and unnecessary cruelty by agencies of the City of New York towards mothers abused by their consorts, through forced unnecessary separation of the mothers from their children . . . due to benign indifference, bureaucratic inefficiency, and outmoded institutional biases” (Weinstein, 2002, p. 9). The injunction was granted to ensure “that (1) battered mothers who are fit to retain custody of their children do not face prosecution or removal of their children solely because the mothers are battered, and (2) the child’s right to live with such mother is protected” (Weinstein, 2002, p. 183).

These judgments are a huge victory for family law and the rights of victims of domestic violence. However, they are also costly. In light of the review presented here, the currency of the *Nicholson v. Williams* suit, and Weinstein’s finding that the remediation engaged in by the CPS agency that was charged did not cure the constitutional violations (Weinstein, 2002), we feminist social workers know that women continue to be disproportionately held responsible for what happens to their children, whereas the role of men is largely overlooked (Forste, 2002). Many of the underlying concepts that continue to pervade child welfare practice, research, and policy regarding the roles of men and women in child rearing are ingrained in Western society. To serve children and their families best, this situation must change. We need to deconstruct such biased beliefs and develop a new looking glass for society. Child welfare researchers, in particular, can and should lead the way.

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