

[Rosalind Edwards, Margareta Bäck-Wiklund, Maren Bak and Jane Ribben McCarthy \(2002\) 'Step-Fathering: Comparing Policy and Everyday Experience in Britain and Sweden'](#)
Sociological Research Online, vol. 7, no. 1,
<<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/1/edwards.html>>

To cite articles published in *Sociological Research Online*, please reference the above information and include paragraph numbers if necessary

Received: 12/2/2002 Accepted: 13/5/2002 Published: 31/5/2002

Abstract

Step-fathering is becoming increasingly common in contemporary western societies, yet it has received little research attention from either social policy or sociological perspectives. In this article, we draw on our empirical studies of step-families in Britain and Sweden to argue that social context is important in shaping step-fathers' understandings of their position. Policy and legislation in these countries emphasise the importance of ascribed, biological parenthood, marginalising step-parents. There are, however, notable class differences in both our British and Swedish samples concerning whether step-fathers see their relationship to their step-children as the same as biological fathering, supplementary to it, or as disengaged from fathering. The analysis also reveals that policies simultaneously emphasise achieved contemporary involved fathering alongside promoting ascribed biological fatherhood. Such policies contain a contradiction for step-fathers' understandings of their everyday relationships with their step- children.

Keywords:

Biological And Social Parenthood; British Family Policy; Comparative Family Policy; Fathering; Social Class; Step-families; Step- fathering; Step-parenting; Swedish Family Policy

Introduction

1.1

Step-parenting has long had a negative image, most notably embodied in the folk tale of Cinderella. Furthermore, step-parenting relationships are marginalised by policy and legislation in contemporary western countries, with an emphasis on the importance of ascribed, biological parenting relationships. Yet step-parenting, and specifically step-fathering, is becoming increasingly common in these countries (UN Dept. of International Economic Affairs 1988, cited in [Wardle 1993](#)). The legal marginalisation yet demographic growth of step-fathering is occurring in the context of an increased political interest in contemporary fatherhood, with a stress on the achieved social relations of involved and caring fathering.

1.2

The position and experiences of step- fathers are interesting because their ambiguous situation can shed light on our understanding of fathering as both a biological and social

relation. How do they experience and understand their position when it has a negative image and is marginalized in policy and legislative terms? What relationship does step-fathering have to the meaning of fatherhood in late modern society? What are the implications for the practice of step-fathering if it is believed that fatherhood is an ascribed position, or if it is regarded as an achieved relationship? Ferri and Smith pose the issues in the following way:

It is the distinction between the social and biological aspects of parenting which underlies the normative vacuum in present-day society concerning the actual roles which step-parents are to play. This is particularly evident in respect of the less clear formulation of the role of fathers generally. ([Ferri and Smith 1998](#), p.12)

1.3

In this article we discuss these pertinent questions concerning the practice of step-fathering and its relationship to understandings of fatherhood. We use a comparative analysis to discuss how step-fathers in Britain and Sweden experience their position as 'fathers' and their relationship with their step-children. We consider theories concerning a transition in the nature of fatherhood, and the relevant policy and legislation in Britain and in Sweden. Our empirical data is drawn from qualitative interviews with samples of British and Swedish step-fathers, conducted independently by two teams of researchers.^[1] The comparative analysis was developed post hoc, as the two research groups became aware of similarities in the research questions they had formulated and in their resulting data sets as well. Furthermore, Britain and Sweden prove to be interesting for comparative purposes because of similarities and differences in the development of family policies in each.

* **Fatherhood in Transition**

2.1

A growing amount of research has been produced on fatherhood, prompted by concern about rising levels of divorce and separation, and 'non-traditional' family forms and gender relations. A key theoretical theme in this work is that fathering is undergoing a transition from 'ascribed' to 'achieved' (see [Jensen 2001](#)). Ascribed fatherhood is a relationship rooted in the biological tie between father and child, and in the gendered division of labour between married parents wherein fathers are breadwinners, disciplinarians and emotionally distanced, and mothers are nurturing carers. It is argued that, with increased maternal employment and family change, this traditional form of 'remote' fathering is breaking down; ascribed fathering is 'shrinking' throughout contemporary western countries, and social recognition of fatherhood has shifted from an institutional to a relational form ([Björnberg 1992](#); [Furstenberg 1988](#); [Jensen 1999](#)). Fathering is becoming an achieved social relationship, rooted in new expectations that fathers should engage with their children as physically and emotionally involved carers. The 'father of duty' is being replaced by 'the loving father' ([Bertaux and Delcroix 1992](#)). In order to explore this empirical shift, research on fathering has focused on the relations and activities that occur between father and child (for example, [Lamb and Oppenheim 1989](#); [Lewis and O'Brien 1987](#); [Lewis and Sussman 1986](#); [Warin et al. 1999](#)) and on the interplay between contemporary social processes and situated gendered family interaction (for example, [Bäck-Wiklund and Bergsten 1997](#); [LaRossa 1989](#); [LaRossa et al. 1991](#); [Marsiglio 1995](#)).

2.2

The terms 'ascribed' and 'achieved' to describe shifts in understandings of the position of fathers may not be entirely satisfactory. It seems to overlay the social relationship (in terms of a particular understanding of the fatherhood role) with the biological relationship (although we would concur with the view that biological relationships are also socially constructed). Morgan ([1998](#)) has sought to develop a new conceptual language as an aid

to exploring some of these facets of contemporary fatherhood, distinguishing between fathers, fatherhood and fathering. In this formulation, 'fathers' refers to concrete individuals (whether in terms of social or biological fathers), 'fatherhood' largely applies to discourses and representations, and 'fathering' refers primarily to practices (although Morgan also points to the interdependence of discourses and practices). This conceptual formulation may be useful in helping to elucidate how these three aspects may have been overlaid in notions of 'traditional', intact, nuclear western families, and continue to be overlaid in the assumptions underlying much current policy. By contrast, an exploration of the position of fathers and step-fathers in reformulated families can show how some of these varying aspects of contemporary fatherhood have become more disconnected and contested. In line with other writers, Morgan suggests that this may be understood perhaps as a loosening of the links between institution and relationship. Nevertheless, since the practices of fathering may be linked to older institutionalized formulations of fatherhood, the position may be complex:

... it would not be correct to see a simply historical transition from the institutional to the relational in terms of fathering. Rather, as recent debates about the duties of fatherhood make plain, there are various mixes of the two ([Morgan 1998](#), p.7)

As we will explore in this paper, these various mixes may work differently for biological and step-fathers, and between different social classes.

2.3

Research shows differences in a transition to achieved fathering in Britain and Sweden. British fathers' role is still largely seen by themselves and other family members as primarily one of economic provider, with other aspects being additional to this ([Warin et al. 1999](#)). There is also evidence that, rather than being achieved by themselves, fathers' relationship with their children is mediated through mothers. Studies by Backett ([1987](#)) and Ribbens ([1994](#)), for example, reveal fathers' reliance on mothers to interpret children's practical and emotional needs, with this reliance often continuing after divorce ([Smart 1999](#)) and as children reach teenage years ([Brannen et al. 1994](#); [Gillies et al. 2000](#); [Hutson and Jenkins 1989](#)).

2.4

Swedish studies, however, often indicate that fathers take an increasingly active part in their children's lives, and not only want to 'have' a family but also 'to be' a family ([Björnberg and Kollind 1994](#)). Nevertheless, there are some equivocal aspects to this. For example, Bäck-Wiklund and Bergsten's ([1997](#)) study showed that while on a discursive level mothers and fathers described an equal sharing of care and responsibility for their young children, their reports of their everyday practices were gender specific. The fathers engaged emotionally with their children but were not so involved in the practicalities of their everyday care unless the mother called on them to take full responsibility (see also [Ahme and Roman 1997](#); [Andersson 1993](#)). Furthermore, it is mothers who are more likely to take the parental leave available to them, rather than fathers ([Riksförsäkringsverket 1998](#)) (discussed later).

2.5

Notions of a transition from ascribed to achieved fathering, however, have not really addressed an underlying link between the two: biology. It is largely biological (ascribed) fathers who are the focus of discussions and studies of the shift towards social (achieved) fathering. As we will see later, social policy legislation and intervention in Britain and Sweden is also concerned with this implicit link. Yet, as noted earlier, non-biological fathering is becoming increasingly common in the context of step-families.

* Step-families on the Research Agenda

3.1

In Britain it is estimated that 1 in 15 of families with dependent children are step-families, comprising nearly eight percent of all dependent children in 1993, and that this proportion is rising rapidly ([Haskey 1994](#); [Office for National Statistics 1998](#)). In Sweden it is estimated that between 7-8 percent of children aged between 0 and 17 years live in step-families ([Barnombudsmannen 1998](#)). In both countries, in the overwhelming majority of step-families, the resident children are the biological offspring of the mother, and live with a step-father.

3.2

Despite its growing prevalence, the everyday practice of step-fathering has received little research attention, or discussion from social policy or sociological perspectives, in either country. Each of the studies reported here was, respectively, only the second in-depth sociological study of step-families to be undertaken in their national contexts. Rather, in the Britain the focus has been on family break-up, with studies based on in-depth accounts or survey responses from separated/divorced parents about their 'negotiations' around childrearing responsibilities (for example, [Bradshaw et al. 1999](#); [Maclean and Eekelaar 1997](#); [Simpson 1998](#); [Smart and Neale 1999](#)). Swedish divorce/separation research has not given much attention to this, however. Overall, as Ferri and Smith (1998, p.11) note, empirical studies of step-families are thin on the ground and problem-oriented. What step-family research and literature there is has largely been within the psychological and therapeutic fields, drawing on clinical inventories or family systems theories, as well as cohort based social studies. In both Britain and Sweden, much attention has been directed towards measuring health, education and social outcomes for children (for example, [Creighton 1992](#); [Ferri 1984](#); [Kiernan 1992](#); [Wadsby 1993](#)). The problem-focused approach perhaps reaches its nadir in a cross-national statistical comparison of child abuse outcomes in step-families, which argues from a neo-Darwinist perspective that abuse occurs because: 'Step-parents do not, on average, feel the same child-specific love and commitment as genetic parents, and therefore do not reap the same emotional rewards from unreciprocated 'parental' investment' ([Daly and Wilson 1998](#), p.38). In this view, achieved fathering is immutably linked to ascribed fatherhood.

3.3

Focusing more on the practice of step-parenting, the first in-depth sociological study of British step-families, conducted in the late 1970s ([Burgoyne and Clark 1984](#)) found that the dominant pattern was for step-families to attempt a 'fresh start', with the step-father 'passing as'/replacing the children's biological father. More recently, Allan, Crow and Hawker (1999), as part of a study of kin constructions in step-families, find that step-fathers are not attempting to replace their step-children's biological father. Yet Ferri and Smith (1998) report that step-fathers have high levels of involvement in bringing up their step-children. Ferri and Smith's survey, however, focuses on practical day to day care, not affective involvement, and also relies on mothers' reports of family activities.

3.4

Swedish family research shows a similar lack of sustained attention to step-families, and to step-fathers in particular. Research by Liljeström and Kollind (1990) stresses the complexity of relations in this family form, and Larsson-Sjöberg (2000) poses step-father/step-child relationships as characterised by conflicting loyalties. There is thus a lack of direct attention given to exploring how, within their own terms, contemporary step-fathers try to make sense of their relationship to their dependent step-children. Our own analysis seeks to remedy this. [\[2\]](#)

3.5

Before we proceed to discuss the step-fathers' understandings of their emotional and caring

position in relation to their step-children, however, we need to consider the relevant policy and legislation in Britain and Sweden. Such policies provide one context through which agenda are set for any research on step-family life, and within which step-fathering itself takes place.

* **British and Swedish Policy Concerns**

4.1

Along with increases in divorce and single motherhood and subsequent re/marriage and re/partnering, recent years have seen a tendency for policy and legislation to emphasise the importance of ascribed, biological parenthood. The legal position of step-parents is one of invisibility, or at least ambiguity, in many western countries ([Agell 1993](#)).

4.2

In Britain, there has been a shift in legal and policy discourses in favour of the normative view that children need biological parents and that the tie with them is for life. The 1989 Children Act is a prime example, with its emphasis on continued parental responsibility across households and assumption that ongoing co-operation is both possible and desirable, and in the child's best interest. There is no explicit recognition of step-parents or step-families in the legislation, but 'non-parents' in 'actual care' of a child may acquire parental responsibility through the granting of a residence order (although only for the duration of that order). Residence orders were created to settle disputes about where a child lives, and the fact that they are central to any step-parental legal standing reflects step-parents' status as a legal non-entity. Furthermore, if a step- parent obtains parental responsibility, this does not affect the rights and responsibilities of the non-resident parent. However, the Children Act is also premised on an individualist philosophy, reiterated in the 1996 Family Law Act, in that the principle of shared parental responsibility across households is cross-cut with a commitment to independent action. Both biological parents can continue to carry out their parental duties independently without the requirement to consult each other. Step-parents, though, are still invisible within this. (See [Edwards, Gillies and Ribbens McCarthy 1999](#), for a broader discussion of the legal position of step-parents in Britain.) The Child Support Act 1991 also attempts to impose ascribed ties of biological responsibility in making the 'absent' parent (most usually the father) financially liable for his children. It is only very recently that any financial responsibilities he may have for any step- children who he currently lives with have been taken into consideration.

4.3

There has also been a recent concern in Britain with achieved fathering: the involvement of fathers in childrearing and the quality of their relationship with their children - as well as with ensuring their financial support for their children after divorce or separation (for examples see [Dennis and Erdos 1993](#); [Burgess 1997](#)). There are campaigns to encourage fathers to read and talk to their children: for example, the 'Lads and Dads' campaign, as part of the 1998 National Year of Reading, and the 'Fathers Direct' service set up to promote closer relationships between fathers and their children. However, this 'new' involved style of 'good' fatherhood lacks supportive legal and social frameworks. The government, for example, has introduced the right to 13 weeks parental leave for fathers and mothers in the first five years of their child's life, but it is (as yet) unpaid. Overall, Britain has a liberal and individualist tradition in relation to social policies. Childbearing and rearing, and the sexual division of labour, are regarded as a matter of individual choice and responsibility necessitating minimal state support, but for the most part policies assume a male breadwinner model, which has latterly been 'modernised' by mothers' part time employment ([Sainsbury 1994](#); [Duncan and Edwards 1999](#)).

4.4

Swedish family policy generally can also be said to be individualised, but not in the same

way as in Britain. Men and women are treated as individuals, but there is a collective dimension to this in that it is supported, or imposed, through the welfare state. The requirement for joint custody, where *all* decisions relating to children have to be agreed by both parents, reveals a less individualistic prescription in relation to the ascribed tie between biological parents and their children. As in Britain, this is regarded as in the child's best interest. This principle has been part of Swedish law since 1915, and has grown in importance in matters concerning custody. Following on the consensus about negative consequences of divorce for children, the 1983 New Custody Act prescribed joint custody for children when their parents divorced, given that the parents agreed on this. If one of them was opposed, however, the court had to rule in favour of separate custody, and where parents were unable to co-operate, the only solution was to dissolve the joint custody ([Agell 1993](#)). Public discourses in favour of the view that children need both biological parents grew still stronger though, and in 1998 the law was changed to enable the court to rule in favour of joint custody even where one of the parents wants separate custody. The court - representing the welfare state - has the superior right over the individual parent to interpret and rule what is considered best for the child. As in Britain, step-parents are a legal non-entity and are rendered invisible.

4.5

In Sweden there has also been a longer and stronger emphasis on the need for achieved involved fathering. Sweden has extensive paid parental leave applying to both mothers and fathers, but it is usually mothers who take almost 90 percent of this. Thus, a period of non-transferable paid leave has been allocated for fathers - initially one month called the 'daddy month' ([Bäck-Wiklund and Bergsten 1997](#)), and increased to two months in early 2002. Many local maternity centres offer training in 'modern fatherhood'. In the mid-1980s the newly appointed Commission for Men's Issues initiated a debate that has become part of public discourses about fatherhood, men and masculinity, following two lines. On the one hand there is a discourse of fairness and independence for women. On the other hand there is a discourse concerning responsibility and care for the benefit of children. The contemporary Swedish father is both mentally and physically close on an everyday basis, showing warmth and affection to his children. This involvement is also supposed to develop men's own personal qualities, to form a base for common experiences with the mother and, at the same time, provide a role model for his children ([Kulturdepartementet 1992, 1995](#); [Nordiska Rådet 1995](#)). All of this occurs within the context of a social democratic welfare regime with family policies that, beside giving cash benefits, also offer extensive subsidised public child care. Child bearing and child rearing are thus supported, and there is no assumption of male breadwinning; in policy terms both mothers and fathers are seen as carers and workers ([Sainsbury 1994](#); [Duncan and Edwards 1999](#)).

4.6

In both Britain and Sweden then - although in existence for far longer in Sweden - there is a policy emphasis on biological parents' responsibilities towards their children, children's need for this even after divorce/separation, and fathering as active involved daily caring. Given the figures we quoted previously about the growing experience of step-parenting - overwhelmingly step-fathering - in both countries, it is obvious that a daily 'fathering' relationship of some sort is actually being practised by step-, not just biological, fathers. Yet, as we have also seen for both countries, step-parents are ignored in policy terms; ascribed fatherhood and achieved fathering go hand in hand. Step-fathers are accorded little in the way of rights and responsibilities in relation to their step-children and any caring role they may have is marginalised.

* **The British and Swedish Studies and Their Methods**

5.1

Both the British and Swedish studies focused on what were respectively labelled 'step-

clusters' and 'linked family systems' – in most cases the resident biological mother, the step-father and the non-resident biological father. This choice of research unit was based on the common concern in both countries with maintaining children's relationships with their non-resident parent (most usually the father) after divorce or separation. This means that step-fathers are likely to be attempting to understand their position in a situation where their step-children are in some form of contact with their biological father. While there are no figures on this specifically in either country, the situation for children's contact with their 'absent' parent generally is indicative. In Britain, a recent study found that 47 percent of non-resident fathers saw their child at least once a week, and a further 14 percent once a fortnight ([Bradshaw et al. 1999](#)). In Sweden, by the mid-1990s the number of separated parents practising joint custody reached 82 per cent ([Statistika Centralbyrån 1995](#)), and 60 per cent of 11-12 year olds of divorced/separated parents said that they had contact with their 'absent' parent at least once a week ([Barnombudsmannen 1998](#)).

5.2

Given the prescriptions for co-operation in childrearing between biological parents, the two research teams were similarly concerned with considering the interactions over everyday rearing of dependent children that it was assumed took place between the parents in the cluster or system. The British study aimed to interview each parental member of the main sample of step-clusters, while the Swedish study aimed to do this for the linked family system but also to include the children involved in each case. Both studies used in-depth methods to explore how adults (and children) made sense of their interwoven lives. It was important to have people's own explanations as data, without valourising any specific viewpoint.

5.3

Researchers studying step-families often have to be pragmatic in the decisions that they take about sampling, and both our studies used a variety of approaches to construct a sample. The British researchers initially took an approach starting from their personal networks before moving to other, including more formal, sources in order to ensure heterogeneity. The Swedish researchers proceeded vice versa, moving from more formal sources to personal networking. Both used a snowballing approach towards contacting interviewees within each step-cluster or linked family system. The British team, however, took a more individualistic and looser approach, which allowed for actual relationships within the step-cluster to be reflected in whether or not the researchers gained access to all members of the step-cluster as the research actually progressed. (See [Edwards and Ribbens with Gillies, 1999](#), for extended discussions of issues in defining and accessing the British sample, and its eventual nature.) In contrast, the Swedish team determined that they wished to have all members of the linked family system included in their study, and did not proceed to interview until this was agreed with all parties (although circumstances meant that they did not always manage to actually conduct all the interviews). They focused around a 'link child' who lived with the resident mother and step-father and had a biological father in another household, and required that each step-father should also be a biological father to a child in his present relationship - the latter being seen by them as indicative of a committed relationship (although one step-father did not have a child with his current partner). (See [Bäck-Wiklund, Sjöberg and Bak 1998](#), for further discussion of sampling methods.)

5.4

In the event, the British sample consisted of 23 step-clusters, and encompassed interviews with 17 step-fathers (four of whom were also non-resident biological fathers of dependent children), and the Swedish sample of 17 linked family systems yielded interviews with 14 step-fathers (four also being non-resident biological fathers of dependent children). Both samples contained step-families who had been living together for varying lengths of time, from a few weeks^[3] though to 11 years. It is these in-depth qualitative interviews with step-fathers, encompassing the organisation and meanings of everyday family life for them, that

we draw on in order to examine how they understood and experienced their situation. Each research team undertook a combination of deductive and inductive approaches to the analysis of their interview data, moving iteratively between the two analytic strategies. The relation between biological and social fatherhood was one of our research interests, as we have developed above, but our approach was clearly inductive in the analysis of the way such relations were actually understood and experienced by the step-fathers. In particular, the social class differences we later describe concerning the meaning of being a step-father were not hypothesised from the outset, but emerged as we engaged in analysis.

5.5

It is thus important to note similarities and differences in the class profiles of each of our samples. We used a multi-dimensional 'objectivist' approach to assess our interviewees' social class, incorporating individual trajectories and household characteristics ([Osborne and Morris 1979](#); [Morgan 1996](#)). This includes: interviewees' own occupation(s) and educational qualifications, the occupations and educational qualifications of their parents and their current partner; housing tenure and neighbourhood; and current social networks. The British sample contained class diversity, with five of the step-fathers being working class, two upwardly mobile from the working class, and the rest (10) middle class. It also included some ethnic diversity: the step-fathers in the sample comprising one Irish, one African-Caribbean and one Bangladeshi step-father, with the remaining 14 being White British. The Swedish team's sample contained a similar class mix, consisting of five working class step-fathers, seven middle-class, and two who were difficult to classify in that they combined both manual and managerial work in small family businesses. In terms of ethnicity however, their sample was all White Swedish.

5.6

Clearly, we are dealing with very small numbers, and our findings must be regarded as illuminative rather than in any way as representative.^[4] Nevertheless, our analysis raises issues that have received little attention. In particular, the cross-cultural comparison in our work throws some light on the achieved nature of step-fathering in the late modern contexts of changes in family and parenting, and where there is an increased group of men living in step-relationships to children but without recognition in contemporary British and Swedish family legislation.

* **Step-fathering: From Integration to Disengagement**

6.1

In looking at how step-fathers make sense of their relationship to dependent step-children, both teams of researchers were struck by the way that understandings of children needing involved, responsible and caring step-fathers and/or involved, responsible and caring biological fathers played themselves out in their accounts of everyday practices.^[5] We were particularly interested in the strong class dimension to the content of these understandings, as well as by how they related to the legal and policy situation in each country and the length of time for which these policies had been pursued.

6.2

Within the British sample, the working class step-fathers did not see a close emotional relationship with children as dependent on biological status. They regarded children as needing the stability of belonging to a clear-cut family unit, with themselves integrated as the father within that unit, including as financial provider. They felt that the natural emotional process of relating to their step-children, treating them as their own, including in relation to discipline, and/or carefully nurturing the relationship over time, could mirror or outweigh biological fatherhood. They focused on children needing families and their own role as a 'good' step-father involving the active protection and care of, and authority over, their step-children.

6.3

Trevor was a case in point. He had been married three times and had seven biological children, but did not have much contact with any of them. He had lived with his current partner, Dawn, for around a year together with her daughters, aged 11 and 16, who saw their biological father regularly. Trevor and Dawn were planning to marry, and he seemed quite happy to cut off from all his biological children and take on Dawn's two as his own:

As far as I'm concerned Dawn is my life, and the two girls, and that's it ... I think and feel of [my step-daughters] as *mine*, not as nothing else. They're part of a unit and that's it, and I feel of 'em as me own, take 'em in as me own, and that's just it, nothing other. Alright I know they've got their own dad and that, but they're still - if you don't take them as your children you might as well not start.
(emphasis is Trevor's)

6.4

Trevor had no problems in taking the initiative in exerting direct authority over his step-daughters as well as backing up Dawn, and saw this as part of his caring fathering responsibilities:

I tell [one of my step-daughters] off and I'll explain to her why I've told her off or why I've grounded [\[6\]](#) her, and it isn't because I don't love her, because I don't want her, it's because I do ... In the past where Dawn has grounded 'em they've kept on and on and on, they've had their own way, in the end she'd let them go out. But now, because I back Dawn up, hundred per cent, she says something, I back her up.

6.5

Trevor felt strongly that, because step-fathers were a 'father figure' to their step-children, biological fathers had no right to undermine this. Indeed, he said he would happily adopt his step-daughters if they ever wanted it and felt that a lack of contact with their biological father (by their own choice) would not be a bad thing.

6.6

Neil had lived with his partner and her two year old daughter, Jordan, for about a year. In that period they had also had a child together. Jordan had never had any contact with her biological father. Like Trevor, Neil similarly emotionally regarded his step-daughter, Jordan, as 'his own':

Jordan is not my own but I mean she is my own if you know what I mean. I would do anything for Jordan, anything. I'd lay in that road and let a lorry run over me for Jordan, I would. No, I would, yeah, I mean I love her that much you know.

6.7

Thus, for these British working class step-fathers, fatherhood was largely achieved in being socially defined, and involving care and responsibility. Similarly, step-fathering was achieved in being lived and felt as the same as biological fathering.

6.8

In contrast, the British middle class step-fathers were concerned with the link between fatherhood and biology. They regarded blood ties between parents and children as resulting in more intense and enduring emotional relationships. This was especially apparent in relation to their discussions about everyday disciplining of children, where these step-fathers were unsure of their authority, or felt that they had none, over their step-children. They saw their role as supplementary to, and supportive of, the mother.

Nevertheless, these middle class step-fathers also felt that children needed a clear-cut family which involved them taking a more active role and exercising care and responsibility, including some authority. They were left in the awkward position of struggling with two competing understandings of how to be a 'good' step-father.

6.9

For example, Martin was a widower with two children aged 11 and 8. His wife, Lynn, had two children, aged 12 and 11, from a previous marriage, who spent most weekends with their biological father. They had been together for three years. Martin felt that he 'naturally' had a special emotional tie with his biological children, and his wife with hers, which meant that each wanted to favour them over their step-children. He and Lynn fought against this, however, because they were trying to create a family life, and family life is about fairness. This careful equity could, though, be disrupted by Lynn's ex-husband:

We were very, very conscious of being fair. It's easy to be unfair because you always want to spoil your own children. It's very easy to give something to your children and not to your partner's children ... And it is difficult when Lynn's ex-husband takes [his children] off and there's always the chance that he'd give them something and my children would not get it ... You can't say to him don't spoil the children because they are his children ... But when they're with us as a family we're fair.

6.10

Despite this construction of an equitable family, Martin reported that, 'her children turn to her for something and my two children turn to me for something', and that he largely left discipline of Lynn's children to her. Crucially, Martin also made a distinction between being a family and being a father:

I don't think of myself as a father to [my step-children] ... They're not related to me in any way. But they are still part of the family that I live in ... I do things with them just the same as I do with my children. I watch TV with them just the same as I do with [mine]. But I'm not their father ... Because you can't replace a true dad or a true mum. You can't.

6.11

Pete described himself as having a 'conflict problem' in how he understood his relationship to his 8 year old step-son, with whom he had lived as a step-father for seven years, and used the issue of names to illustrate this:

I think it's really important that he had a good relationship with his dad but, you know, I do find - he gets into this thing where he says 'dad, er, Pete'. So in some ways I wish I'd been, I mean it's selfish really, not so sensitive to [his biological father] and been more sensitive to myself and said 'look, you can call me dad' ... But, you know, I also do think it's important that he doesn't have a confusion in his mind who his dad is. Whatever people say, I think there's a strong genetic tie.

6.12

In this formulation then, because fatherhood was an ascribed biological given that encompassed ascribed rather than achieved emotional ties, step-fathering was a supplementary activity. But this could be in tension with the step-fathers' responsibility for an achieved fathering that also met children's needs for a clear-cut family unit.

6.13

The Swedish working class step-fathers also worked with some notions of 'good' step-fathering as a supplementary activity - here because biological fathers should, rightly, be

involved with their children - alongside ideas that they themselves should fulfill an involved, responsible and caring fathering role in providing their step-children with a cohesive family unit. Yet a major difference between them and the British middle class step-fathers was that they appeared not to experience a tension between the two, perhaps because they were more like the British working class step-fathers in stating that they could emotionally feel their step-children were their own. They were active in providing care and taking responsibility for their step-children *and* in making space for the biological father to do so as well.

6.14

Ingmar is a good example of this complementary balance. His wife, Anita, had a daughter, aged 9, from a previous relationship, who saw her biological father regularly, and together they had two sons aged 6 and 4. Ingmar clearly valued his family: 'The most important people for me are the family. It is the children, all the children, and Anita.' He said that he and Anita set out with the conviction that he was just as responsible for her daughter as she was, and this had not changed with the birth of his own biological children:

You get just as angry and just as happy with all three ... Even if you don't have other children of your own, you bloody well have the same responsibility as if the child was yours. You must have that as a guiding principle.

6.15

Nevertheless, even though his step-daughter had started to call him 'daddy', Ingmar reflected that she had a biological father with whom she had a special emotional relationship: 'Daddy is always - you have to accept that as a step-father, the biological father ... You should not be sorry about that or make a fuss about it.' He saw himself as having full fatherly feelings for his step-daughter, allowing her to have two fathers - but not as competitors. While his step-daughter had, and should have, a close relationship with her biological father, this did not affect Ingmar's own feelings for her, which were, and should be, the same as for his biological children.

6.16

Nils similarly made little distinction between his 10 year old step-son, Chris, and his 2 year old biological son, Tom. The only difference he saw in his fathering of them was because of their age:

It was fun [with Chris] from the beginning. He was three years old then ... It was like other families. A lot of fun that first summer ... It is different [fathering them] because there is so much age difference, you do different things with them. When Tom was very small I felt it was unfair to Chris that Tom takes up more time. But what I am, I am [Chris'] father, I think, that's what I think.

6.17

Thus, for these Swedish working class step-fathers the supplementary role of step-fathering actually mirrored that of, and could work alongside of, involved biological fathering, rather than the two being incompatible. While biological fathers had an ascribed status that was linked to emotion, step-fathers could also develop an achieved emotional fathering relationship.

6.18

The Swedish middle class step-fathers felt that the blood ties between father and child were primary and that biological fathers should take active caring responsibility for their children. They form a contrast to the British middle class step-fathers and their Swedish working-class counterparts, however. They did not experience a tension between two versions of 'good' step-fathering (i.e. a supplementary or integrated practice), nor did they conflate them. Rather, they discursively disengaged themselves from active care and

responsibility for their step-children because this was placed upon biological fathers - although it was clear that the step-fathers often stepped into such a role when called upon to do so.

6.19

Gunnar, for example, had two adult children and one dependent child, aged 16, from a previous marriage, with the youngest spending every other weekend, one day a week, and some holidays with himself and his new wife, Berit. Berit also had two children from her previous marriage, aged 15 and 11, and shared weekly turns of care of them with her ex-husband. Gunnar and Berit also had a 4 year old son, Jonas, of their own. Gunnar described his relationship with his step-children as 'generalised':

I am some kind of generalised adult. When I try to act [in relation to my step-children] it just doesn't work, so I just stay put and leave it to my wife. And after all, they do have a father very close by. To sum up my role as a father, I am here, I am an adult, I have children, and I have Jonas. Of course, I stand up for them in different situations and I care for them, but more so when [my wife] is not around.

6.20

Gunnar sorted the children into the categories 'mine, hers and ours', and felt strongly that he was not taking on a role as a father to his step-children. He talked about being there for them on an everyday basis, performing practical duties, but not interfering in their upbringing. He appeared hesitant to invest in any deep relationship with them; it was their biological father who should exercise care and responsibility.

6.21

Like Gunnar, Filip did not see himself as a father to the step-sons he had lived with for 10 years, since they were seven and nine years old. He also described 'holding back' in his relationship to them because anything more would have encroached on biological fathering:

I am not a father but I feel accepted, I think I have responsibility. I have tried not to push myself on them. They have another family history before ... It is obvious, it is difficult to approach a child without taking over something from somebody else, taking something from the father they already have.

6.22

Thus, for this group, fatherhood was an ascribed biological given and carried emotional ties and responsibilities. As a result, they saw step-fathering as a somewhat disengaged rather than supplementary practice. To an extent, it is not achieved 'fathering' at all.

6.23

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the step-fathers in both the British and Swedish studies, whatever their social class and their involvement with their step-children, did take on an ascribed material aspect of fatherhood. They all saw themselves as having financial responsibilities for those children:

I have without doubt been a good, if you like, provider for both of [my step-children]. They've both enjoyed things that they otherwise couldn't have done in a material sense ... So when I said to you just now, although I didn't come into the situation as a step-father, I have in fact fulfilled a role of some kind, it's mostly financial. (Frank - British middle class)

I'd already said, when I first met Eva, there's something that we'll never argue about, that is money. It'll always work out. It's not worth speculating too much

about money. Nobody remembers 100 crowns a thousand years from now ... We have to see what [the children] need and then make the decisions that are necessary. If [my step-daughter] needs a bike, can we solve this with [her biological father]? He's unemployed at the moment, so [my wife] and I have to find the solution. If she needs a bike, then we buy her a bicycle. That's the way I see it. (Klaus – Swedish working class)

6.24

This acceptance of an aspect of ascribed fatherhood – the traditional role of financial provider (even where biological fathers were involved and providing financial support, to whatever degree) – is particularly interesting in the light of policies in both countries stressing and ensuring biological fathers' financial obligations. It is also pertinent in the light of the patterned variability in our step-fathers affective and caring involvement. It supports Maclean and Eekelaar's (1997, chapter 8) argument that both biological and step-fathers relate their support obligations to social (achieved) parenthood, and - in the British case at least - links into prevalent understandings of fathering as an ascribed breadwinning function.

* Conclusion

7.1

Looking at our joint material overall then, although the step-fathers consistently accepted an ascribed financial responsibility for their step-children, we have an interesting variability around achieved emotional and caring involvement. This moves from a view of step-fathering as an integrated practice focused around caring and responsible activity that equates with biological fathering (British working-class), through to step-fathering understood as a disengaged practice that largely does not equate with fathering even in a supplementary sense (Swedish middle class). In between these we have step-fathering as either mirroring and conflating with fathering practices (Swedish working class), or as a supplementary practice that is in tension with other, more active, fathering practices (British middle class).

7.2

The class differences within our samples indicate that the working class step-fathers we interviewed in both countries were emphasising achieved *social* relations. Ascribed biological ties were of less concern; they cared for the children living with them. In contrast, the middle class step-fathers, with their circumscribed fathering responsibilities, emphasised ascribed *biological* ties as primary, rather than achieved social relations. The latter were adopting a biologically-based thinking that can have neo-Darwinist underpinnings, whereas the working class step-fathers handled contemporary step-fathering in a way that focused on the social rather than the biological. [6]

7.3

The conclusions that we can draw from our respective small scale studies are illuminative in nature, rather than general. Interestingly, however, this variability appears to have some relationship to the type of policies pursued in Britain and Sweden, and the length of time for which they have been promoted. The British policy emphasis on biological parental ties being ascribed for life, and the linked focus on achieved involved fatherhood, is quite recent. In this context, our evidence would indicate that British step-fathers can adhere to older (in the light of [Burgoyne and Clark's 1984](#), findings), or alternative, notions of fathers' primary responsibilities being to the dependent children who they currently live with, whether biological or social. They hold to these to a greater (working class) or lesser (middle class) extent, respectively either ignoring or experiencing a tension with more recent pronouncements and understandings. In contrast, the Swedish policy emphasis on ascribed biological ties linked to achieved involved fatherhood has far longer roots. This

context has congruence with the Swedish sample of step-fathers' understandings of their position. They either work their own fathering practices alongside these notions (working class), or work with the legislative formulation of their position as disengaged in favour of biological fathers (middle class).

7.4

We would stress that the relationship between policy and step-fathering practice among our samples that we have noted above should not be taken to imply that step-fathers' understandings of their position can be 'read off' from past and current state family policy promotion in any simplistic fashion (i.e. that pursuing particular policies results in particular attitudes amongst a given population).^[7] As we have seen, there seem to be important class variations in how step-fathering is experienced within each national context. Across the studies in both countries, the view that ascribed biological ties are paramount and special was a particularly middle class view, while the working class view held that achieved fathering was possible in feeling and acting the same towards step-children as towards biological children.

7.5

Indeed, the social class dimension of our findings finds resonance with other in-depth studies of step-family life in other national contexts. Le Gall and Martin's (1997) research on French step-families identifies two attitudes towards parenting and family life – 'replacement' and 'continuity' – according to whether their interviewees were, in their terms 'disadvantaged' or 'more fortunate'. While these terms of socio-economic status cannot be fully equated with social class, the parallels between this French study and our British and Swedish studies are striking. 'Disadvantaged' (working class) step-fathers and other step-family members were concerned with 'replacement', focusing on a 'relatively traditional concept of family ... and the presence of children immediately gives substance to this' (p.186). These step-fathers took the 'traditional' position of father. In contrast, their 'more fortunate' step-fathers and other step-family members were concerned with 'continuity', where the step-child's link to their biological father 'continues to exist in spite of separation' (p.190). These step-fathers found difficulty in modelling a fathering role and thus occupied a precarious position.

7.6

Thus, the meaning of step-fathering may be shaped in important ways by deep-rooted class or socio-economically based experiences. The interplay between economic and material circumstances and culture over time may well be an issue here. Middle class men, for example, have long had more invested in biological relationships and status in their concerns with inheritance (for example, [Davidoff et al.1999](#), [Rose 1989](#)). In contrast, working class families have long been subject to social conditions of risk and uncertainty (for example, [Walkerdine and Lucey 1989](#)). Thus an emphasis on social parenting may make good sense in a world where men may be in a poor position to provide well for their families in stable households. Men who are prepared to act as provider and father to children are significant and pertinent, rather than biological fatherhood.

7.7

It may well be, then, that the family policies pursued in each country examined here are the outcome of middle class notions of biological and step-fathering, such that particular attitudes amongst a more powerful social group have resulted in particular policies. Nevertheless, it also appears to be the case that the longer middle class attitudes have been inscribed in family policy, the more likely they are to begin to shape working class understandings, albeit these do not become entirely congruent with those of the middle classes.

7.8

Certainly the interactions between policy, practice and time are complex issues, and

beyond the scope of our discussion here. Whatever the case, though, it is clear that in both Britain and Sweden, social policy is concerned with ascribed fatherhood, through an emphasis on biological fathers' responsibilities to their children, and a linking of achieved involved fathering to this ascribed fatherhood. Thus there is the irony that policies that have been developed to deal with one aspect of fluid contemporary family change (divorce, non-traditional families, etc.) may not be entirely 'progressive'. Rather, it would seem that they can draw on what are often seen as 'conventional' normative (biological) notions of fatherhood in seeking both to reproduce traditionally ascribed, and to produce contemporary ascribed, fathering. [\[8\]](#)

7.9

Our analysis thus reveals some interesting contradictions between the direction in which policy and legislation are moving in both countries (though further advanced in Sweden than in Britain), and the future of fathering and step-fathering. Legislatively, in both countries, step-fathers are shut out and marginalised, even though they may play a significant role in dependent step-children's daily lives. They live together with their step-children on an everyday basis and provide them with support, both materially and – to varying extents - emotionally. In contrast, biological fathers, who tend to live their everyday lives apart from their children, are legislatively ascribed financial, and encouraged to achieve emotional, responsibility for their children. The messages in both British and Swedish family policies contain a complex and uneasy relationship between ascribed and achieved fathering, and contradictions for step-fathers' lived relationships with their step-children. For policy to continue to ignore this current situation seems short-sighted and wrong-headed.

* Notes

¹ Other members of the research teams not represented here as authors were Val Gillies (Britain) and Kristina Larsson Sjöberg (Sweden). We acknowledge their contribution to our respective projects. The British study was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council under grant number R000236288.

² In this article we address the step-fathers' perspectives only, and do not focus on the children involved. For the Swedish sample, these are developed in Larsson-Sjöberg ([2000](#)), and for the British sample in Ribbens McCarthy et al. ([2002](#)).

³ Length of time did not prove to be a important pattern in how the step-fathers made sense of their relationship to their dependent step-children (indeed, searches for 'logical timescales' governing the development of step-family relationships are misplaced - [Gorell Barnes et al. 1998](#), p.271). However, we indicate length of relationship where appropriate in our discussion of their understandings. Nevertheless, step-fathers themselves could see time as an issue; indeed, some spoke about slowly 'developing' a relationship with their step-children. Importantly, however, they did not all envisage the sort of relationship that they were aiming for in the same way, as we elaborate.

⁴ Nevertheless, some of the indications find support in other British work. In particular, Ferri and Smith's ([1998](#)) survey finding of high step-father involvement in parenting their step-children is based on a majority working-class sample. Additionally, Maclean and Eekelaar ([1997](#)) found that where step-couples were cohabiting (a more working class pattern), the biological fathers were more likely to reduce contact with their children once the mother had repartnered. See also our discussion of Le Gall and Martin ([1997](#)) in the conclusion.

⁵We do not mean to imply any evaluation as to which step-fathering practice is 'best'.

Rather, we are pointing out that such differences exist, and that working class practices in particular are largely invisible in social policy.

⁶'Grounding' refers to not letting a child go out (i.e. like an aircraft, they are not allowed to 'fly' but must remain on the 'ground').

⁷A point demonstrated by Harris (1983) in challenging the functionalist Parsonian 'fit' between families and the societies in which they are located.

⁸Our thanks to an anonymous referees of a previous version of this paper for pointing this out to us. See also note 6. Here, again, we are not implying any valourisation of one point of view by using the language of 'conventional' or 'progressive', but rather that the emphasis on biology overlooks contemporary concerns with achieved, involved fathering.

References

AHRNE, G. and ROMAN, C. (1997) *Hemmet, barnen och makten. Förhandlingar om arbete och pengar i familjen*, Stockholm: Fritzes.

AGELL, A. (1993) 'Step-parenthood and biological parenthood: competition or co-operation?', in J. Eekelaar and P. Sarcevic (Eds) *Parenthood in Modern Society*, Kluwer Academic Press.

ALLAN, G., CROW, G. and HAWKER, S. (1999) *Step-families and the Construction of Kinship*, End of Award Report to the Economic and Social Research Council, University of Southampton.

ANDERSSON, G. (1993) *Leva för jobbet och jobba för livet. Om chefsfamiljers vardag och samlevnadsformer*, Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Förlag.

BÄCK-WIKLUND, M. and BERGSTEN, B. (1997) *Det Moderna Föräldraskapet*, Stockholm: Natur och Kultur.

BÄCK-WIKLUND, M., SJOBERG, K.L. and BAK, M. (1998) 'Children and parents in new family patterns/family cultures', Proceedings of the Anglo-Swedish Meeting on 'Step-families and Foster Families' held at Thomas Coram Research Unit in London on 16 November, London: Thomas Coram Research Unit.

BACKETT, K. (1987) 'The negotiation of fatherhood', in C. Lewis and M. O'Brien (Eds) *Reassessing Fatherhood*, London: Sage.

BARNOMBUDSMANNEN (1998) *Upp till 18: Fakta om Barn och Umgdom*, Stockholm: Statistiska Centralbyrån.

BERTAUX, D. and DELCROIX, C. (1992) 'Where have all the daddies gone?', in U. Björnberg (Ed.) *European Parents in the 1990s: Contradictions and Comparisons*, London: Transactions.

BJÖRNBERG, U. (1992) 'Parents' ideals and their strategies in daily Swedish life', in U. Björnberg (Ed.) *European Parents in the 1990s: Contradictions and Comparisons*, London: Transactions.

BJÖRNBERG, U. and KOLLIND, A-K. (1994) *Janus and Jenus*, Stockholm: Brombergs.

BRADSHAW, J., STIMSON, C., SKINNER, C. and WILLIAMS, J. (1999) *Absent Fathers?*,

London: Routledge.

BRANNEN, J., DODD, K., OAKLEY, A. and STOREY, P. (1994) *Young People, Health and Family Life*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

BURGESS, A. (1997) *Fatherhood Reassessed*, London: Vermillion.

BURGOYNE, J. and CLARK, D. (1984) *Making A Go Of It: A Study of Stepfamilies in Sheffield*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

CREIGHTON, S.J. (1992) *Child Abuse Trends in England and Wales 1988-90*, London: NSPCC.

DALY, M. and WILSON, M. (1998) *The Truth About Cinderella: A Darwinian View of Parental Love*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

DAVIDOFF, L., DOOLITTLE, M., FINK, J. and HOLDEN, K. (1999) *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy*, Harlow: Pearson.

DENNIS, N. and ERDOS, G. (1993) *Families Without Fatherhood*, London: Institute for Economic Affairs.

DUNCAN, S. and EDWARDS, R. (1999) *Lone Mothers, Paid Work and Gendered Moral Rationalities*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

EDWARDS, R., GILLIES, V. and RIBBENS McCARTHY, J. (1999) 'Biological parents and social families: legal discourses and everyday understandings of the position of step-parents', *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 13, pp.78-105.

EDWARDS, R. and RIBBENS, J. with GILLIES, V. (1999) 'Shifting boundaries and power in the research process: the example of researching "step-families"', in J. Seymour and P. Bagguley (Eds) *Relating Intimacies: Power and Resistance*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

FERRI, E. (1984) *Stepchildren: A National Study*, NFER-Nelson.

FERRI, E. and SMITH, K. (1998) *Step-parenting in the 1990s*, London: FPSC/JRF.

FURSTENBERG, F. (1988) 'Good dads – bad dads: two faces of fatherhood', in A. Cherlin (Ed.) *The Changing American Family and Public Policy*, Washington DC: Urban Institute Press.

GILLIES, V., RIBBENS McCARTHY, J. and HOLLAND, J. (2000) *Pulling Together, Pulling Apart: The Family Lives of Young People*, London: Family Policy Studies Centre/Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

GORELL BARNES, G., THOMPSON, P., DANIEL, G. and BURCHARDT, N. (1998) *Growing Up in Stepfamilies*, Clarendon.

HARRIS, C.C. (1983) *The Family and Industrial Society*, London: Allen and Unwin.

HASKEY, J. (1994) 'Stepfamilies and stepchildren in Great Britain', *Population Trends*, 76. London: HMSO.

HUTSON, S. and JENKINS, R. (1989) *Taking the Strain: Families, Unemployment and Transition*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

JENSEN, A-M. (1999) 'Partners and parents in Europe: a gender divide', *Comparative Social Research*, 18, pp.1-29.

- JENSEN, A-M. (2001) 'Property, power and prestige – the feminization of childhood', in M. du Bois-Reymond, H. Sünker and H.H. Krüger (Eds) *Childhood in Europe: Approaches, Trends, Findings*, New York: Peter Lang.
- KIERNAN, K. (1992) 'The impact of family disruption in childhood on transitions made in young adult life', *Population Studies*, 46, London: HMSO.
- KULTURDEPARTEMENTET (1992) *Ideér om Mannen*, Stockholm: Kulturdepartementet.
- Kulturdepartementet (1995) *Pappagruppens Slutrapport*, Stockholm: Kulturdepartementet.
- LAMB, M.E. and OPPENHEIM, D. (1989) 'Fatherhood and father-child relationships: five years of research', in S.H. Cath (ed.) *Fathers and Their Families*, London: Analytical Press.
- LAROSSA, R. (1989) 'Fatherhood and social change', *Family Relations*, 37, pp. 451-457.
- LAROSSA, R., GORDON, B.A., WILSON, R.J., BAIRAN, A. and JARET, C. (1991) 'The fluctuating image of the 20th century American father', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, pp.987-997.
- LARSSON-SJÖBERG, K. (2000) *Det Länkade Familjesystemet - om Samhörighet och Åkskillnas*, Göteborgs Universitet.
- LEGALL, D. and MARTIN, C. (1997) 'Fashioning a new family tie: step-parents and step-grandparents', in M. Gullestad and M. Segalen (Eds) *Family and Kinship in Europe*, London: Pinter.
- LEWIS, C. and O'BRIEN, M. (1987) (Eds) *Reassessing Fatherhood*, London: Sage Publication.
- LEWIS, C. and SUSSMAN, M. (1986) *Men's Changing Roles in the Family*, Hartworth Press.
- LILJESTRÖM, R. and KOLLIND, A.K. (1990) *Kärleksliv och Föräldraskap*, Stockholm: Carlssons.
- MARSIGLIO, W. (1995) (Ed.) *Fatherhood: Contemporary Theory, Research and Social Policy*, London: Sage.
- MACLEAN, M. and EEKELAAR, J. (1997) *The Parental Obligation: A Study of Parenthood Across Households*, Oxford: Hart Publishing.
- MORGAN, D.H.J. (1996) *Family Connections: An Introduction to Family Studies*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- MORGAN, D.H.J. (1998) Gender practices and fathering practices, paper presented at the Women and Gender Research Forum, Oxford Brookes University, 2 March.
- NORDISKA RADET (1995) *Nordens Män en Skiftande Skara*, Nordiska Rådet.
- OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS (1998) *Social Focus on Families*, London: Stationery Office.
- OSBORNE, A.F. and MORRIS, T.C. (1979) 'The rationale for a composite index of social class and its evaluation', *British Journal of Sociology*, 30, pp.39-60.
- RIBBENS, J. (1994) *Mothers and Their Children: A Feminist Sociology of*

Childrearing, London: Sage.

RIBBENS McCARTHY, J., EDWARDS, R. and GILLIES, V. (2002) *Making Families: Moral Tales of Parenting and Step- Parenting*, York: sociology press.

RIKSFÖRSÄKRINGSVERKET (1998) *Statistikinformation Is 1998*, Stockholm: RFV.

ROSE, N. (1989) *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*, London: Routledge.

SAINSBURY, D. (1994) 'Women's and men's social rights: gendering dimensions of welfare states', in D. Sainsbury (Ed.) *Gendering Welfare States*, London: Sage.

SIMPSON, B. (1998) *Changing Families: An Ethnographic Approach to Divorce and Separation*, Oxford: Berg.

SMART, C. (1999) 'The 'new' parenthood: fathers and mothers after divorce', in E.B. Silva and C. Smart (Eds), *The New Family?* London: Sage.

SMART, C. and NEALE, B. (1999) *Family Fragments?*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

STATISTISKA CENTRALBYRÅN (1995) *Barn och deras Familjer 1992-3*, Report 89, Stockholm: Statistiska Centralbyrån.

WADSBY, M. (1993) *Children of Divorce and Their Parents*, Linköping University.

WALKERDINE, V. and LUCEY, H. (1989) *Democracy in the Kitchen: Regulating Mothers and Socialising Daughters*, London: Virago.

WARDLE, L.D. (1993) 'The evolving rights and duties of step-parents: making new rules for new families', in J. Eekelaar and P. Sarcevic (eds) *Parenthood in Modern Society*, Kluwer Academic Press.

WARIN, J., SOLOMON, Y. LEWIS, C. and LANGFORD, W. (1999) *Fathers, Work and Family Life*, London/York: Family Policy Studies Centre/Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

