

Rossi A S. Transition to parenthood. *J. Marriage Fam.* 30:26-39, 1968.  
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A structural analysis of the parental role in a developmental framework pinpoints why the transition to parenthood is more difficult than marital or occupational transitions. The essay suggests that the maternal role focuses on instrumental activities and the paternal role on expressive activities; hence neither men nor women are adequately prepared for parenthood in American society. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this paper has been cited in over 140 publications, making it the most-cited article in this journal.]

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I wrote this essay in 1967 at an important turning point in my own intellectual biography and in the speciality of family sociology. Sociology was then dominated theoretically by a paradigm concerning gender roles that was extraordinarily simplistic and traditional. Applied to the family, the leading conception was that men were instrumental leaders of the family and women the expressive hub of the family, implementing delegated authority from the husband-father.

My essay turned this theory on its head, pointing out that, in fact, men fill their family roles during evening and weekend leisure hours, when expressive "play" is the keynote, while women fill the instrumental duties of parenting during the far longer daytime hours. The implication was that sex role socialization did not adequately prepare either men or women for competent performance of their parental roles. This thesis was provocative and controversial in the 1960s, but speaks with continuing relevance to readers in the 1980s, which is why, I believe, it continues to appear in anthologies and science citations. The essay on parenthood was my first sustained effort to apply a feminist perspective to traditional topics in my speciality in family sociology.

The personal roots of this radical new look at parenthood included three elements: the first was the impact of a painful first encounter with sex discrim-

ination, which led to my first essay on sex equality,<sup>1</sup> published in 1964.

Second, I was then enjoying the freedom of time, provided by an NIMH five-year career development award, to explore other related fields and to break out of the pressure to "publish or perish." I had been reading widely in developmental psychology and social anthropology and had become concerned with the tendency of these fields to focus on parental impact on children, to the neglect of the impact on parents of their own transition to parenthood. Judd Marmoor, a psychoanalyst in Los Angeles, invited me to give a paper on the transition to parenthood, which was very enthusiastically received. I submitted it, in a revised and expanded form, for publication, to Marvin Sussman, then editor of the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. He spotted its originality and not only immediately accepted it, but published it in the very next issue of the journal.

The third "root" of the essay was that I was at that time struggling to cope with the responsibility of rearing three young children, maintaining a very large home, and persisting, against the social grain, in holding down a full-time professional job. None of the then-accepted thinking about gender and family roles "fit" my own experience and observations of other families I knew.

The essay also stimulated a developmental perspective on parenthood, encouraging longitudinal studies tracing changes in men and women from the wife's first pregnancy through the first several months of childrearing.<sup>2,3</sup> This approach has culminated in a special issue of *Marriage and Family Review* on the transition to parenthood, which is currently in press.

My work has continued to be controversial in more recent years, though the intellectual issues have changed, for I have been attempting to inject some more sophisticated thinking from the biological sciences into social science research on sex and gender roles. Indeed, the 1968 essay was merely a first step toward the culmination of my thinking about gender in relation to the family, as represented by my presidential address on "Gender and parenthood" to the American Sociological Association in 1983.<sup>4</sup> This essay develops a biosocial perspective that many feminists and sociologists still find more irksome than congenial, but it is my hope and prediction that it will speak to future readers more easily than to readers today, and hence will repeat the pattern of the 1968 essay.

1. Rossi A S. Equality between the sexes: an immodest proposal. *Daedalus* 93:607-52, 1964. (Cited 65 times.)
2. LaRossa R & LaRossa M M. *Transition to parenthood: how infants change families*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981. 262 p.
3. Entwisle D R & Doering S G. *The first birth, a family turning point*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. 331 p.
4. Rossi A S. Gender and parenthood. *Amer. Sociol. Rev.* 49:1-19, 1984.

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